

Denise Burkhard

Exploited, Empowered, Ephemeral

(Re-)Constructions of Childhood in Neo-Victorian Fiction

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Uwe Baumann, Marion Gymnich
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1. Introduction

Children were omnipresent in the Victorian era, as orphans and waifs suffering and starving on the streets, as workers in factories, workshops and mines, housed in boarding schools or growing up in middle- and upper-class homes. In fact, “Victorian Britain was *a nation of children*”¹ with a steady rate of young people among the growing population. As Ginger S. Frost notes, “[i]n 1841, 36.1 percent of the population was younger than fifteen, and in 1891, the figure was still 35 percent” so that “the youthfulness of the population was one of the defining characteristics of Victorian life”². Throughout the Victorian era – a vibrant time of change in many respects –, children received a considerable amount of social, political and legal attention, which was meant to protect the lives of the young in different areas of life and ameliorate the dire working conditions of many – if not most – working-class children. It was also a time when childhood became increasingly sentimentalised as a special, separate phase of life worth protecting and was celebrated accordingly.

This growing interest in children (and their welfare) is also reflected in nineteenth-century literary texts for both young and old, in which children fulfil a range of different functions and purposes with varying degrees of agency. The most well-known and arguably most memorable child figures in novels addressing an adult readership include Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Cathy Linton in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Tom and Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Philip (Pip) Pirrip in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861) as well as *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) and *David Copperfield* (1850) in Dickens’ eponymous works.³ In narratives for young readers, Tom Brown in Thomas Hughes’ *Tom*

1 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 3, my emphasis.

2 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 3.

3 Charles Dickens has contributed significantly to the depiction of childhood in Victorian literature, drawing attention to the plight and suffering of many real children through his works, and has been acknowledged as “the pre-eminent writer of Victorian childhood”. Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 9. Many neo-Victorian texts use Dickens’

Brown's Schooldays (1857), Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Jim Hawkins in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), Mowgli and Kimball O'Hara in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894–1895) and *Kim* (1901), Peter Pan in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911, originally a 1904 stage play entitled *Peter Pan; or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*) as well as Cedric Errol, Sara Crewe and Mary Lennox in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* (1911) respectively come to mind. All of them are still part of the literary and cultural imagination regarding the Victorians, not least because their stories have been adapted for television, the cinema and the stage numerous times. For instance, the 1980 TV adaptation of Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* has been a Christmas classic on German television for years, and *Oliver Twist*'s daring question for more food in the workhouse is one the text's easily remembered and touching key scenes in many adaptations. Sometimes, even entire fictional places, such as Wonderland or Neverland, have "become the *setting* of versions of childhood", and "their images are so abiding that they have come to operate as metonyms for childhood itself"⁴.

This interest in children and childhood – prevalent topics, socially, culturally and politically since Romanticism – has been taken up in neo-Victorianism, "a term that, in its broadest sense, denotes post-Victorian culture's creative return to, or engagement with, the Victorian"⁵, and especially in neo-Victorian literary texts. According to Michelle J. Smith, "neo-Victorian fiction often exhibits curiosity about children and children's stories"⁶, and it seems that there is an ongoing "Victorian trend in contemporary children's and adolescent literature"⁷, as a substantial number of these texts use the nineteenth century as a period setting, which is sometimes reached through a shift in time. Children's texts such as Antonia Barber's *The Ghosts* (1969, republished as *The Amazing Mr Blunden* in 2021), Joan Aiken's *Midnight is a Place* (1974), Valerie Weldrick's *Time Sweep* (1976), Helen Cresswell's *Moondial* (1987), Kathryn Reiss' *Time Windows* (1991), Julia Lee's *The Mysterious Misadventures of Clemency Wrigglesworth* (2013), Sally Nicholls' *A Chase in Time* (2018), Sharon Gosling's *The Golden Butterfly* (2019) and Shirley Reva Vernick's *Ripped Away* (2022) exemplify beyond doubt

works as explicit or implicit intertexts, such as Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* (1989), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002), Ronald Frame's *Havisham* (2004), Terry Pratchett's *Dodger* (2012) and Jon Clinch's *Marley* (2019). See also the 2012 *Neo-Victorian Studies* special issue "The Other Dickens: Neo-Victorian Appropriation and Adaptation", guest edited by Charlotte Boyce and Elodie Rousselot.

4 Jenny Bavidge. "Stories in Space.", 324, original emphasis.

5 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. "On the Neo-Victorian, Now and Then.", 495.

6 Michelle J. Smith. "Neo-Victorianism.", 2.

7 Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara K. Day. "Introduction.", 2.

the sustained interest in reimagining the stories of the young. Yet, while neo-Victorian children's literature, being "based on the presence of the child (reader, character, memory of an adult writer, the child within the adult)"⁸, naturally brims with child characters of all ages, serving different uses and functions in their respective stories, adult fiction seemingly displays less enthusiasm for the young. It often "tend[s] to subordinate the representation of childhood to other thematic concerns, such as famine and emigration, race and colonialism, gender discrimination and sexual exploitation"⁹, and in many of these texts children are cast in peripheral roles. However, in some narratives, though these appear to be indeed the exception rather than the rule, children and childhood experience do take centre stage: Dianne Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* (2009), John Harding's *Florence & Giles* (2010) and Emma Donoghue's *The Wonder* (2016) all reinforce rather than "evade or challenge the cultural centrality of childhood"¹⁰.

This neo-Victorian interest in children and their childhoods is part of a larger occupation with these concerns, which have a long literary history and a central place in contemporary British fiction. According to Adrienne E. Gavin, "childhood has been a vibrant element in British writing for over 800 years"¹¹, though this topic only gained prominence and sparked an intense and extensive authorial engagement from the Romantic period onwards, before reaching a peak in the nineteenth century. This acute literary engagement with childhood shows no signs of abating and is still discernible today. As Katharina Dodou observes, there has even been "a dramatic increase in attention"¹² regarding children since the 1970s, which is also evident on the contemporary literary marketplace: she argues that there has been "an intense novelistic preoccupation with the child" and claims that "childhood has become established as one of the major themes in the contemporary British novel"¹³ – a trend that is also discernible in neo-Victorian

8 Margarida Morgado. "A Loss Beyond Imagining.", 245.

9 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 120–121.

10 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 134. Other adult novels elaborating more extensively on children and childhood include Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), Peter Behrens' *The Law of Dreams* (2006) and Sarah Collins' *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* (2019).

11 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 3.

12 Katharina Dodou. "Examining the Idea of Childhood.", 238.

13 Katharina Dodou. "Examining the Idea of Childhood.", 238. This interest in children and childhood is evident in various sectors: "[p]ublic and political discussions have addressed children's well-being, their moral nature, safety rights, and social position, and they have informed a series of institutional fortifications of the child in Britain, including the Children Act 1989, the appointment of a Minister for Children in 2003, and the establishment of a Children's Commissioner in 2005". Ibid. For more information on childhood in contemporary British adult fiction, see Sandra Dinter's *Childhood in the Contemporary English*

fiction. With an ever-growing literary corpus, “multiple and often contradictory discourses of childhood do exist simultaneously”¹⁴, and each (re-)construction of the child serves as an indication of how children and childhood were perceived in the society in which the texts were produced, but historical fiction in general and neo-Victorian fiction in particular constitute a special case in this respect: they evoke another period while simultaneously addressing present-day concerns from a relative distance, highlighting sometimes shocking and upsetting similarities as well as continuities and developments between now and then.

The persistent literary engagement with the child in neo-Victorian fiction and beyond derives not least from the range of functions representations of fictional children afford. According to Sarah Maza, the child is the “most emotionally and symbolically charged of figures”¹⁵ and was often used to evoke pity and compassion in Victorian literature directed at adults to encourage intervention and reforms on behalf of the child. It is also a highly versatile figure, able to take on a range of (symbolic) roles, featuring “as innocent, victim, blank slate, born sinner, infant tyrant, visionary, or signifier of nostalgia, hope, despair, or loss”¹⁶, according to the individual author’s likes and preferences and the child’s position in the story. Gavin even speculates that

[c]hildhood remains such an enduring literary topic, because [...] the figure of the child continues to raise for writers and readers more questions – about self, youth, life, sexuality, interiority, innocence, evil, hope, loss, life, death, justice, imagination, nature, nurture, the past, the future, the here and now, and the hereafter – than it can ever, even symbolically, answer.¹⁷

The fictional child thus is capable of raising and addressing a range of *fundamental* issues, including identity, morality and the future. Moreover, “childhood is, along with death, one of the two universal human experiences”¹⁸ readers of all ages can relate to. In effect, then, “[t]o study the image of childhood is to study ourselves”, not least “because the child’s changing image is inscribed by the force of our feelings and fears – our beliefs, prejudices, anxieties, and conflicts”¹⁹, and in neo-Victorian fiction the ones attributed to the Victorians as well.

The Victorians’ preoccupation with the child, both in fiction and in reality, contributed to making children and childhood central concerns of neo-Victorian fiction. Victoria Ford Smith argues that “[t]he nineteenth-century child is a

Novel (2020), which analyses representations of childhood published between the 1980s and 2010s.

14 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 3.

15 Sarah Maza. “The Kids Aren’t All Right.”, 1263.

16 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 2.

17 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 17.

18 Sarah Maza. “The Kids Aren’t All Right.”, 1262.

19 Ellen Pifer. *Demon or Doll*, 16.

complex figure, surrounded by a constellation of contradictions that easily accommodates the ambivalences of neo-Victorian fiction; the desirable dream-child of the Romantics is belied by the cruel social realities of nineteenth-century childhood”²⁰, which widely contradicts the Edwardians’ idealisation and celebration of the child. More importantly, in each of these literary periods, a variety of *images* of childhood exist simultaneously: the suffering and abused child can be found alongside idealised children – sometimes both are even conflated within the same text, as *Oliver Twist* implies – and even those who do not survive infancy. Hence, it is precisely “[b]ecause of its very volatility [...] [that] childhood is ripe for neo-Victorian reimagining, for nostalgic yearning and cutting critique”²¹, where the latter often seems to predominate.

In neo-Victorian fiction for young and old, children and childhood are depicted in manifold ways, foregrounding various foci and thematic concerns and displaying a striking heterogeneity. While a considerable number of texts depict neo-Victorian childhoods “as traumatic, scarred by violence, poverty, exploitation, emotional and/or sexual abuse”²², others offer a much broader range of images of the early stages of human development, which arguably depends on the target readership.²³ So far, scholarly attention was either directed exclusively at children’s and young adult (YA) literature (see Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sarah K. Day’s edited volume *The Victorian Era in Twenty-First Century Children’s and Adolescent Literature*, 2018) or at adult literature (Marie-Luise Kohlke’s article “Neo-Victorian Childhoods: Re-Imagining the Worst of Times”, 2011, and most of the 2012 *Neo-Victorian Studies* special issue). Since depictions in children’s and adult literature usually differ, however, it is crucial to analyse both alongside each other, as this book illustrates by juxtaposing texts targeting different readerships.²⁴

Yet, despite neo-Victorian writers’ abiding interest in reimagining the lives of the young, they have not yet received extensive scholarly attention. Even though Eckart Voigts-Virchow already identified childhood as one of the “thematic clusters”²⁵ of neo-Victorianism in 2009 and Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn observed that “[c]hildren and the idea of children’s stories have become more prominent in recent neo-Victorian fiction”²⁶ in 2010, it was only from roughly

20 Victoria Ford Smith. “*Return of the Dapper Men* and the Nonsense of Neo-Victorian Literature.”, 126.

21 Victoria Ford Smith. “*Return of the Dapper Men* and the Nonsense of Neo-Victorian Literature.”, 126.

22 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 135.

23 Cf. Claudia Nelson. “Foreword.”, xii.

24 Cf. Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. “The Secret Sharer.”, 5.

25 Eckart Voigts-Virchow. “In-Yer-Victorian-Face.”, 109.

26 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 156.

2018 onwards that they have received more sustained critical attention. The fact that neo-Victorian scholarship has turned comparatively late to the topic of childhood has to do with the fact that “neo-Victorianism initially focused predominantly on ‘highbrow’ literary art”²⁷, thus excluding a range of relevant texts. Only “[i]n the last few years, these boundaries have begun to shift, and popular fiction [encompassing children’s literature] and culture now play an increasingly prominent role in neo-Victorian critical debate”²⁸, though articles on representations of childhood often focus on individual texts.

The foundational contributions in this field include, firstly, Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben’s edited collection *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (2011), and more specifically Kohlke’s article “Neo-Victorian Childhoods: Re-Imagining the Worst of Times”, which provides a general overview of representations of childhood in neo-Victorian adult fiction and glimpses of various texts, such as Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* (1996), Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers* (2000), Sarah Waters’ *Fingersmith* (2002), Michel Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Peter Behrens’ *The Law of Dreams* (2006) and A.S. Byatt’s *The Children’s Book* (2009). Among them is, secondly, Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson’s guest-edited 2012 *Neo-Victorian Studies* special issue “The Child in Neo-Victorian Arts and Discourse”. This issue focuses on the child more generally and uses novels such as Richard Flanagan’s *Wanting* (2008), John Harding’s *Florence & Giles* (2010), Libba Bray’s *Gemma Doyle* trilogy (2003–2007) and Nancy Springer’s *Enola Holmes* series (2006–) or neo-Victorian adaptations of *Jane Eyre* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* for case studies. Finally, Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara K. Day’s collection *The Victorian Era in Twenty-First Century Children’s and Adolescent Literature* addresses both children’s and YA fiction, including board/alphabet books for very young readers. Their volume reinforces that “ironic, playful, appreciative, and/or traumatic versions of Victorianism abound in literature for younger readers, as well”²⁹. The texts and films analysed include but are not limited to Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995–2000), Disney’s *Treasure Planet* (2002), Philip Reeve’s *Larklight* (2006), Cassandra Clare’s *Infernal Devices* trilogy (2010–2013) and Gail Carriger’s *Finishing School* series (2013–2015).

In addition, a number of individual articles focusing on specific neo-Victorian texts, prevalent tropes and discourses have been published. They address and explore topics such as illegitimacy (Louisa Hadley’s “Illegitimate Fictions: The Illegitimate Child in Neo-Victorian Fiction”, 2015), (lack of) agency and girl

27 Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 5.

28 Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 7.

29 Margaret D. Stetz. “Neo Victorian Studies.”, 345.

power (Michelle Beissel Heath's "Reveling in Restraint: Limiting the Neo-Victorian Girl", 2020 and Erin Temple's "In Conversation with *Enola Holmes*: Neo-Victorian Girlhood, Adaptation, and Direct Address", 2021), trauma (Sarah E. Maier's "Gendered (De)Illusions: Imaginative Madness in Neo-Victorian Childhood Trauma Narratives", 2020), sexual abuse (Kohlke's "Perverse Nostalgia: Child Sex Abuse as Trauma Commodity in Neo-Victorian Fiction", 2018), queer families (Louisa Yates' "The Figure of the Child in Neo-Victorian Queer Families", 2011) and intertextuality (Lea Heiberg Madsen's "Neo-Victorian Naughty Children: Double Narratives, *Struwwelpeter* and (Mis)Reading Misbehaviour", 2017 and Elizabeth Rees' "Dickensian Childhoods: Blighted Victorian Children in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*", 2012). Yet not all of them are pertinent or relevant to equal extents to this project due to a focus on divergent topics or a strong emphasis on individual texts. Nevertheless, as the enumeration above implies, a certain amount of foundational and pioneering work has already been accomplished, though a monograph on this topic is still missing, which is a gap this book seeks to fill.

The texts selected for this study are Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* (2001), Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) and Dianne Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), which are analysed chronologically according to their year of publication, allowing a direct juxtaposition of the two children's and the two adult texts.³⁰ While all of them have won literary awards, some are better known in academic circles than others due to their status as key or 'classic' texts. *Tom's Midnight Garden* is a 'classic' of children's literature and *Fingersmith* a key text and paramount example in neo-Victorian studies. By contrast, *The Thirteenth Tale* and *Journey to the River Sea* are lesser-known works. The latter, for instance, has not yet received any scholarly attention in neo-Victorianism and children's literature criticism although it has been claimed to have "classic"³¹ status.³² The reason for not in-

30 It is pure coincidence that the novels chosen for analysis have all been written by women.

There are male authors who incorporate children or address childhood in their novels, for instance Peter Behrens, Michel Faber, Richard Flanagan, John Harding, David Almond and David Wiseman, but stories about childhood indeed tend to be written predominantly by women writers, such as A.S. Byatt, Sarah Moss, Mary Hooper, Linda Newbery, Laura Amy Schlitz, Penelope Lively, Karen McCombie, Philippa Pearce and Helen Cresswell amongst many others.

31 Mark Chandler. "Macmillan Children's Books Lands Carroll's Sequel to Ibbotson Classic.", n.p.

32 Pan Macmillan likewise advertises Emma Carroll's sequel *Escape to the River Sea*, which takes place in 1946 when Rosa Sweetman, who has been evacuated during WWII to Westwood seven years ago, is waiting to be claimed by her family before she embarks on a journey to the Amazon, as a "compelling new novel inspired by Eva Ibbotson's bestselling, classic masterpiece" on their website and as "sequel to Eva Ibbotson's classic bestseller" on the cover. Pan Macmillan. "Escape to the River Sea.", n.p.

cluding more novels is simply that the ones selected are worth being explored in detail due to the wealth of material they provide for an analysis of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction. The four novels present a wide range of reimagined childhood experiences and ample material for close readings. The selection of these four novels is also based on the fact that none of them has received extensive scholarly attention regarding specifically their depiction of childhood and childhood experiences so far, which makes close readings even more compelling. This way even characters who have up until now not been subject to neo-Victorian debate (either because the novel as such has not yet been read through a neo-Victorian lens or discussed in the context of neo-Victorianism, as is the case in *Journey to the River Sea*, or because scholarship gave preference to other, more central characters and topics, as in *Fingersmith*) receive due attention. To enrich the corpus beyond the four core texts, cross-references to various further neo-Victorian novels have been incorporated and are meant to contextualise the case studies, illustrate similarities and continuities between texts, highlight divergences and open up avenues for further research.

Pearce's children's novel *Tom's Midnight Garden* constitutes an early example of an engagement with the Victorians. This engagement takes the form of a time slip back to and immersion in the Victorian period, where the child protagonist Tom Long befriends the late-Victorian orphan child Harriet (Hatty) Melbourne, who is growing up in her widowed aunt's household. *Tom's Midnight Garden* capitalises on the ephemerality of childhood as a transient stage in human life and is a text where neo-Victorianism's "bi-directionality"³³ is most evident in the dramatisation of the relationship between past and present that is effected through time slip, allowing two child characters from different historical periods to meet and interact. The second children's text, Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* juxtaposes various childhood experiences in the Amazon rainforest and draws, like *Tom's Midnight Garden*, on the well-established link between children and nature that was already propagated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.³⁴ It addresses various Victorian discourses and neo-Victorian concerns, such as twinship, Britishness and trauma, and is the novel in which most childhood experiences intersect and affect one another due to chance meetings and agreed-upon living arrangements. It is one of two texts introducing a working-class childhood (the other being *Fingersmith*), in this case in the form of a travelling child actor, and features a part-Indigenous child, opening up and problematising Victorian questions of race and miscegenation. It acknowledges Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* openly as an intertext and reinforces the notion of a global neo-Victorianism.

33 Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 15.

34 Cf. Jenny Bavidge. "Stories in Space.", 323.

Waters' *Fingersmith* is a text in which childhood experience only takes up a very small, but arguably significant portion of the overall novel. It is narrated in hindsight by two autodiegetic narrators, Maud Lilly and Sue Trinder, who both recount their childhood experiences when they are adolescents. As it turns out, they live the childhood of the other due to a changeling plot, of which they are unaware. Besides Sue, who lives a criminal working-class childhood, this text contains a second working-class character, the knife-boy Charles Way, who blurs the boundaries between childhood and adolescence and whose seeming child-likeness can be read in a twofold way. *Fingersmith* uses Dickens' *Oliver Twist* as the central intertext for Sue's and Charles' childhood experiences, addresses childhood abuse in various forms and focuses on the commodification of children. Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* is the most recently published novel in this study. In this narrative, the focus is on three generations of Angelfields (Charlie and Isabelle, Emmeline, Adeline and Shadow and finally Aurelius), implying that character traits and features are hereditary and biographies bound to those of previous generations. It also elaborates on intense, even fatal sibling/twin relationships and topics such as incest, identity, illegitimacy and trauma. It is a text in which the Victorian period is constructed through an act of storytelling, creating a tension between past and present, and is linked with the articulation of traumatic experience. This text overall foregrounds the idea of the preservation of untold and otherwise forgotten histories through a biographical project that brings the terminally ill Vida Winter and her biographer, Margaret Lea, together.

All of these novels contribute to neo-Victorianism's aim of recuperating the stories of those marginalised by the historical record, in this case, the stories of the young. They all consciously draw on Victorian and Edwardian children's and/or adult texts as implicit or explicit intertexts, whereby their authors acknowledge their indebtedness to these earlier texts. Usually, one or two function as dominant intertexts, suggesting a haunting presence of these earlier works in the present moment and reinforcing their literary and cultural significance in the here and now. The texts chosen as source material in these four novels, including but not limited to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, all tend to display a strong focus, even capitalise on childhood experience, which neo-Victorian texts seek to engage with creatively, critically challenge and subvert. They also predominantly focus on middle- and upper-class childhoods; this focus is significant insofar as childhood suffering and abuse were usually linked with the working classes (but also the poor and criminals) in the Victorian era, which is something neo-Victorian literature often challenges and problematises.³⁵ The novels selected for a close reading reinforce that, even though childhood increasingly gained sentimental significance as a

35 Cf. Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 137, 140.

time irretrievably lost to adults in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, neo-Victorian fiction desists from linking childhood uncritically with nostalgia. Instead, neo-Victorian representations of children and childhood are used to draw attention to past and present injustices towards the young, exposing shortcomings, even failures, in the childcare protection system and the lack of adult intervention.³⁶ In these texts, the (emotional, physical and/or sexual) abuse of children frequently takes place in the domestic sphere of the family home, implying that, while the family was subject to idealisation in the Victorian era, many abuses took place within the supposed safety of the home and behind closed doors.³⁷

For reasons of scope and focus YA fiction has been excluded from this study. While “blurred lines exist between both children’s and YA literature, and YA and adult fiction”³⁸, a distinction between texts targeting children and those addressing a more mature audience is nevertheless inevitable in the context of this book. The principal reason for excluding YA texts from its corpus is that YA fiction typically does not focus on the period of childhood, instead addressing adolescent/adult concerns that are usually excluded from children’s texts, and uses YA protagonists as means of identification for the reader. This does not mean that childhood or child characters do not feature *per se* in these texts, but that childhood tends to play a subordinate role as far as the protagonists are concerned. A distinction between children’s and YA fiction thus rests on the age range appointed to denote ‘the child’/childhood in contrast to ‘the adolescent’/adolescence, which itself is always arbitrary and was also subject to intense debate in the Victorian era as the laws gradually raising the female age of consent suggest. For the purpose of this study, I adopt the age limit Frost uses in her monograph *Victorian Childhoods* (2009) and thus employ “the school-leaving age at the end of the [nineteenth] century – fourteen – as the cutoff [*sic*] point for defining childhood”³⁹. The term ‘child’ and the corresponding phase of ‘childhood’ are hence used for protagonists up to and including the age of fourteen.

The primary aim of this study is to offer a typology of the child in neo-Victorian fiction. This typology in the form of the ‘childhood scale’ provides the first attempt to systematise and categorise the depictions of children and their childhoods in this subgenre and hence constitutes an important intervention in this field. The typology encompasses various categories based on the idea of power relations on a graded scale, ranging from representations of victimised children who lack power and agency to images of children displaying (excessive

36 Cf. Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 135.

37 Cf. Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 137.

38 Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 107.

39 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 4.

amounts of) agency and self-determination. It allows situating child characters at any point in the story on the scale to chart their character development and for a comparison between child characters from the same but also from different stories and categories. The childhood scale reinforces that representations of children and childhood in neo-Victorian texts are not only meant to evoke pity and compassion, as did many portrayals of suffering, impoverished and starving children in Victorian texts targeting an adult readership, but even horror, outrage and repulsion.⁴⁰ These texts oftentimes question and challenge the innocence paradigm that has been at the core of Western conceptions of childhood since Romanticism, “problematiz[ing] the image of the innocent child as a symbol of vulnerability, guiltlessness, and lack of knowledge”⁴¹, which is frequently achieved by “[g]othicizing the child”⁴², endowing him/her/them with monstrous, even murderous forms of empowerment.

This book further introduces literary possible-worlds theory (PWT), a promising approach that has increasingly been used in literary studies since the 1970s, to neo-Victorian studies. It makes use of “a PW-inspired narrative semantics”, which “looks at the internal organization of narrative worlds” and presupposes that “[s]toryworlds are [...] entire modal universes consisting of multiple worlds”⁴³ rather than mere possible worlds. On this story-internal level, PWT allows analysing the power structures that govern the relationships between the characters through the (non-)actualisation of the characters’ individual *obligation*-, *wish*- and *knowledge-worlds*. These worlds often also guide their actions and interactions with other characters, especially those between children and adults, where clashes and conflicting positions between *obligation*- and *wish-worlds* may result in transgressive acts or entail punishments. Overall, PWT and especially the findings and contributions by Marie-Laure Ryan, on which this monograph predominantly draws, offers an extremely useful terminological framework, as the discussions of *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, *Journey to the River Sea*, *Fingersmith* and *The Thirteenth Tale* exemplify. The four texts reinforce that PWT, which has often found extra-textual/story-external applications, yields crucial insights when deployed on the level of story and in particular for the analysis of relationships (including power relations) between characters.

To analyse the representations of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction, this book is subdivided into ten chapters. Chapter 2 “Neo-Victorian Fiction: Features and Developments of a Distinctive Type of Historical Fiction” sets out with an overview of the genre of neo-Victorian fiction, focusing on relevant develop-

40 Cf. Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 144.

41 Katherina Dodou. “Examining the Idea of Childhood.”, 240.

42 Katherina Dodou. “Examining the Idea of Childhood.”, 240.

43 Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell. “Introduction: Possible Worlds Theory Revisited.”, 18.

ments within the field and outlining pertinent core characteristic features. Additionally, Ansgar Nünning's five-fold typology of the historical novel is used to explore neo-Victorian fiction as a subgenre of the historical novel, highlighting that the neo-Victorian engagement can take different forms, ranging from revisionist approaches to strategies associated with historiographic metafiction, before a working definition is provided. Chapter 3 "Children and Childhood: Historical Developments and Literary Representations in Victorian Literature" outlines crucial literary, cultural and legal developments regarding children and childhood in the Victorian era, providing the backdrop against which the texts chosen as case studies are analysed. It briefly glimpses at Rousseau and the Romantic poets, who influenced Victorian conceptions of childhood markedly, and focuses more extensively on the Victorian and Edwardian periods, using a range of Victorian and Edwardian texts to elaborate on the images of childhood in literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁴ It also focuses on the idea that "[c]hildhood lengthened during the course of the nineteenth century"⁴⁵ by drawing on the legal situation as well. In Chapter 4 "Representations of Children in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Towards a Typology", a typology is developed that allows analysing representations of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction and arguably also fiction more generally. It consists of five categories on a scale and a sixth category, which stands apart from the others; it is meant to cover the range of heterogenous images of childhood that can be found in neo-Victorian literature. The usefulness of such a childhood scale is demonstrated by means of various examples of (neo-)Victorian fiction. In Chapter 5 "Possible-Worlds Theory as a Tool for Analysing Historical Fiction", the basic tenets of literary possible-worlds theory are introduced, including PWT-specific terminology and Ryan's idea of accessibility relations, and focuses on the theory's applicability to historical fiction. In this context, an additional accessibility relation is proposed that is crucial in the analysis of time-slip novels, a genre to which *Tom's Midnight Garden* belongs, and thus seeks to expand literary PWT's scope of application.

The chapters that follow contain the close readings of the novels selected for this study. The analysis of *Tom's Midnight Garden* in chapter 6 centres on the ephemerality of childhood and its representation of growing up. It focuses on Tom's childhood in the 1950s, explores the time-slip device and elaborates on Hatty as a late-Victorian girl.⁴⁶ Special emphasis is placed on the titular 'mid-

44 This chapter only refers to canonical works and authors, as those are the ones most likely to have served as an inspiration for neo-Victorian writers.

45 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 4.

46 One of the dominant time-slip patterns and the one at work in *Tom's Midnight Garden* is sending a present-day child back to the nineteenth century, creating a temporal proximity between the two periods and foregrounding the concept of 'living history' through an actual immersion in the past. Cf. Tess Cosslett. "'History from Below'.", 247–248.

night' garden, which is endowed with various meanings in Pearce's story, and the idea that childhood may be ephemeral but retrievable in memory. The reading of *Journey to the River Sea* in chapter 7 explores the competing visions of childhood projected by and juxtaposed in this text (an adventurous girl, middle-class twins, a part-Indigenous orphan child and an impoverished child actor). It examines Maia's changing attitude towards the Amazon rainforest, the home she is provided with by her relatives and her relationship with the twins Beatrice and Gwendolyn. It is further concerned with Finn's journey to the Xanti, the representation of Westwood and the precarious life of Clovis as a traveling child actor. In chapters 8 and 9, *Fingersmith* and *The Thirteenth Tale* are analysed respectively, which project bleaker versions of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction altogether, focusing on various forms of abuse, neglect, monstrous empowerment and commodification within family environments. In these two texts, childhood is drawn upon to a greater (*The Thirteenth Tale*) or lesser (*Fingersmith*) extent and used to foreground the formative aspects of childhood experience. The analysis of *Fingersmith* focuses on Maud's abusive childhood at Briar, Sue's criminal working-class childhood among the thieves on Lant Street and elaborates on a character who has hitherto not received any scholarly attention: the knife-boy Charles Way. The reading of *The Thirteenth Tale* explores Charlie and Isabelle's incestuous relationship, Emmeline and Adeline's childhood as twins and considers Shadow and Aurelius in the context of illegitimacy.

Since there is no consensus in neo-Victorian scholarship on the exact temporal boundaries of the 'Victorian' in 'neo-Victorian' and since temporal markers are necessarily arbitrary, depending on scholars' preferences and needs, a comment on the time frame under consideration is required. In this book, the temporal frame is widely determined by the children's texts under consideration, as the first Golden Age of children's literature, which heralded a change in writing for children in the second half of the nineteenth century and "produced a rich vein of literature which connected childhood with the fantastic, the imaginative, and the entertaining"⁴⁷, serves as a crucial point of reference. Even though the exact temporal markers are again subject to debate, this first Golden Age is often understood as the time ranging from the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 to the outbreak of WWI in 1914.⁴⁸ While texts such as Kipling's *The Jungle Books*, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* and Burnett's *The Secret Garden* are all first Golden Age children's texts, they have not all been published in the Victorian era when applying temporal markers along the line of the reigning monarch (Queen Victoria ascended the

47 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 9.

48 Cf. Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 210.; cf. Victoria Ford Smith. "Return of the Dapper Men and the Nonsense of Neo-Victorian Literature.", 126.

throne in 1837 and died in 1901). Nonetheless, they are often used as intertexts in neo-Victorian children's fiction, collapsing the traditional distinction between the 'Victorian' and the 'Edwardian' ages and expanding the literary imagination regarding Victorian and Golden Age texts through their creative and revisionist approaches whilst acknowledging their indebtedness to these works and authors.⁴⁹ In neo-Victorian scholarship, as Sarah Edwards notes, "[t]he now familiar critical term 'neo-Victorian' is often employed in analyses of 'neo-Edwardian' texts, which might be located in both the Victorian and Edwardian periods, or engage in reflections on the dawn of the twentieth century"⁵⁰. This book hence follows scholars such as Georges Letissier, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn in employing the term 'neo-Victorian' to encompass the Edwardian era as well.⁵¹ Yet, whenever a distinction between the 'Victorian' and the 'Edwardian' is necessary, as is the case in chapter 3, which outlines historical developments, the terms are used separately. Since the Victorians arguably came "into existence before Victoria ascended the throne"⁵², as certain mentalities and structures were already under way and existed before 1837, I adopt, like other neo-Victorian scholars, the temporal boundaries of the 'Long Nineteenth Century' (1789–1914) – a term coined by Ilya Ehrenburg and Eric Hobsbawm. This is not meant as a retrospective act of appropriating the Georgian and Regency periods, but as a means of acknowledging that there was no immediate caesura when Queen Victoria ascended the throne, as much as there was no radical break upon her death. All in all, Queen Victoria's 64-years reign and the transitional periods were a time of upheaval in various respects concerning private and public life, including concepts of children and childhood, which makes it such a captivating period to be used and explored by neo-Victorian writers, readers and scholars.

49 In his study of the Edwardians, Jonathan Rose likewise remarks that "[t]he Edwardian period, in fact, is not usually treated as a period in its own right. More often it is attached to histories of nineteenth-century or postwar Britain, or else it is classified as a 'transitional' phase, still very Victorian but gradually becoming modern". He even extends the Edwardian period to encompass the time "from 1895 to 1919, for the trends explored here [i.e., in his monograph] really flourished throughout those twenty-four years", reinforcing that some continuities do exist. Jonathan Rose. *The Edwardian Temperament*, xi, xiii.

50 Sarah Edwards. "The Rise and Fall of the Forsytes.", 198–199.

51 Cf. Georges Letissier. "From Dickens's Theatrical Performance to Contemporary post Dickensian Narrative and Artistic Performance.", para. 1.; cf. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. "On the Neo-Victorian, Now and Then.", 493.

52 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. "On the Neo-Victorian, Now and Then.", 493.

2. Neo-Victorian Fiction: Features and Developments of a Distinctive Type of Historical Fiction

In recent decades, a substantial number of neo-Victorian narratives have been published, which led to the emergence of neo-Victorian studies as an interdisciplinary academic field in its own right that has increasingly gained scholarly attention.¹ The academic exchange since 2008 has fostered a productive and critical engagement with neo-Victorianism and has helped to identify various neo-Victorian concerns. At the same time, the ever-increasing number of neo-Victorian narrative texts, which are read by children and adults, scholars and casual readers alike, contributes to making neo-Victorian fiction a vibrant and highly versatile subgenre of the contemporary historical novel. To introduce and explore this subgenre, this chapter takes a closer look at developments and selected defining characteristics that cater to neo-Victorian fiction's appeal and popularity among readers, writers and academics. It also proposes that Ansgar Nünning's five-fold typology of the historical novel can be used to delimit the broad spectrum covered by neo-Victorian narratives before it closes with a working definition that is used throughout this book.

Even though neo-Victorianism as a field of study and inquiry is a comparatively recent one, the creative narrative engagement with the Victorians dates back much further and reached its first peak in the 1960s. Christian Gutleben is among the scholars who argue that "fictional rewriting of nineteenth-century

1 The growing academic interest is reflected in the *Neo-Victorian Studies* journal, which was launched in 2008, as well as in the growing number of critical studies on neo-Victorianism, such as Louisa Hadley's *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us* (2010), Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009* (2010), Kate Mitchell's *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (2010), Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss' collection of essays *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (2014) or Antonija Primorac's *Neo-Victorianism on Screen: Postfeminism and Contemporary Adaptations of Victorian Women* (2018). The mounting critical attention is further reflected in the publication of two handbooks on Neo-Victorianism (forthcoming), which will be co-edited by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, as well as Sarah E. Maier and Brenda Ayres.

literature started already in the early twentieth-century [*sic*]² and, as has recently been suggested by Jessica Cox, arguably even in the Victorian era itself.³ While Michael Sadleir's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) and Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953) can certainly be regarded as early examples of this fictional engagement with the Victorian past, the origins and subsequent proliferation of neo-Victorian fiction are often linked with the renaissance of the historical novel at large, which is a phenomenon that took hold in the 1960s.⁴ Around this time, "new kinds of revisionist, metafictional, and self-reflexive historical fiction in England have appeared to the extent that a paradigmatic shift in this genre can no longer be overlooked"⁵, including Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), "a landmark work in initiating a new consciousness about the possibilities of re-visioning nineteenth-century cultural *Ur*-texts"⁶, and John Fowles' widely-read *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). Despite the fact that the "neo-Victorian inception tends to be conflated somewhat too simplistically with the late 1960s"⁷ and with the publications of Rhys' and Fowles' novels respectively, it has been argued that, notwithstanding occasional earlier examples, "the phenomenon really gather[ed] ground"⁸ around this time. Rhys' and Fowles' novels can thus be regarded as cornerstones in the emergence and development of "[a] remarkable trend [...] in British fiction", comprising "the production of a significant number of novels and literary biographies which critically engage with the Victorian age and its narratives"⁹ while simultaneously emphasising their contemporary relevance by addressing and reflecting on present-day issues and problems.

A second wave of interest in and occupation with the Victorians and the (Victorian) past appeared in the 1980s and 1990s. This mounting interest is reflected in the publication of works such as Philip Pullman's YA novel *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985), A.S. Byatt's Booker Prize-winning *Possession: A Romance* (1990) or Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and in audio-visual adaptations, in-

2 Christian Gutleben. "Hybridity as Oxymoron.", 60.

3 In her 2019 monograph *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, Jessica Cox argues that neo-sensational writing can already be found in the Victorian era. Analysing Austin Fryer's (William Edward Clery's) parody *A New Lady Audley* (1891), she maintains that "its appearance at a time when the sensation novel was still in vogue points to the blurred boundaries between sensation and neo-sensation and to the paradoxical possibility that neo-Victorianism emerges in the Victorian period itself". Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 219.

4 Cf. Robin Gilmour. "Using the Victorians.", 189.

5 Ansgar Nünning. "Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres.", 217.

6 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. "On the Neo-Victorian, Now and Then.", 498, original emphasis.

7 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Introduction: Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter.", 3.

8 Robin Gilmour. "Using the Victorians.", 189.

9 Andrea Kirchknopf. "(Re)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction.", 53.

cluding Karel Reisz's 1981 adaptation of Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. While "[a]n intense historiographical curiosity [...] drove 1980s and 1990s Victorian revivalism and located the Victorian age as historically central to late-century postmodern consciousness"¹⁰, this time was also informed by two other, partially interrelated developments that contributed to the heightened visibility of the Victorian period in British literature and culture. On the one hand, "'new memory studies'"¹¹ was taking ground and furthered an engagement with history at large. As Astrid Erll observes, "[i]t was only in the 1980s (after the 'death of history,' the narrative turn, and the anthropological turn) that 'collective memory,' first slowly and then at breathtaking speed, developed into a buzzword not only in the academic world, but also in the political arena, the mass media, and the arts"¹², which in turn also fostered an occupation with the Victorians. On the other hand, Margaret Thatcher's conservative politics explicitly drew on Victorian ideals and values "to capitalize on the cultural value of the Victorians and to assert a direct lineage between the values of the Victorian era and her own political values"¹³. The resurgence of Victorian values and the preoccupation with the Victorian past indicate that the Victorians were very

10 Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich. "Introduction: Histories of the Present.", xi.; cf. Christian Gutleben. *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, 6.

11 Astrid Erll. "Cultural Memory Studies.", 8.

12 Astrid Erll. "Cultural Memory Studies.", 9.

13 Luisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 8. The term 'Victorian values' was used by Brian Walden in a TV interview with Margaret Thatcher in January 1983. When they talked about Thatcher's political agenda, Walden asked: "Am I wrong when I say that what you seem to be looking for is a more self-reliant Britain, a thriftier Britain, a Britain where people are freer to act, where they get less assistance from the State, where they're less burdened by the State, is that the sort of Britain that you want to bring about at the end of your Premiership?". When Thatcher confirms this, he draws attention to the retrospective character of these values: "All right, now you know, when you say you agree with those values, those values don't so much have a future resonance, there's nothing terribly new about them. They have a resonance of our past. Now obviously Britain is a very different country from the one it was in Victorian times when there was great poverty, great wealth, etc., but you've really outlined an approval of what I would call Victorian values. The sort of values, if you like, that helped to build the country throughout the 19th Century". Brian Walden. "TV Interview for London Weekend Television *Weekend World* ('Victorian Values').", 28, 29. In a radio interview with Peter Allen in April of the same year, Thatcher was asked what she means by these values and links them with her upbringing: "I was brought up by a Victorian grandmother. You were taught to work jolly hard, you were taught to improve yourself, you were taught self-reliance, you were taught to live within your income, you were taught that cleanliness was next to godliness. You were taught self-respect, you were taught always to give a hand to your neighbour [*sic*], you were taught tremendous pride in your country, you were taught to be a good member of your community. All of these things are Victorian values", which for her are "perennial values as well". Peter Allen. "Radio Interview for IRN programme *The Decision Makers*.", 7.

much 'alive' in the UK's socio-political and public discourses of the time, which is likely to also have spurred the literary engagement to a certain extent.

In the twenty-first century, the interest in the Victorian era is anything but receding and the Victorians continue to loom large in historical fiction, enjoying sustained popularity among writers, readers, critics and academics alike. Novels such as Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Michael Cox's *The Meaning of Night: A Confession* (2006), Emma Carroll's *Frost Hollow Hall* (2013), John Harwood's *The Asylum* (2013), Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* (2013), Chris Priestley's *The Last of the Spirits* (2014), Lyn Gardner's *Rose Campion and the Stolen Secret* (2016) and Elizabeth Macneal's *The Doll Factory* (2019) reinforce beyond doubt that "the fascination with things Victorian has been a British postwar vogue which shows no signs of exhaustion"¹⁴. This abiding interest in the Victorians and the nineteenth century can arguably be accounted for by the fact that Victorian culture still pervades different areas of contemporary everyday life, both public and private, which often overlap and intersect. There is a substantial number of fields, such as "film, television, trends in interior decoration, fashion, genealogy, advertising, museums, historical re-enactments, politics and scholarship about the Victorian period"¹⁵, where Victorian literature and culture frequently (re-)surface. The British heritage industry also (re-)invigorates an awareness of cultural artefacts that date back to the Victorian era, for instance Victorian pennies, or are (re-)created and based on relics of the time, while organisations such as the National Trust aim at conserving historical houses and other relics of the past, making them accessible for consumption to the wider public sphere. They highlight that "[m]aterial culture proves a vital part of cultural memory connecting past and present"¹⁶ and is crucial in keeping the Victorians 'alive'.

Given the seeming ubiquity and popularity of the Victorians in the present moment, it comes hardly as a surprise that they are often considered in the context of a genealogy. As Alexia Bowler and Jessica Cox ascertain, "the Victorians are frequently constructed as our immediate ancestors whose achievements remain evident in the modern world"¹⁷. Adopting a family metaphor,

14 Cora Kaplan. *Victoriana*, 2. The popularity of neo-Victorian fiction still seems to be increasing, which may also be due to neo-Victorian audio-visual adaptations of Victorian classics as well as neo-Victorian texts. For example, "[t]he Hollywood film adaptation of *Possession* in 2002 both confirmed and extended the popular appeal of Byatt's novel, and neo-Victorian fiction more generally" and popular streaming platforms, such as Netflix, also regularly turn to adapting (neo-)Victorian narratives, as is evidenced by their 2020 adaptation *Enola Holmes*, which is based on Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes* mystery series (2006–). Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 2.

15 Kate Mitchell. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 1.

16 Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss. "Introduction: Spectacles and Things.", 14.

17 Alexia L. Bowler and Jessica Cox. "Introduction to Adapting the Nineteenth Century.", 4.

Louisa Hadley elaborates on the contemporary preoccupation and relationship with the Victorians:

At the most fundamental level, the Victorians hold a central place in the contemporary cultural imagination because of the position they occupy in relation to the twentieth century. Close enough for us to be aware that we have descended from them and yet far enough away for there to be significant differences in life-styles, the Victorians occupy a similar place to our grandparents.¹⁸

The idea of the Victorians as (cultural) ancestors, even grandparents, suggests that “we need the Victorian age to construct ourselves as we know ourselves today” and that the Victorian era, which is well-documented by comparison to earlier periods, is a particularly suitable site to do so as “it provides us with a plethora of stories of origin”¹⁹ that can be used for this very purpose.

The contemporary fascination with the Victorians and the increasing number of novels dealing specifically with the Victorian past also triggered and fostered academic activities concerning the neo-Victorian project. When the *Neo-Victorian Studies* journal was launched in 2008, Marie-Luise Kohlke, founding editor of the journal, highlighted the need to consider neo-Victorianism as a distinct branch and field in its own right: “[o]ver the last two decades, the production of neo-Victorian artefacts, fictions, and fantasies has become too prolific to be contained as a ghost in the corner of the Victorian Studies parlour, relegated to the margins of an established field with its own vital foci and concerns”²⁰. While neo-Victorian studies was initially “held back by its diffusiveness, which currently [i.e., in 2008] undermines efforts to get to grips fully with the subject matter and with *why* it matters”²¹, the critical engagement with neo-Victorian fiction, apparent in a substantial number of (journal) articles and book publications in the field over the last two decades, helped to arrive at a clearer picture regarding its subject matter and generic features.²²

18 Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 6–7. This idea of the Victorians as grandparents is sometimes also employed by neo-Victorian writers. In Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), which is analysed in chapter 6, and Mary Downing Hahn’s *The Doll in the Garden* (1989), the old landladies (Mrs Bartholomew and Miss Cooper) occupy a position similar to that of a grandmother even if they are not related to the child protagonists in their respective stories.

19 Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss. “Introduction: Spectacles and Things.”, 14–15.

20 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Introduction: Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter.”, 1.

21 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Introduction: Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter.”, 1, original emphasis.

22 See, for instance, the volumes in Brill’s Neo-Victorian series: *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: The Politics of Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering* (2010, edited by Kohlke and Gutleben), *Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics* (2011, edited by Kohlke and Gutleben), *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century* (2012, edited by Kohlke and Gutleben), *Neo-Victorian Cities: Reassessing Urban Politics and Poetics* (2015, edited by Kohlke and Gutleben), *Neo-*

However, in spite of the persistent critical engagement with neo-Victorianism from various thematic angles, there is no generally accepted or universal definition of the term 'neo-Victorian'. The absence of an all-embracing definition is due to the fact that 'neo-Victorianism' designates an extremely broad and varied field and constitutes, as has been remarked with respect to neo-Victorian narrative texts, "a term which usefully categorises a vast range and variety of modern publications"²³. The sheer number of works and the spectrum covered by neo-Victorian fictional texts necessitate working definitions that are bound to the specific context(s) in which they are used. This need not be considered an obstacle though. In 2010, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn argued that "[t]he term [neo-Victorianism] has up until now remained loosely defined, and that may be an advantage in the wider cultural sphere"²⁴, because it enables and invites scholars to engage with neo-Victorianism from their respective fields and areas of interests.²⁵

In asking "[h]ow 'neo' must neo-Victorian literature be to count as such?"²⁶, Kohlke points to the central question underlying all definitions of neo-Victorian fiction and the different approaches deployed in working definitions.²⁷ As texts written by contemporary authors that address the Victorian era and/or its literary

Victorian Humour: Comic Subversions and Unlaughter in Contemporary Historical Re-Visions (2017, edited by Kohlke and Gutleben), *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture* (2017, edited by Benjamin Poore), *Neo-Victorian Bio-fiction: Reimagining Nineteenth-Century Historical Subjects* (2020, edited by Kohlke and Gutleben) and *Black Neo-Victoriana* (2022, edited by Felipe Espinoza Garrido, Marlena Troncke and Julian Wacker). But also, for example: Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham's edited collection *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past* (2010), Elizabeth Ho's *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* (2012), John Glendenning's *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels: Eye of the Ichthyosaur* (2013), Kym Brindle's *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Diaries and Letters* (2013), Helen Davies' *Neo-Victorian Freakery: The Cultural Afterlife of the Victorian Freak Show* (2015), Ann Heilmann's *Neo-/Victorian Biographilia and James Miranda Barry: A Study in Transgender and Transgenre* (2018), Sarah E. Maier and Brenda Ayres' edited collection *Neo-Victorian Madness: Rediagnosing Nineteenth-Century Mental Illness in Literature and Other Media* (2020) and Sarah E. Maier, Brenda Ayres and Danielle Dove's edited collection *Neo-Victorian Things: Re-imagining Nineteenth-Century Material Cultures in Literature and Film* (2022).

23 Judith Johnston and Catherine Waters. "Introduction: Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns.", 2.

24 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 4.

25 Louisa Yates also celebrates the term's diversity and indicates that coining a universal definition is nearly impossible: "No matter what the nomenclature (or perhaps because of it), this remains a genre that delights in proffering numerous exceptions to any universal definition, both in form and function". Louisa Yates. "'But it's only a novel, Dorian'.", 189.

26 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein.", 21–22.

27 This question is indirectly seized by Yates, who draws attention to "the binary tension at the heart of neo-Victorian fiction – to reproduce or to revise". Louisa Yates. "'But it's only a novel, Dorian'.", 196.

productions, neo-Victorian fiction is concerned with adaptation, appropriation and revision to varying degrees, including recurring themes, plot elements, characters, settings and/or storylines. In other words, “neo-Victorian fiction serves not one but two masters: the ‘neo’ as well as the ‘Victorian’; that is, homage to the Victorian era and its texts, but in combination with the ‘new’ in a post-modern *revisionary* critique”²⁸. While there can be “an element of nostalgia, these novels do not merely seek to revive the Victorian era or its literary modes; rather, they effect a transformation of it”²⁹ that is made explicit in the way these elements and themes are revisited and modified.

The focus on marginalised voices and those eclipsed from the historical record of the time, for instance, is a frequently employed means of conveying criticism and disclosing the revisionist impulse. This shift towards the disenfranchised, silenced groups and individuals of Victorian society, including “servants, criminals, women, homosexuals, the colonised races”³⁰, can prominently, yet not exclusively, be found in works that rewrite Victorian classics.³¹ Characters that are marginalised in Victorian texts often gain attention and a voice of their own in the stories told by authors of neo-Victorian fiction, who thereby “manage to supply different perspectives from the canonised Victorian ones”³². Therefore, it is not only of importance *who* gains a voice, but also *how* these characters are presented within the fictional domain by means of self-representation or depiction through a narrator or other characters. The aspect of voice/voicing is addressed pronouncedly in Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which was written “out of a deeply-felt personal, ethnical and cultural sense of injustice”³³ and is “one of the first in a long line of texts which have sought to open up the silent spaces of history or classic literary texts”³⁴. It tells the story of Antoinette Cosway (later renamed Bertha by her husband) by giving her the narrative voice and backstory she is essentially denied in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). In the latter text, the narrator introduces her as cunning, highly animalistic and as a lunatic, who can laugh but is excluded from verbal communication, whereas in Rhys’ post-

28 Samantha Carroll. “Putting the ‘Neo’ Back into Neo-Victorian.”, 173, my emphasis.

29 Louisa Hadley. “Feminine Endings.”, 181.

30 Samantha Carroll. “Putting the ‘Neo’ Back into Neo-Victorian.”, 195, my emphasis.

31 This is not to say that Victorian writers refrained from writing about women or providing female perspectives; on the contrary, the Brontë sisters, for instance, frequently wrote about female protagonists in their novels, as can be seen with Helen Huntingdon née Graham in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) or Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853). Thus, the neo-Victorian novel’s revisionist potential rather departs from *what* is depicted in the story or how this is done, for instance, sexuality, which tends to be only alluded to in Victorian novels, but is addressed explicitly in neo-Victorian texts.

32 Andrea Kirchknopf. “(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction.”, 54.

33 Christian Gutleben. *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, 5.

34 Sally Shuttleworth. “Natural History.”, 256.

colonial and feminist prequel to Brontë's novel she becomes one of the narrators to tell her own story.³⁵ In the prequel, "Antoinette, Edward Rochester's first wife, gets the most narrative space, while Rochester remains an unnamed speaker"³⁶, which shifts (at least part of) the narrative power to Antoinette and becomes a means of her self-articulation and self-representation.³⁷

Against the background of feminism, gender roles and sexuality also tend to be among the topics most often under scrutiny and revision in neo-Victorian fiction and remain central targets of criticism. Sexuality, for instance, is often explored "in recognition of both the difference of the ages (with the allegedly liberated modern period being pitted against the 'repressed' and hypocritical Victorians) and their possible affinities, i.e. the emergence of today's attitudes in the nineteenth century"³⁸. In their literary productions, neo-Victorian novelists therefore often tackle issues and concepts related to sexuality and gender, not least by including descriptions of homo- and hetero-sexual encounters – the former, for instance, in Sarah Waters' three neo-Victorian novels *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) – that tended to remain unarticulated in 'classic' Victorian novels.³⁹ They also critically engage with concepts regarding women, such as that of the 'Angel in the House', which goes back to an eponymous serial poem by Coventry Patmore (1854), and the middle-class ideology of 'separate spheres', both of which continue to shape the image of gender relations in the Victorian period.⁴⁰ Arguably, gender and sexuality constitute topics through which the revisionist and often subversive impulse of neo-Victorian literature becomes most easily recognisable, because the latter is often excluded in popular and widely-read Victorian literature and may strike readers

35 Cf., for instance, the first description of this character, which highlights Bertha's animalistic nature by dehumanising her in referring to her as 'it': "In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face". Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 291.

36 Andrea Kirchknopf. "(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction.", 68.

37 Nicole Terrien comments more critically on the distribution of narrative voices. She observes that "Antoinette's point of view is in its turn framed within the husband's account. This suggests that the female character cannot escape from entrapment in marriage, represented by the husband's control over discourse, or paradoxically that the husband's account is challenged from within". Nicole Terrien. "The Neo-Victorian Novel.", 75.

38 Dietmar Böhnke. "Neo-Victorianism.", 320–321.

39 Sean Purchase, for instance, draws attention to the fact that "images of sexual congress are conspicuously absent in the major works of Victorian literature". He however acknowledges that they existed in lesser-known works and that "other popular women writers of the day, such as George Eliot or the Brontë sisters, are famous for narrating the lives of sexualized, albeit repressed, women". Sean Purchase. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 127, 128.

40 For a closer look at the concept of 'separate spheres', see chapter 3 "Children and Childhood: Historical Developments and Literary Representations in Victorian Literature".

as a particularly notable feature that can be used to differentiate between the Victorian and the neo-Victorian.

While some scholars foreground the revisionist impulse of neo-Victorian fiction in their working definitions, others situate this type of fiction in the context of historiographic metafiction and put special emphasis on these texts' self-reflexivity. For instance, Heilmann and Llewellyn consider the metafictional engagement with the past as a means to differentiate between historical novels set in the nineteenth century and neo-Victorian fiction. In *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009* (2010), they provide a working definition of neo-Victorian fiction that is evocative of Linda Hutcheon's understanding of 'historiographic metafiction':

'neo-Victorian' is *more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*.⁴¹

Despite the fact that "the widely established critical emphasis on self-reflexivity provides a specific dividing line clearly differentiating the neo-Victorian from other historical fiction set in the nineteenth century"⁴², most novels that are set exclusively in the Victorian era and adopt a revisionist approach are excluded from a neo-Victorian corpus that makes self-reflexivity its defining feature.⁴³ Accordingly, as Kohlke asserts, "such demarcation proves inadequate for conceptualising the full range and diversity of neo-Victorian writing"⁴⁴ and in particular neo-Victorian children's literature, since it more often than not presents different, more story-centred views on the Victorian past.⁴⁵

41 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 4, original emphasis. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages". Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 5.

42 Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss. "Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian – Neo-Victorian Fashions.", 3.

43 In an article published in 2014, Heilmann and Llewellyn acknowledge their very specific use of 'neo-Victorian' by pointing out that "in practice the term is more generally applied to a great variety of contemporary cultural modes". Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. "On the Neo-Victorian, Now and Then.", 495–496.

44 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein.", 25.

45 Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss argue along similar lines, advocating that "self-reflexivity should not be paramount in any definition of neo-Victorianism as it forestalls the analysis of immersive practices of reception and consumption, which may turn out to be equally defining features of the neo-Victorian project". Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss. "Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian – Neo-Victorian Fashions.", 7. Drawing on reader response theory, Jessica Cox comes to a similar conclusion: "[f]or the 'unknowing' reader, unfamiliar with the Victorian literary and cultural landscape", a group to

The fact that neo-Victorian fiction appears in various shapes and guises implies that a spectrum is required that allows classifying and exploring neo-Victorian fiction in its various manifestations, as John Glendening suggests. He maintains that “[i]t is perhaps best to think of ‘neo-Victorian’ as covering a spectrum, with awareness of how the present shapes understanding of the past prevalent but varying in the degree to which it operates to confuse and revise the relationship between present and past and between fiction and historical truth as generally conceived”⁴⁶. Foregrounding the tensions between past and present as well as between fact and fiction, he proposes differentiating between novels that use contemporary realist and postmodernist methods, which constitute the two poles of his spectrum:

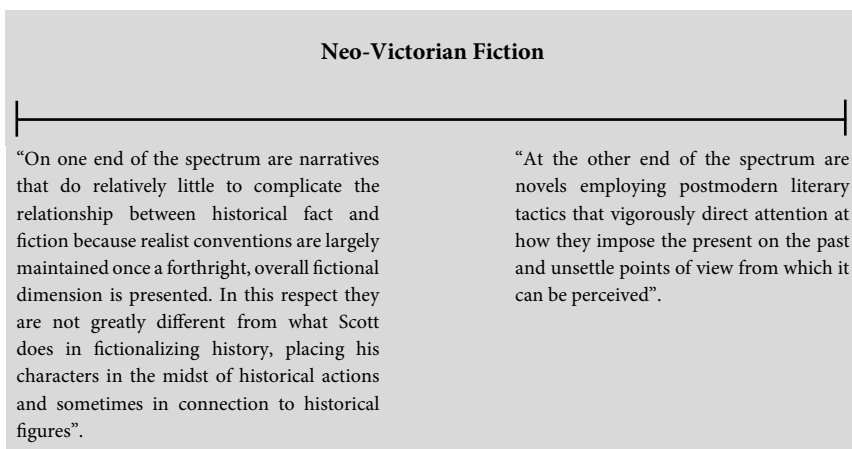


Illustration 1: Neo-Victorian Fiction according to John Glendening⁴⁷

While I fully endorse Glendening’s proposal to consider neo-Victorian fiction as a spectrum to accommodate the variety of neo-Victorian (narrative) texts that have been published so far, I believe that his suggestion is not fully differentiated and leaves some questions unanswered. For instance, if one end of the spectrum includes historical novels that “are not greatly different from what Scott does in fictionalizing history”, is he referring to historical fiction set in the nineteenth

which children often belong, “the distinction between a ‘self-consciously engaged’ narrative, and one which is not rooted in historical accuracy or replete with intertextual references to Victorian texts, is not necessarily clear, so the distinction which Heilman and Llewellyn draw [...] is rendered redundant: it depends entirely on the reader being able to respond to these different narratives in a particular way”. Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 9.

⁴⁶ John Glendening. *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels*, 10.

⁴⁷ Quotations in the illustration: John Glendening. *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels*, 12, 13. The diagrams/visualisations in this chapter are my own.

century? When understanding “neo-Victorian novels as revisionary historical fiction”⁴⁸, why does he not make the revisionist impulse constitutive of the one end of his spectrum so as to delimit neo-Victorian fiction from historical fiction set in the nineteenth century? Given that his realisation seems to lack parameters for a clear differentiation between the various forms of historical/neo-Victorian fiction, this chapter reverts to Ansgar Nünning’s five-fold typology of historical fiction, which he developed in his extensive, two-volume study of the historical novel *Von Historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion* (1995).

Nünning’s poetics and typology rest on the premise that the contemporary historical novel is a diverse genre and takes different forms. He claims that “the ways in which genre conventions are blurred in contemporary [historical] fiction are so multifarious that it does not make much sense to subsume all the novels in question under one label, be it ‘historiographic metafiction’ or ‘the postmodernist revisionist historical novel’”⁴⁹ as employed by Hutcheon and Brian McHale respectively.⁵⁰ He therefore saw the need to develop “a more systematic typology and a more finely nuanced poetics of the various modes for presenting history in fiction”⁵¹ and devised a model that allows differentiating between the different manifestations of the Anglophone historical novel in general and “the broad spectrum of postmodernist historical fiction”⁵² in particular.

Using different parameters, Nünning proposes a five-fold subdivision of historical fiction, encompassing 1) the ‘documentary historical novel’, 2) the ‘realist historical novel’, 3) the ‘revisionist historical novel’, 4) the ‘metahistorical novel’ and 5) ‘historiographic metafiction’.⁵³ The vast spectrum of texts covered by these five types can be illustrated as follows:

48 John Glendening, *Science and Religion in Neo-Victorian Novels*, 13.

49 Ansgar Nünning, “Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 219.

50 His criticism of the concept of historiographic metafiction as developed by Hutcheon is shared by Mitchell, who argues that “Hutcheon’s account has proven very useful for understanding those texts that do foreground the problematics of representation, deploying an ironic playfulness that undermines even their own attempt to depict the past. However, it is limited for understanding texts that eschew this mode, or which combine it with a range of other attitudes towards the past, ranging from ironic distance to affective identification”. Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 26.

51 Ansgar Nünning, “Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 220.

52 Ansgar Nünning, “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 365, my emphasis.

53 Cf. Ansgar Nünning, *Von Historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion*, 256–291. Despite the fact that the typology is highly inclusive and attempts to accommodate a variety of forms, Nünning concedes that “[a] number of postmodernist historical novels, however, resist generic classification altogether, or at least test the limits of it, because they are characterized by a blurring of genre conventions”. Ansgar Nünning, “Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 232.

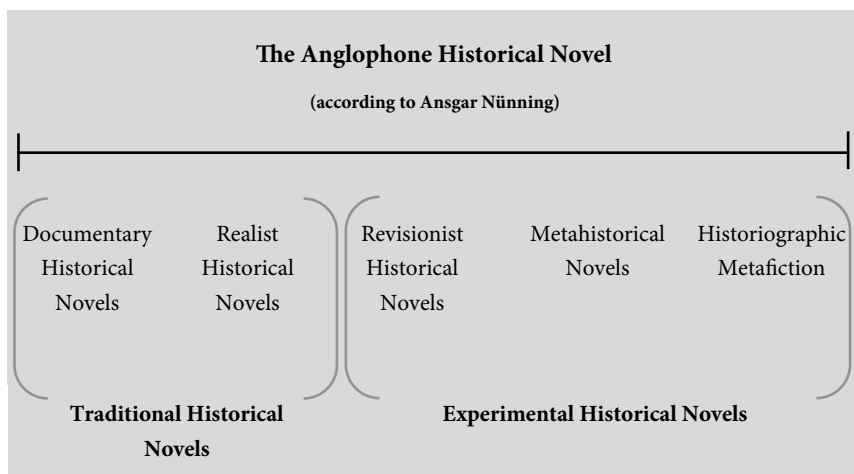


Illustration 2: The Anglophone Historical Novel according to Ansgar Nünning⁵⁴

The group of texts referred to as ‘traditional historical novels’ by Nünning comprises the documentary and realist historical novels, both of which use fictionalised and factual historical elements to varying extents. The former “tend[s] to foreground the conventionally backgrounded factual world”⁵⁵, is oriented towards the past and presents events in a predominantly linear-chronological fashion.⁵⁶ This type of historical novel creates an ‘illusion of reference’ by placing a special focus on factual information established by the historical record and by using a substantial number of references to ‘reality’ (e.g., important historical events and key historical figures) while generally refraining from including counterfactual information or anachronisms.⁵⁷ Whilst the documentary histor-

54 At this point I refrain from using the term ‘postmodernist historical fiction’ (Nünning’s term) to refer to this set of novels, because, as Hutcheon argued in “Postmodern Afterthoughts” (2002), “the postmodern does indeed appear to be a twentieth-century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past”, even though “some of its discursive strategies and most of its ideological critique continue to live on – as do those of modernism – in our contemporary twenty-first-century world”. Linda Hutcheon. “Postmodern Afterthoughts.”, 5, 11. Joseph Brooker’s alternative term “[t]he advanced historical novel of recent decades” is also problematic for a different reason, as it assumes a certain superiority over the other forms, which is why I opt for using the term ‘experimental historical novels’ to refer to these more recent forms of historical fiction. Joseph Brooker. “Reanimating Historical Fiction.”, 161.

55 Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 362.

56 Cf.: “Aus der Konzentration auf ein geschichtliches Geschehen ergibt sich auch die für dokumentarische historische Romane typische Vergangenheitsorientiertheit. Dieser dominante Zeitbezug korreliert vielfach mit einer linear-chronologischen Anordnung des Geschehens”. Ansgar Nünning. *Von Historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion*, 261.

57 Cf.: “Das konstitutive Merkmal dieses Typus besteht darin, daß die Elemente des Text-repertoires solcher Romane weitgehend referentialisierbar sind. Solche Romane zeichnen

ical novel places special emphasis on factual information, the realist historical novel “foreground[s] a fictitious plot against the backdrop of some identifiable historical context”⁵⁸. These works of fiction aim at “evok[ing] the impression of offering an ‘authentic’ picture of a particular period by drawing upon conventions of literary realism (e.g., linear storytelling, psychologically plausible characters, detailed descriptions of extratextual reality)”⁵⁹, as do, for example, the historical novels by Sir Walter Scott. They typically use an overt narrator, who (retrospectively) comments on the story and use predominantly fictional (main) characters.⁶⁰ In contrast to the documentary historical novel, this type tends to complement ‘facts’ about the past and imaginatively embellishes historical developments by focusing on the “dark areas”⁶¹ of history.⁶² The two types in this group thus exhibit “a basic belief in the aims, procedures and findings of history”⁶³ and refrain from questioning the contents of the historical record and/or the enterprise of historiography.

A more sceptical view towards the past, history and historiography is evinced in the group referred to as ‘experimental historical novels’. The spectrum covered by this group of historical novels “ranges from moderate types of revisionist historical novels over metahistorical novels that use and at the same time subvert some of the conventions of postmodernism to implicit and explicit forms of historiographic metafiction”⁶⁴. The revisionist historical novel aims at rewriting the past and presenting alternative versions by focusing on those that used to be marginalised or ignored by historiography.⁶⁵ As a result, this form of historical

sich daher durch einen äußerst breiten Skopus von spezifischen temporalen, lokalen und personalen Realitätsreferenzen und einen entsprechend hohen Grad an Intensität, Homogenität und Integrativität des Wirklichkeitsgehalts aus. Die dadurch hervorgerufene Referenzillusion geht einher mit einem weitgehenden Verzicht auf Fiktionalitätssignale, kontrafaktische Realitätsreferenzen und Anachronismen”. Ansgar Nünning. *Von Historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion*, 259.

58 Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 362.

59 Marion Gymnich. “Fictions of (Meta-)History.”, 72.

60 Cf. Marion Gymnich. “Fictions of (Meta-)History.”, 72.

61 Ansgar Nünning. *Von Historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion*, 265, original emphasis.

62 Cf.: “Im Gegensatz zum dokumentarischen Typus beschränken sich solche Texte [realistische historische Romane] darauf, historisch belegte Fakten zu ergänzen und geschichtliche Zusammenhänge im Bereich der *dark areas* phantasievoll auszugestalten”. Ansgar Nünning. *Von Historischer Fiktion zu Historiographischer Metafiktion*, 265, original emphasis.

63 Daniel Candel Bormann. *The Articulation of Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel*, 57.

64 Ansgar Nünning. “Crossing the Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 237.

65 Cf. Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 362–363. The focus on marginalised (hi)stories also contributed to an increasing incorporation of “those thematic domains dealt with by the history of mentalities, women’s history, oral history, history from below, and the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*)”. Ibid., 362, original emphasis.

fiction displays “the tendency toward marginalizing the great events of history and highlighting instead the experience of ordinary human beings”⁶⁶, focusing on subjective, personal experiences and an individual’s perception of the events presented in the story. Even though these novels tend to display an awareness of being written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they typically maintain “the aesthetic illusion”⁶⁷, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the counter (hi-)story presented in the text.⁶⁸ In the case of neo-Victorian fiction, these stories are usually set exclusively in the Victorian era, make use of the realist mode of writing, whereby “[t]he realist narrative voice allows neo-Victorian fictions to confidently assert the reality of the past they narrate”⁶⁹, and aim at “persuad[ing] an audience of the veracity of the representation” by creating what has been termed the “authentic fallacy”⁷⁰. Novels belonging to this type include, for instance, Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), Mary Hooper’s *Fallen Grace* (2010) and Eloise Williams’ *Gaslight* (2017).

A more self-reflexive engagement with history and historiography is evinced by metahistorical novels and those belonging to the type referred to as historiographic metafiction. The former “focus[es] on the continuity of the past in the present, on the interplay between different time-levels, on forms of historical consciousness, and on the recuperation of history”⁷¹, which usually is only implicitly questioned. These texts “are generally set in the present” or juxtapose two or more temporal levels and are “concerned with the appropriation, revision, and transmission of history”⁷², as is the case in Ann Pilling’s *Black Harvest* (1989) and John Harwood’s *The Ghost Writer* (2004). The reliability of historiography and the contents of the historical record are more openly and explicitly challenged in historiographic metafiction, which “calls into question the ontological boundary between fact and fiction, the real and the imaginary”⁷³. This type of historical novel “deals less with historical facts than with the epistemological problems attached to the reconstruction of historical events and to the writing of history”⁷⁴. In contrast to the other types, “historiographic metafiction *self-consciously* explores the status and function of narrative as an ideological construct shaping history and forging identity rather than merely representing the past”⁷⁵. The historical novels belonging to this latter group, which include Fowles’ *The French*

66 Ansgar Nünning. “Crossing the Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 222.

67 Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 362.

68 Cf. Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 362.

69 Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 151.

70 Jerome de Groot. *Remaking History*, 16.

71 Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 364.

72 Ansgar Nünning. “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 364.

73 Ansgar Nünning. “Crossing the Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 229.

74 Ansgar Nünning. “Crossing the Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 226.

75 Ansgar Nünning. “Historiographic Metafiction.”, 216, my emphasis.

Lieutenant’s Woman and Byatt’s *Possession*, thus tend to focus on the tension between fiction/invention and what is believed as historically accurate/‘real’.⁷⁶ These latter types, to varying degrees, thus “remind the reader that history, while it exists as a continuous process, is accessible to men and women only as a narrative produced by human beings who remember and interpret events from their particular points of view”⁷⁷ and socio-historical backgrounds.

This typology hence allows identifying various manifestations of historical fiction and also provides a more refined approach to neo-Victorian fiction. Making use of Nünning’s ideas, I propose a spectrum that considers neo-Victorian fiction on a gradual scale and allows differentiating between neo-Victorian fiction and historical fiction set in the nineteenth century:

Historical Fiction set in the 19th Century		Neo-Victorian Fiction		
Realist Historical Novels		Revisionist Historical Novels	Metafictional Historical Novels	Historiographic Metafiction
present a fictional story in a historical setting typically use an overt narrator, who (retrospectively) comments on the story use predominantly fictional (main) characters		critically engage with the past and/or conceptions of history narrate counter- and/or alternative (hi)stories	typically self- reflexive juxtapose two or more temporal settings and narrative levels (implicitly) question the representation of the past and the historical record	challenges the historical record and historiography challenges conceptions regarding historical ‘fact’ and fiction high degree of self- reflexivity

Illustration 3: Neo-Victorian Fiction according to Nünning’s Typology

As this spectrum suggests, the different forms and shapes of neo-Victorian fiction cannot be easily grasped with a binary classification, but require being conceptualised in a more precise manner.⁷⁸ According to Nünning’s typology,

76 Cf. Ansgar Nünning, “Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet.”, 362.
77 Ansgar Nünning, “Crossing the Borders and Blurring Genres.”, 227.
78 It should be noted that I am not the first to make use of Nünning’s typology to approach and accommodate the neo-Victorian novel. In his 2002 monograph *The Articulation of Science in the Neo-Victorian Novel*, Candel Bormann also draws on Nünning’s typology of historical fiction and considers the contemporary forms of the historical novel (the revisionist historical novel, the metahistorical novel and historiographic metafiction) as the relevant forms for approaching neo-Victorian fiction. Cf. Daniel Candel Bormann. *The Articulation of Sci-*

neo-Victorian fiction belongs to the group of ‘experimental historical novels’, ranging from revisionist historical fiction, which constitutes one end of the scale, to historiographic metafiction, which forms the other. Considering and understanding neo-Victorian fiction in this way proves to be a highly inclusive approach that permits casting more nuanced perspectives on individual novels and the manifold ways they engage with and challenge the Victorian past.

This broad conceptualisation and understanding of neo-Victorian fiction is further made necessary by a discernible shift in contemporary historical fiction (including neo-Victorian fiction) towards more immersive narrative strategies rather than experimentation. It seems that, “[t]o a certain extent, historical fiction in the 21st century seems to have moved beyond the more extreme structural experiments favoured by postmodernism, opting for more story-centred approaches to the past and making use of strategies associated with literary realism in order to endow constructions of the past with materiality and corporeality”⁷⁹. This fairly recent shift “from the explicit to the implicit” suggests “that the formal pendulum has swung from loud authorial intervention to more seamless fictional diegeses”⁸⁰ – in other words, from a palpable focus on strategies typically associated with historiographic metafiction towards a revisionist and metahistorical engagement with history and the (Victorian) past.

Against this background, this book adopts a very broad working definition of neo-Victorian fiction that allows considering novels displaying a high degree of self-reflexivity along those that approach the Victorians from a revisionist perspective. Throughout this study, neo-Victorian fiction is conceived of as spanning the entire spectrum covered by the ‘experimental historical novel’ as devised by Nünning to acknowledge the different takes employed in reimagining the Victorian past. It encompasses, to borrow from Jessica Cox’s definition of neo-Victorian YA fiction, those children’s and adult texts “engag[ing] at any level

ence in the Neo-Victorian Novel, 57. Even though he introduces the different forms of contemporary historical fiction, his definition of neo-Victorian fiction is merely a modification of Nünning’s definition of historical fiction and leaves the subdivision aside: “a neo-Victorian novel is a fictional text which creates meaning from the background of an awareness of time as flowing and as poised uneasily between the Victorian past and the present; which secondly deals dominantly with topics which belong to the field of history, historiography and/or the philosophy of history *in dialogue with a Victorian past*; and which thirdly can do so at all narrative levels and in any possible discursive form, be it through the narration of action, through static description, argumentative exposition or stream-of-consciousness techniques”. Ibid., 62, original emphasis. Despite using Nünning’s subdivisions in his analyses of Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983) and Byatt’s *Possession* (1990), he refrains from fully exploiting the potential of the typology for understanding and exploring neo-Victorian fiction in its different manifestations.

79 Marion Gymnich. “Fictions of (Meta-)History.”, 83.

80 Joseph Brooker. “Reanimating Historical Fiction.”, 174.

with Victorian history, literature and culture”⁸¹, provided the occupation with Victorian historical and cultural matters and/or the period’s literary productions has a significant impact on the reader’s reception of the text. These texts “establish a dialogue, a two-way process, a dual relationship”⁸² between the Victorian past and the present moment and thus function “as a mirror in which our own experiences, though necessarily distorted, are nevertheless reflected”⁸³. In other words, these texts revisit and revise the Victorian past from a contemporary perspective and address topics that are still relevant today, such as child labour, child (sexual) abuse and childhood trauma.⁸⁴

81 Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 107.

82 Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham. “Introduction.”, xx.

83 Alexia L. Bowler and Jessica Cox. “Introduction to Adapting the Nineteenth Century.”, 10. Böhnke elaborates on this dialogue with the Victorian past, commenting that “[w]hat these [neo-Victorian] novels and films do is to establish a dialogue between the present and the past which puts the reader or viewer in the role of the traveller to that ‘foreign country’, the Victorian age, which s/he can explore and wonder at, never once losing the grounding in the present moment and thus the ability to notice contemporary resonances – whether striking or obscure – but also the essential strangeness and impenetrability of the ‘culture’ of the past. The effect surely is a re-writing or re-vision of history from the present (as any historiography must be), but is also a rethinking of the present through the prism of history and of our ways of looking at and using the past”. Dietmar Böhnke. “Neo-Victorianism.”, 336.

84 The contemporary relevance of the genre prompted Kohlke to speculate that, “[m]uch as we read Victorian texts as highly revealing cultural products of their age, neo-Victorian texts will one day be read for the insights they afford into twentieth- and twenty-first century cultural history and socio-political concerns”. Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Introduction: Speculations in and on the Neo-Victorian Encounter.”, 13.

3. Children and Childhood: Historical Developments and Literary Representations in Victorian Literature

Childhood became a profound concern in the Victorian period and was an aspect that permeated the social, cultural, literary and political discourses at the time. As Claudia Nelson discerns, “[n]ever before had childhood become an obsession within the culture at large” and “Victorian conceptions of childrearing, of the state of being a child, and of the emotional importance of children to a society dominated by adults took on such weight as to represent something new in Western history”¹. Given the topicality of and the abiding interest in childhood in the Victorian era, this chapter explores the representations of childhood in Victorian literature by outlining various historical and culturally relevant developments that are pertinent to the four novels that will serve as case studies. The approach chosen for this section is a chronological one, starting with the developments during the second half of the eighteenth century and in particular the Romantic period, where childhood came to be seen in a new light and “[e]ducation was one of the most hotly contested and frequently discussed topics”². The altered perception of childhood resulting from the Romantic interest in children yields various crucial impetuses for the cultural, literary as well as legal developments in the nineteenth century and lays the foundations for the first Golden Age of children’s literature. The discussion of the notion of childhood in Victorian literature therefore revolves around and explores these broader developments. It is supplemented by literary examples from the Edwardian period, a time when “[c]hildhood [...] was a subject of deep concern, fascination, and even obsession”³. Following the exploration of these developments, a special focus is placed on the representation of the family and in par-

1 Claudia Nelson. “Growing Up.”, 69.

2 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 2.

3 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 1.

ticular the literary figure of the orphan, which is central to the four neo-Victorian novels discussed in more detail in this book.⁴

In the eighteenth century, children and childhood became topical concerns to an extent that was unprecedented in earlier epochs and important foundations for our contemporary understanding of children and childhood were laid. This newly awakened interest in children and conceptions of childhood was “[f]ramed by the writings of John Locke at its beginning and of the Romantic poets at its end, and with the strident figure of Rousseau at centre stage”⁵. All of them (to varying degrees) contributed to the heightened recognition of childhood as a special phase of life and human existence that was continued and elaborated on in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “‘The discovery of childhood’” in the eighteenth century is a cornerstone in the history of childhood insofar as it “not only entails the emergence of the idea that childhood is an important stage of life, but also the idea that childhood is its *own* stage of life, a time separate from adulthood with its own unique qualities and experiences”⁶ that were theorised and celebrated accordingly.⁷

While conceptions of childhood in the eighteenth century were initially shaped by the belief in ‘original sin’, which suggested that children were born with an “innate depravity”⁸ and wickedness, “[o]ne can [...] see a more positive image of the child coming to the fore, as the emphasis on original sin declined gradually from the eighteenth century onwards”⁹. This more favourable conception of the child is, among others, linked to John Locke, whose “notion of the child’s mind as *tabula rasa* [...] was [...], at the core of pedagogical discourse in

4 I thus opted for a topic-based approach to explore the literary representations of children in Victorian literature. Therefore, specific genres, such as the school story, the adventure story or domestic fiction, cannot be taken into account separately.

5 Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 58. When referring to Romanticism as a literary period and movement, this chapter follows Alan Richardson’s temporal demarcation and consider the Romantic period “as extending roughly from the 1780s through the early 1830s”. Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 3.

6 Ann Weirida Rowland. *Romanticism and Childhood*, 7, original emphasis.

7 With regard to the use of the term ‘discovery’, Ann Weirida Rowland notes that “[h]istorical studies of childhood [...] understand and discuss childhood as something that was ‘discovered’ at a particular historical moment, by which they mean that there was a period in which a set of social factors and cultural practices cohered to bring children and childhood into greater focus and importance in the larger culture than previously seen”; therefore, the term ‘discovery’ (similar to the often alternatively employed term ‘invention’) is used to “defamiliarize and estrange what can easily be seen as a universal and ever-present fact of human life”, while simultaneously highlighting that childhood is a social and cultural construct. Ann Weirida Rowland. *Romanticism and Childhood*, 6.

8 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 14.; cf. Roni Natov. *The Poetics of Childhood*, 3.

9 Colin Heywood. *A History of Childhood*, 40.; cf. Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 58.

the late eighteenth century”¹⁰ and has had a considerable impact on educational principles. In his popular “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (first published in 1689), he postulated that the child’s mind can be conceived of as “white paper”¹¹:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience.¹²

This understanding of the child’s mind as a ‘blank slate’ or ‘*tabula rasa*’ suggests that children are shaped by society and that “the child’s malleability [...] can lend itself equally to corruption or improvement”¹³. It suggests that “children [learn] through experience and should be moulded by parents from an early age towards virtue, rationality, and reason, effectively becoming adults as soon as possible”¹⁴. Despite its focus on turning children into ‘small adults’, Locke’s conception of the child had a considerable impact on notions of how children should be educated; these were further consolidated by his widely-read treatise “Some Thoughts Concerning Education” (1693), which contains “a recognition of the individuality of each child”¹⁵ that should be considered in the child’s education.

The idea that children should not be regarded simply as diminutive versions of adults, but as individuals in their own right was brought to the fore in particular by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In several of his works, he “presented childhood as a stage of life possessing uniquely valuable qualities of innocence and truth-to-nature that are lost as the effects of civilization encroach upon the growing child”¹⁶. This understanding of childhood is particularly evident in *Émile ou de l’éducation* (1762, *Émile or On Education*, 1763), which popularised “[t]he notion of the child [...] as somehow unique, qualitatively different from (and in some senses superior to) the adult”¹⁷. In the preface to his influential treatise, the French philosopher starts with the premise that “[c]hildhood is unknown. [...]

10 Andrew O’Malley. *The Making of the Modern Child*, 4–5.

11 John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 95.

12 John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 95. The widespread popularity of the text and its ideas, which fully took hold in the eighteenth century, is attested by its numerous editions and translations: “There had been more than a dozen English editions by the mid-eighteenth century, and several editions in French, German, Italian, Dutch and Swedish in the course of the eighteenth century”. Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 61.

13 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 12.

14 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 6–7.

15 Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 60.

16 Christine Kenyon Jones. “Childhood.”, 179.

17 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 9.

The wisest men concentrate on what it is [*sic*] important for men to know without considering what children are in a condition to learn. They are always seeking the man in the child without thinking of what he is before being a man”¹⁸. In claiming that children differ not only in physical appearance but also, for instance, in cognitive abilities from adults, he promotes the idea that children should be educated in a child-appropriate way, which, in his opinion, requires “that children should be left free and unconstrained to discover the world and reason in a natural way for themselves (rather than through books) before only later being guided by a responsive tutor”¹⁹. The special emphasis on childhood as a separate developmental stage with its own needs and views is also vindicated by the ‘naturalness’ of this state:

Nature wants children to be children before being men. If we want to pervert this order, we shall produce precocious fruits which will be immature and insipid and will not be long in rotting. We shall have young doctors and old children. Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it. Nothing is less sensible than to want to substitute ours for theirs, and I would like as little to insist that a ten-year-old be five feet tall as that he possess judgment.²⁰

While Locke’s educational propositions make instilling reason into the child the guiding pedagogical principle, Rousseau’s approach opposes this thinking radically by “allow[ing] children to grow up in accordance with nature, and without the imposition upon them of moral rules and learning”²¹, which prolonged childhood – at least in theory.²² This recognition of childhood as a special phase in life at the core of Rousseau’s proposition was extremely influential and also had a lasting effect on Romantic writing and in particular on Romantic poetry.

The pivotal role of Romantic writing in the overall history of childhood is evident in the fact that “the child that is ‘discovered’ or ‘invented’ in the eighteenth century is most often referred to as the ‘Romantic child’”²³. This is not to

18 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile or On Education*, 33–34. The demand for a child-centred and child-appropriate education is further highlighted in the following passage: “The masterpiece of a good education is to make a reasonable man, and they [those following ‘Locke’s great maxim’] claim they raise a child by reason! This is to begin with the end, to want to make the product the instrument”. *Ibid.*, 89.

19 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 7. It should be noted that Rousseau’s thoughts on education are gendered and focus predominantly on the education of boys, in this case *Émile*. In Book V of his treatise, he introduces a female counterpart to *Émile*, Sophie, and elaborates on the education of girls, which will, for reasons of conciseness and focus, be excluded from this chapter.

20 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile or On Education*, 90.

21 Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 63.

22 For a more comprehensive overview of Rousseau’s educational principles see Christiane Maria Binder. *From Innocence to Experience*, 10–13, and Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 62–64.

23 Ann Weirda Rowland. *Romanticism and Childhood*, 8.

say that there was “one dominant ‘Romantic’ image of the child”²⁴, but a whole range of heterogeneous images, consisting of the dominant attitudes towards and reflections on children, childhood and education in existence at the time.²⁵ The term ‘Romantic child’ suggests that the philosophical concepts proposed by Locke and especially Rousseau laid the foundations, but that it was the engagement with and celebration of childhood by Romantic writers that essentially contributed to the heightened sensibility towards children and gave the impetus for the nostalgic longing for the ephemeral state of childhood. The significance of Romantic writers’ celebration of childhood is evident in the fact that “the idea of the ‘Romantic child’ does more than refer back to and embody ideas of childhood developed over the course of the eighteenth century; it also gestures ahead to the ideas of childhood that will dominate Western culture well into the twentieth century”²⁶, which points to the ‘Romantic child’s’ legacy and influential position in Western thought.²⁷

The celebration of childhood as a special phase of life and the Rousseauian idea of a natural development of the child are among the central tenets of much Romantic writing and in particular of Romantic poetry.²⁸ As M.O. Grenby argues, “[p]oets like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth”

24 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 9.

25 Drawing on Lawrence Stone’s *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (1977), Richardson quotes Stone’s “four views about the given nature of the child available to writers, educationalists, and parents in the period 1640–1800” in this context, which attest to the heterogeneity; they include “a ‘traditional Christian view’”, “an ‘environmentalist’ view”, “a ‘biological’ view” as well as “a ‘utopian’ view” and he adds what “could be termed ‘transcendental’” to the views identified by Stone. Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 10, 11.

26 Ann Weirda Rowland. *Romanticism and Childhood*, 9.

27 Rowland further substantiates this point by arguing that “the ‘Romantic child’ earns its sobriquet because it is essentially an idealized, nostalgic, sentimental figure of childhood, one characterized by innocence, imagination, nature and primitivism, qualities associated with Romanticism that survive today in very few cultural figures, the child being one of the most enduring”. Ann Weirda Rowland. *Romanticism and Childhood*, 9.

28 The poems used in this section have been composed by male poets and were chosen for their popularity and their pertinence in the canon of Romantic poetry. This is not to say that women at the time did not write poetry, but that they often tend to be neglected in favour of their male counterparts. These male poets are the ones who are deeply inscribed in the cultural memory connected with the period, which is why this chapter focuses on Romantic poems written by male poets. For a brief discussion of female Romantic poets and their attitudes towards childhood see Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 15–16. Despite the fact that there is a focus on Romantic poems in this section, the content-related developments of the novel should be kept in mind as well, because novels, too, displayed an abiding interest in childhood: “The novel in this era [the Romantic period] is still more obviously permeated by the growing emphasis on childhood and education, which accompanies the emergence in England of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development”. *Ibid.*, 7.

were “writing of the child before his or her acculturation as being closest to nature and to God and of childhood as being a state of sublime innocence”²⁹, where important experiences are made. Wordsworth’s poem “My heart leaps up when I behold” (composed in 1802) is among the most popular Romantic poems cherishing childhood experience and presenting childhood as a stage in which relevant insights are gained and developed that also inform adult life:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A Rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a Man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is Father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.³⁰

The idea that “The Child is Father of the Man”, which has been acknowledged as “Wordsworth’s most famous line on childhood”³¹, reinforces that childhood comprises the formative years of every individual as envisaged by nature and that the joy triggered by the sight of the rainbow, a natural phenomenon, can be traced back to the lyrical I’s childhood experience that is still maintained into his/her/their adult years. It is furthermore “an argument that suggests that the child has something to teach the adult”³², which stresses that childhood and adulthood are interconnected and that childhood experience is fundamental to later stages of development.³³

The recognition of the importance of childhood experience frequently induced Romantic authors to express nostalgic feelings for this irretrievable time. This longing for childhood as a passing state is characteristic of much Romantic poetry, because

[f]or the first time in a sustained way Romantic poetry constructed childhood as a desirable state, distinct from adulthood, for which adults longed: a lost, idealized, clear-visioned, divinely pure, intuitive, in-tune-with-nature, imaginative stage of life, of whose spirit adults felt the loss and sought to capture in literature.³⁴

29 M.O. Grenby. “Children’s Literature.”, 182.

30 William Wordsworth. “‘My heart leaps up when I behold’.”, 246, ll. 1–9.

31 Ann Weirda Rowland. *Romanticism and Childhood*, 3.

32 Roderick McGillis. “Irony and Performance.”, 103.

33 This idea also reinforces that Wordsworth’s “interest in childhood had less to do with children *per se* than with the adult’s need of the child, with what adults learn from children and what they need from childhood”. Roni Natov. *The Poetics of Childhood*, 22, original emphasis.

34 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 7–8.

This nostalgic conception of childhood is explicitly drawn upon in Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (first published in 1807 as 'Ode'), in which the lyrical I laments the loss of childhood:

What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower[.]³⁵

In these lines, childhood is contemplated as an irrecoverable phase of life that has long passed and is linked with a carefree and happy existence as well as a proximity to the natural world.³⁶ Throughout the ode, childhood is closely related to a divine existence and nearness to God: "But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home: / Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"³⁷ This state, however, is gradually dissolved once the "Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy"³⁸, eventually leaving the lyrical I to yearn for the state of divine innocence associated with infancy.

While Romantic poets used children and childhood as topics for celebration and for expressing nostalgic yearning, both were also drawn upon as a means of conveying (social) criticism, which is a use that was perpetuated and became particularly prominent in the nineteenth century. As Richardson observes, "[t]hroughout the early part of the Romantic period lower-class children – that is, by far the majority of children – continued to work in the fields, in home industry, in shops and, increasingly, in mines and factories"³⁹, and it is to those working-

35 William Wordsworth. "Ode.", 302, ll. 178–181. When the "Ode" was republished in 1815, Wordsworth also expanded its title, adding "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood".

36 The child's proximity to and deep connection with the natural world is an essential element of many Romantic poems. For instance, in Blake's "The Echoing Green" the children play on the titular green, a place where "The merry bells ring / To welcome the Spring; / The skylark and thrush, / The birds of the bush, / Sing louder around / To the bells' cheerful sound". William Blake. "The Echoing Green.", 180, ll. 3–8. In Wordsworth's "There was a Boy", the titular boy is a 'child in nature' ("[a]t evening, when the stars had just begun / To move along the edges of the hills, / Rising or setting, would he stand alone / Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake") and able to communicate with owls; during silences in between the owls' replies, he can hear "the voice / Of mountain torrents" or see the natural surroundings "[w]ith all its solemn imagery" in front of his inner eye. William Wordsworth. "There was a Boy.", 474, ll. 3–6, 20–21, 23. The lyrical I in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" (in the 1834 version) likewise envisages his/her/their baby as a 'child in nature', promising that it should not be "reared / In the great city, pent mid cloisters dim", as was the lyrical I, but the countryside, where it "shalt wander like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags / Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds / Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores / And mountain crags". Samuel Taylor Coleridge. "Frost at Midnight.", 626, ll. 56–57, 59–63.

37 William Wordsworth. "Ode.", 299, ll. 64–66.

38 William Wordsworth. "Ode.", 299, ll. 67–68.

39 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 16.

class children that Romantic poets also frequently turned. In Blake's "The Chimney-Sweeper" from his *Songs of Innocence* (1789), for example, the Romantic ideal of a carefree and pleasant childhood is contrasted with the harsh realities of chimney sweeps. The poem opens with a "child-speaker [who] is sold, as poor children were at four through seven years of age"⁴⁰, to become a climbing boy. In what is reminiscent of a frame narrative, the child speaker recounts the dream vision of "little Tom Dacre"⁴¹, one of his fellow sweeps, in which Tom temporarily escapes the exploitative and rough work chimney sweeps have been subjected to:

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight:
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black,
And by came an angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free.
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the sun.⁴²

The criticism inherent in this poem suggests that theory and practice frequently were not compatible, especially where child labour was concerned, and highlights that towards the end of the eighteenth century children "came to be regarded as victims, as 'slaves', as innocents forced into 'unnatural' employment and denied their 'childhood'"⁴³. In this respect, the marked contrast between the black and cramped coffins and the natural environment bathed in sunshine becomes paradigmatic for the rift between the 'lived' and 'imagined' childhoods addressed in Blake's poem. With a dream as the only possible worldly escape from their rough and dreadful everyday existence – except for death –, these children lived a monotonous and precocious life dominated by work and dutiful obedience, which is further criticised in the final, slightly sarcastic line of the poem.⁴⁴

The eighteenth-century interest in children and childhood became, however, not only popular material for Romantic poetry but also had a considerable impact on the emergence of a children's book market. It was the time when

40 Roni Natov. *The Poetics of Childhood*, 10.

41 William Blake. "The Chimney-Sweeper.", 44, l. 5.

42 William Blake. "The Chimney-Sweeper.", 44–45, ll. 9–16.

43 Harry Hendrick. "Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood.", 39.

44 Cf. "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm". William Blake. "The Chimney-Sweeper.", 45, l. 24. Precocity is further evident in the fact that Tom "cried when his head, / That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved", which aligns his outer appearance even more to that of an adult. Ibid., ll. 5–6. The comparison to the lamb, an iconic trope of innocence, suggests that his child-like innocence and his angelic appearance have been taken from him and that he has been obliged to become part of the adult world and the work force.

supposedly “the first material written specifically for children to read”⁴⁵ was produced. A crucial role in this development of literature specifically targeted at children is ascribed to John Newbery, whose instructional textbook *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) was “one of the first commercial books for children”⁴⁶ and “is often regarded as the most important single point of origin”⁴⁷ of children’s literature. While Newbery and his contemporaries (among them Thomas Boreman as well as Thomas and Mary Cooper) have contributed significantly to the development of children’s literature, because they “establish[ed] children’s literature as a distinct branch of print culture”⁴⁸, they have not ‘invented’ it.⁴⁹ In fact, as Richardson maintains, “[b]ooks had, of course, been produced for children well before this period – courtesy books, children’s bibles, hornbooks and primers, religious works, and fable collections”⁵⁰, among the latter most prominently *Aesop’s Fables*, which had been available in English since 1484. Despite the fact that books for children have already existed before, the 1740s were significant insofar as the commercialisation of children’s literature and the attendant advertisements must “have done much to create children’s literature as a new taxonomic category in the public consciousness”⁵¹. Grenby, who has done an extensive study on children as readers and their reading customs in *The Child Reader, 1700–1840* (2011), further elaborates on this idea and claims that “[t]he important point is that the 1740s texts arrived more or less together. What followed was hardly a flood of similar titles, but numbers did increase steadily”⁵².

45 Christine Kenyon Jones. “Childhood.”, 179.

46 Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 29.

47 M.O. Grenby. “The Origins of Children’s Literature.”, 4.

48 Matthew Grenby. “Children’s Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.”, 43.

49 The idea of an invention is, however, not unproblematic, because “saying that children’s literature began in the mid-eighteenth century, and in Britain, immediately invites dis-sension”. Matthew Grenby. “Children’s Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.”, 40. Grenby speculates that “[c]urrent academic tastes are unlikely to assent to an account that is quite so glib, so Anglocentric, so canonising, so reliant on a ‘great man’ notion of cultural history, so little attentive to the role of mothers as children’s first teachers, and children as being themselves active in the construction of their literature”, which is why this chapter refrains from identifying a single point of origin of children’s literature. M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 2. This idea is further consolidated in one of his articles, in which he explains that “we find that children’s literature has no easily discernible starting point” and that academic studies exploring the beginnings of children’s literature rely on a narrow definition of the term. Matthew Grenby. “Children’s Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.”, 43. These definitions then necessarily include and exclude certain points of origin and, thus, cater only to specific purposes and needs.

50 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 109.

51 M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 4, my emphasis.

52 M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 4. Peter Hunt, for example, enumerates some of the titles published in the 1740s: “Thomas Boreman’s *Gigantick Histories* in ten volumes (1740–3), Thomas Warren’s *Little Master’s Miscellany* (Birmingham, c. 1742), and Mary

This continual burgeoning of titles advertised as ‘children’s literature’ thus contributed substantially to the dissemination of the term and fostered the recognition that children constitute a literary audience of their own.⁵³

Notwithstanding the efforts by John Newbery and his co-publishers, the commercialisation and development of children’s literature must also be accounted for by a host of other factors. In fact, “the growth of children’s literature was a symptom of wider social, economic and cultural changes rather than the result of the sudden creation of instantly appealing texts by a circle of brilliant authors and daring publishers”⁵⁴. One of the crucial factors in this process was a demographic increase of the population, which “rose by about 20 per cent between 1720 and 1770. What these demographic and cultural shifts meant was a society increasingly full of, and concerned with, children, and willing to invest in them both emotionally and financially”⁵⁵. In addition to demographic and economic changes, the increasing attention given to and the relevance of education were also factors that contributed to the development of children’s literature, and promoted the emergence of “a more secular literature, distinct from the cheap chapbooks which were read by people of all ages”⁵⁶. Thus, it was the combination of various factors paired with commercialisation that fostered “the development of a *new kind* of children’s literature”⁵⁷ in the eighteenth century, attesting to the mounting attention paid to children as well as childhood.

Despite the increasing commercialisation of children’s literature and the interest in childhood, children often did not possess the works written specifically for them and instead continued to read texts targeting an adult readership. As Grenby maintains, “it is clear that, in the lives of many children, even in affluent families and even towards the end of the period [‘the long eighteenth century’], children’s books did not figure prominently, nor even, in many cases, at all”⁵⁸. This implies that the successful dissemination of these books and widespread reading of children’s literature only fully took hold in the nineteenth century. The fact that literary texts in the eighteenth century were cross-read by adults and children suggests that “[c]hildren used books long before books were produced specifically for children”⁵⁹ and that they may have been familiar with “virtually all

Cooper’s nursery rhymes, perhaps the first genuine literature of childhood”. Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 42, original emphasis.

53 Cf. M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 3.

54 Matthew Grenby. “Children’s Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.”, 44.

55 M.O. Grenby. “The Origins of Children’s Literature.”, 7.

56 Hugh Cunningham. *Children and Childhood*, 65.; cf. Matthew Grenby. “Children’s Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.”, 44–45.

57 M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 96, my emphasis.

58 M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 93.

59 Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 27.

the important works of literature available to adults”⁶⁰. Among the frequently shared books was also the bible, which was, however, often used differently by children and adults, as its younger readers typically were given and read only selected passages and not the entire book.⁶¹ Apart from the bible, children also “read romances, ballads, chapbooks, fairy tales, garlands, broadsides, jestbooks, tracts, almanacs, penny dreadfuls and shilling shockers”⁶² as well as “novels originally written for adults: *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1671), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726)”⁶³, covering a wide spectrum of very different texts and tastes.

One widely-read genre that was originally not intended for children but was exceedingly influential in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the development of children’s literature is the fairy tale. Peter Hunt elucidates that “[t]he beginning of the eighteenth century saw the importing of fairy-tales from France”⁶⁴, most notably those by Charles Perrault, which were first translated in 1729 and distributed in chapbooks, and a number of fairy tales collected by the Countess d’Aulnoy as well as the *Tales from the Arabian Nights*.⁶⁵ Despite the fact that the second half of the eighteenth century was clearly dominated by “the moral tale, at least in terms of influence if not of numbers (purely instructional and devotional books remained the best-sellers)”⁶⁶, the fairy tale attracted children and fostered their imaginative capacities. The appeal of these stories for a child audience can partially be found in what Deborah Cogan Thacker refers to as their “participatory nature”⁶⁷:

Although it is frequently stated that folk tales and fairy tales were not originally intended for children, but for a primitive, uneducated audience, the participatory nature of oral narrative served as a corrective to the authoritarian paternalism of instructional texts. A narrative contract which offers an open text and invites the reader to share in the making of meaning implies a different relationship between author and reader, which is

60 Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn. *Children’s Fantasy Literature*, 13.

61 Cf. M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 99. He also observes that the bible was soon part of the commercial children’s book market when special editions for children were produced: “Just as important was the development of the new commercial genre of children’s literature in the middle of the eighteenth century into which the Bible was successfully absorbed, sometimes abridged, illustrated or adapted, but also even in its full form”. Ibid., 102.

62 M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 103.

63 Rebecca Knuth. *Children’s Literature and British Identity*, 3.

64 Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 41.

65 Cf. Jack Zipes. “Origins.”, 29. Among d’Aulnoy’s *Diverting Works* (1707) were “versions of ‘The Yellow Dwarf’ and ‘Goldilocks’”, while Perrault’s *Histoires, or Tales of Past Times, Told by Mother Goose* (French orig. 1697, English transl. 1729) “included ‘Red Riding Hood’, ‘Puss in Boots’, and ‘Cinderella’”. Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 41.

66 Matthew Grenby. “Children’s Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.”, 47.

67 Deborah Cogan Thacker. “Imagining the Child.”, 17.

more democratic in approach, nurturing an imaginative spirit rather than controlling and enforcing particular ideologies.⁶⁸

Despite the fairy tale's capacity to "nurtur[e] an imaginative spirit" through fantasy, the form was rarely devoid of didacticism, which was included in the oftentimes formulaic moral at the end of the fairy tale. In fact, "[t]raditional fairy tales were [...] moralized by their redactors, translators, and editors" and "[t]he early fairy tale collections designed for middle-class children were cleaned up and often given didactic applications"⁶⁹. In this respect, the fairy tale also illustrates "the dualistic model – didacticism and imagination, instruction and delight, reason and fantasy – underlying most accounts of the development of children's literature"⁷⁰. Nevertheless, this form with its incorporation of fantastical elements, such as giants, fairies, (enchanted) princesses and the like, proliferated throughout the eighteenth century and provided (child) readers with an alternative to the highly didactic moral tales.⁷¹ The strong and enduring impact of the fairy tale can, for instance, be seen in the fact that "[e]ven some of the most respectable children's writers – Fielding, Fenn, Sherwood (not to mention the Newberys) – employed fairy-tale characters, motifs and narratives to advance their rational or spiritual agendas, developing a new sub-genre, the 'moral fairy tale' "⁷². Even though the fairy tale was not considered children's literature at this time but was another genre that appealed to all ages, the young readers' sustained interest in the literary form was instrumental in its appropriation, so that "[b]y the time that the Brothers Grimms' fairy tales became available in English in 1823, fairy tales were widely understood as the fit property of children"⁷³.

The development of children's literature in the eighteenth century thus highlights a move away from purely didactic and instructional books. This is not to say that the "Romantic revision of children's literature" managed to "purge bookshelves of serious, improving books. Moral tales continued to be produced,

68 Deborah Cogan Thacker. "Imagining the Child.", 17.

69 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 117.

70 Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 114.

71 The strong focus on instruction and didacticism in literature for children fostered the emergence of critical voices that considered the fairy tale as inappropriate reading material for children. Drawing on Samuel F. Pickering, Alan Richardson observes that both fairy tales and fantasy "came under attack from two sides: the rationalist school of education drawing on Locke and Rousseau, and (although with notably less consistency) the Christian moralist critique of children's fiction which found exponents in writers like Sarah Trimmer and M.M. Sherwood". Alan Richardson. *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, 113. In spite of this criticism, the fairy tale continued to be read and published widely.

72 Matthew Grenby. "Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.", 53.

73 M.O. Grenby. *The Child Reader, 1700–1840*, 109. The dual audience of the Grimms' fairy tales is implicit in its original German title: *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (transl. *Children's and Household Tales*).

often under the aegis of religious societies, and the nineteenth century was the heyday of textbooks full of facts to be learned by rote⁷⁴. Nonetheless, the commercialisation of children's literature, which contributed significantly to the recognition of children as readers in their own right, fostered a more varied repertory of children's books available on the book market and paved the way for "the fantastical [becoming] more central to children's literature"⁷⁵ at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, "[a] new children's literature that was sympathetic to the romantic view of childhood was not to develop until the middle of the nineteenth century"⁷⁶, when it garnered prominence through the publications of Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (1863) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which heralded the first Golden Age of children's literature.

In the nineteenth century, the preoccupation with the child and childhood climaxed and was reflected in various areas of life as well as in a substantial number of changes in the legal framework that affected both children and the duration of childhood. While Nelson correctly claims that "[o]ver the course of Victoria's reign, more and more legislation was aimed at the children of the poor, especially the urban poor" and that "these laws were designed both to protect and to control"⁷⁷, some laws were aimed at children independent of their parents' financial status or social class. The most important and profound of these acts affecting children can be subdivided into three broad, but frequently interrelated, categories: work, education and child protection.⁷⁸

The series of Factory Acts passed throughout the nineteenth century attempted to ameliorate the working conditions for (young) children who had to contribute to the family income, and the Acts passed in 1833 and 1847 were particularly relevant in this context. The 1833 Factory Act acknowledged that children's "hours of labour are longer than is desirable, due regard being had [*sic*] to their health and means of education"⁷⁹. This Act made it illegal to employ children under the age of nine in the textile industry (excluding the silk factory

74 M.O. Grenby. "Children's Literature.", 183.

75 Matthew Grenby. "Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.", 53.

76 M.O. Grenby. "Children's Literature.", 182.

77 Claudia Nelson. "Growing Up.", 72.

78 Due to the substantial number of acts that were passed throughout the nineteenth century and their far-reaching consequences, this chapter can only refer to a selection. The acts mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs are only some among several of a series, were chosen for their relevance and serve the purpose to exemplarily illustrate the manifold changes initiated by the government to improve the situation of children.

79 Henry Carne Oats. *The Factory Acts*, 13, The Factory Act 1833, 3 & 4 Wilhelm IV, chap. 103, § 1. It should be noted that this is not the first Factory Act that was passed, but is among the Factory Acts that brought significant changes that were more comprehensive than, for instance, the Cotton Mills and Factories Act of 1819.

business) and specified the maximum number of hours children were allowed to work.⁸⁰ Accordingly, nine- to thirteen-year-olds were permitted to work nine hours per day (or 48 hours per week), while they should simultaneously be provided with two hours of schooling per day, and thirteen- to eighteen-year-olds were allowed to work a maximum of twelve hours per day (or 69 hours per week).⁸¹ These hours were amended in the 1847 Factory Labour Limitation Act, also known as the ‘Ten Hours Act’, which stipulates that “no person under the age of eighteen years shall be employed in any such mill or factory [...] for more than ten hours in one day nor more than fifty-eight hours in one week”⁸², and shortened the working day markedly. Even though the substantial number of Factory Acts passed throughout the nineteenth century contributed significantly to regulating the work day for children, they only gradually and slowly raised the minimum age of employment – to twelve as late as 1901.⁸³

Legal attention was also directed at the school and education sector and gained particular prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the 1833 Factory Act enforced that children should receive two hours of schooling on six days per week, the Education Acts that followed in the 1870s and 1880s eventually made school attendance compulsory.⁸⁴ Their pivotal role is reflected in the fact that they, “from 1802 onward[,] extended the categories of children required to attend school and the number of hours each day to be spent in the classroom, while the average number of years of schooling rose correspondingly”⁸⁵. William Forster’s influential Elementary Education Act of 1870 proved foundational in many respects, as it installed school boards that were meant to ensure the elementary education of children in the age range between five and thirteen years; given that the passing of byelaws was not obligatory according to this Act, school attendance was not yet compulsory for all children.⁸⁶ This only changed a decade later with the Elementary Education Act of 1880, according to which

80 Cf. Henry Carne Oats. *The Factory Acts*, 16, 18, The Factory Act 1833, 3 & 4 Wilhelm IV, chap. 103, § 2, 7.

81 Cf. Henry Carne Oats. *The Factory Acts*, 16–19, 30–31, The Factory Act 1833, 3 & 4 Wilhelm IV, chap. 103, § 2, 7, 8, 20, 21.

82 Henry Carne Oats. *The Factory Acts*, 181, The Factory Labour Limitation Act, 1847, 10 & 11 Victoria, chap. 29, § 2.

83 Cf. William Bowstead. *The Law Relating to Factories and Workshops as Amended and Consolidated by the Factory and Workshop Act, 1901*, 79, Factory and Workshop Act 1901, 1 Edward VII, chap. 22, § 62.

84 Cf. Henry Carne Oats. *The Factory Acts*, 31, The Factory Act 1833, 3 & 4 Wilhelm IV, chap. 103, § 21.

85 Claudia Nelson. “Growing Up.”, 74.

86 Cf. G. Edwardes Jones and J.C.G. Sykes. *The Law of Public Education in England and Wales*, 246, The Elementary Education Act, 1870, 33 & 34 Victoria, chap. 75, § 74.

[e]very person who takes into his employment a child of the age of ten and under the age of *thirteen* years resident in a school district, before that child has obtained a certificate of having reached the standard of education fixed by a byelaw in force in the district for the total or partial exemption of children of the like age from the obligation to attend school, shall be deemed to take such child into his employment in contravention of the Elementary Education Act, 1876, and shall be liable to a penalty accordingly.⁸⁷

The restrictions imposed by this Act had a considerable impact on the child labour market and simultaneously provided many children up until the age of thirteen with an occupation.⁸⁸ The stipulations that were put forth in this Act thus compelled children to attend school, in individual cases certainly for the first time in their lives, and afforded them with an elementary education in reading, writing and arithmetic. The necessity for elementary education, as Fiona McCulloch ascertains, “came with the Second Reform Act of 1867, which gave suffrage to most working-class men, so it became important to educate those with the vote”⁸⁹, making the various pieces of legislation mutually dependent. The Elementary Education Acts illustrate that throughout the nineteenth century, “*childhood* and *the child* had become unquestioned and unquestionably public categories”⁹⁰, because the state occupied an increasingly dominant position in administering, enforcing and controlling education through statutory regulations.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the legal framework also changed with respect to the female age of consent and child protection measures. These legislative changes reflect the “new commitment to using the law to safeguard the interests and well-being of the young”⁹¹. The Offences Against the Person Act of 1828, which made the abuse of a girl (for boys apparently no such provision existed) under the age of ten a felony to be punished by death and the abuse of a girl between ten and twelve a misdemeanour, consolidated the female age of consent at twelve years.⁹² Even though the Act of 1828 was repealed by the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, this Act did not raise the age of consent for girls, which still remained as low as twelve years.⁹³ It was only with the

87 G. Edwardes Jones and J.C.G. Sykes. *The Law of Public Education in England and Wales*, 312, The Elementary Education Act, 1880, 43 & 44 Victoria, chap. 23, § 4, original emphasis.

88 Philip Davis, for example, observes that “[i]n 1851, there were nearly five million children of school age (between 3 and 15 years) and of these 600,000 were officially at work, over two million at school, and the rest at neither”. Philip Davis. *The Victorians*, 218.

89 Fiona McCulloch. *Children's Literature*, 14.

90 Laura C. Berry. *The Child, the State and the Victorian Novel*, 2, original emphasis.

91 James Walvin. *A Child's World*, 159.

92 Cf. UK Government. *The Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, 105, Offences Against the Person Act 1828, 9 George IV, chap. 31, § 17.

93 Cf. The National Archives. “Offences Against the Person Act 1861.”, n.p., Offences Against the Person Act, 1861, Victoria 24 & 25, chap. 100, § 50–51. One of the crucial changes, which was

Offences against the Person Act in 1875 when the female age of consent was raised, however slightly, from twelve to thirteen years. According to the Act, anyone who

unlawfully and carnally know[s] and abuse[s] any girl under the age of twelve years shall be guilty of felony, and, being convicted thereof, shall be liable, at the discretion of the court, to be kept in penal servitude for life or for any term not less than five years, or to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.⁹⁴

In case the girl was between twelve and thirteen years of age, the sexual abuse was considered a misdemeanour and the offender “liable, at the discretion of the court, to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour”⁹⁵. The most significant step in raising the female age of consent occurred ten years later, when the age was raised from thirteen to sixteen years with the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. Once it was enacted, this piece of legislation made the abuse of a girl under the age of twelve a felony and of a girl between thirteen and sixteen years a misdemeanour.⁹⁶ Thus, despite raising the age of consent for female children throughout the Victorian period and penalising child sexual abuse increasingly, the age of the assaulted still had a considerable impact on the sentence, insofar as sexual abuse was effectively acknowledged as a *serious crime* and punished accordingly only up to a certain age. Nevertheless, raising the female age of consent was an integral part of child protection and reflects the growing interest in the well-being of children throughout the period.

The central position of the welfare of the young in Victorian society is further substantiated by acts that were meant to protect children from physical and psychological mistreatment. The Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act of 1889 enforced protective measures to keep children from being “ill-treated, neglected, abandoned, or exposed, in a manner likely to cause such child unnecessary suffering”⁹⁷ in a familial environment – albeit, to the exclusion of “the right of any parent, teacher, or other person having the lawful control or charge of a child to administer punishment”⁹⁸. The state thus became increas-

necessitated by other Acts passed in the meantime, was that in case the perpetrator was convicted as a felon, he was no longer punished by death. Cf. *ibid*.

94 UK Government. *The Public General Statutes*, 1044, Offences against the Person Act 1875, 38 & 39 Victoria, chap. 94, § 3.

95 UK Government. *The Public General Statutes*, 1045, Offences against the Person Act 1875, 38 & 39 Victoria, chap. 94, § 4.

96 Cf. Frederick Mead and A.H. Bodkin. *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885*, 44–45, The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, 48 & 49 Victoria, chap. 69, § 5.

97 The National Archives. “Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act 1889.”, 1, Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act, 1889, Victoria 52 & 53, chap. 44, § 1.

98 The National Archives. “Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act 1889.”, 7, Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act, 1889, Victoria 52 & 53, chap. 44,

ingly involved in child protection and revoked absolute parental control over children by making parents liable for any form of mistreatment specified by the Act. The more comprehensive Children's Act of 1908 furthered these stipulations to achieve and uphold children's welfare.⁹⁹ Most notably, the Act provided revisions and changes concerning baby-farming and infant protection, monitoring the whereabouts of young children and forcing "person[s] undertak[ing] for reward the nursing and maintenance of one or more infants under the age of seven years apart from their parents or having no parents"¹⁰⁰ to give a written notice within 48 hours after reception.¹⁰¹ The Act, moreover, also brought alterations concerning the conviction of child offenders and criminals by precluding imprisonment as sentence for delinquents under the age of fourteen and by establishing a juvenile court so that children could be convicted separately from adults.¹⁰² The increasing attention paid to children and their welfare, as these Acts suggest, reflect the growing awareness that *all* children are in need of protection, independent of their social class.

The legislative changes targeting children and childhood in the nineteenth century were comprehensive and wide-ranging, affecting the daily lives of children, their parents and guardians as well as judicature in the UK. Whilst taking into account that "Victorian interventionism emerged slowly and often reluctantly, [...] though this was, it must be stressed, unprecedented in scale and

§ 14. The increasing amount of attention paid to children and their welfare is also reflected in the fact that, in 1889, the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (London SPCC), founded by Lord Shaftesbury in 1884, was renamed and turned into the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). It should, however, be noted that societies for the protection of children were established only relatively late in the century, as "[a] society to protect animals, the RSPCA, had been formed some sixty years earlier, in 1824". James Walvin. *A Child's World*, 162.; cf. Fiona McCulloch. *Children's Literature*, 16.

99 For Adrienne E. Gavin the legislative developments and acts passed at the beginning of the twentieth century had an immense impact on parent-child relationships: in "[r]educing parental powers and increasing state protection, such laws gave children independent legal rights". Adrienne E. Gavin. "Unadulterated Childhood.", 165.

100 The National Archives. "Children Act 1908.", 7, Children Act, 1908, 8 Edward VII, chap. 67, § 1.

101 Cf. The National Archives. "Children Act 1908.", 7, Children Act, 1908, 8 Edward VII, chap. 67, § 1.

102 Cf. The National Archives. "Children Act 1908.", 56–57, 59, Children Act, 1908, 8 Edward VII, chap. 67, § 107, 111. The recognition that children ought to be punished for crimes according to different standards than adults occurred around the middle of the nineteenth century: "the Youthful Offenders Act, 1854, which, together with further Acts in 1857, 1861 and 1866, was significant for a number of reasons. Most importantly, [...] it provided the initial recognition in legislative terms of juvenile delinquency as a separate category (prior to the Act only children under 7 were presumed to be incapable of criminal intent), thereby extending 'childhood' beyond the traditional first seven years to under 16 (for non-indictable offences)". Harry Hendrick. "Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood.", 43.

vitality”¹⁰³, the Victorian era can be considered not only as a time of change in the attitude towards children and childhood, but also as a period that contributed to the development towards childhood as it is perceived today. It was, effectively, through an interplay of “economic, legal and cultural shifts [...] [that] children began to be associated with innocence, vulnerability, and being in need of protection from the adult world”¹⁰⁴, including the work environment. This interest in childhood and children’s welfare was perpetuated during the Edwardian era, when “[f]or the first time it was widely recognized that children are different from adults; that they have different needs, sensibilities, and habits of thinking; that they cannot be educated, worked, or punished like adults; that they have rights of their own independent of their parents”¹⁰⁵. The legislative framework of the Victorian period in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus helped protecting children increasingly and – at least theoretically – was meant to grant them a secure childhood.

Similar to the complex number of changes in the legal framework affecting children and childhood, the nineteenth century also saw an increasing diversification of literature produced for and read by children.¹⁰⁶ In the first half of the century, a substantial number of highly didactic (evangelical) works was published. Besides the cautionary tracts published by the Religious Tract Society, Mary Martha Sherwood’s *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818, 1842 and 1847), which portrays children as originally sinful and focuses on their redemption, was popular reading material. A first step away from purely instructive and didactic children’s literature can be found in Catherine Sinclair’s *Holiday House: A Series of Tales* (1839), which “is often regarded as a landmark text that shifted the focus of children’s fiction from instruction to delight”¹⁰⁷. In the preface, the author laments that,

[i]n this age of wonderful mechanical inventions, the very mind of youth seems in danger of becoming a machine; and while every effort is used to stuff the memory [...]

103 James Walvin. *A Child’s World*, 163.

104 Helen Davies. *Neo-Victorian Freakery*, 122.

105 Jonathan Rose. *The Edwardian Temperament*, 178.

106 In the following, this chapter only focuses on what Hunt dubbed “[t]he ‘Landmark’ Authors” of the first Golden Age of children’s literature. Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 78. I am aware that this focus excludes a substantial number of texts produced for children, such as the extremely popular, sensational and cheap ‘Penny Dreadfuls’ as well as children’s magazines (including, but not limited to, the long-running *The Boy’s Own Paper* (1879–1967) as well as its gendered counterpart *The Girl’s Own Paper*, published from 1880 to 1956). While they – beyond doubt – provide an interesting field for scrutiny, they are excluded from this overview for reasons of scope.

107 Marah Gubar. “The Victorian Child, c. 1837–1901.”, n.p.

with well-known facts and ready-made opinions, no room is left for the vigour of natural feeling, the glow of natural genius, and the ardour of natural enthusiasm.¹⁰⁸

Drawing on Rousseauian and Wordsworthian sentiment, she “has endeavoured to paint that species of noisy, frolicsome, mischievous children which is now almost extinct, wishing to preserve a sort of fabulous remembrance of days long past, when young people were like wild horses on the prairies, rather than like well-broken hacks on the road”¹⁰⁹ and thus openly criticises the strong moral bias of many evangelical children’s books. This turn towards delighting children was also fuelled and greatly influenced by the translation of the Brothers Grimm’s *German Popular Stories* in 1823–1826 as well as Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales in 1846. The dissemination of these fairy-tale translations “helped create a foundation for the child-writing of the second [half of the century]”¹¹⁰ and, as did the fairy tale more generally, “provided an initiation into imaginative literature for Victorian readers and writers”¹¹¹ that climaxed in the first Golden Age of children’s literature.¹¹²

The examples mentioned above thus imply that two different, but not contradictory, concepts of childhood can be found at the beginning of the Victorian era.¹¹³ These comprise, according to Lewis C. Roberts, the Romantic view as well as “the evangelical view”¹¹⁴: the former, as was outlined before, celebrated childhood innocence and proximity to God, while the latter “offered a seemingly obverse notion of childhood based on doctrines of original sin and innate depravity, and often insisted that children needed strict discipline, austere conditions, and regular, enforced prayer within the context of home and family”¹¹⁵. As a result, these different “constructions of the child produced richly imagined fantastic texts, on the one hand, and starkly observed realistic texts, on the other”¹¹⁶. Despite the fact that the fantastic imagination of young readers was nurtured in the first half of the century, “there was little imaginative fiction for

108 Catherine Sinclair. *Holiday House*, iv.

109 Catherine Sinclair. *Holiday House*, iv–v.

110 Philip Davis. *The Victorians*, 338.

111 Lewis C. Roberts. “Children’s Fiction.”, 360.

112 James Walvin, for instance, highlights the popularity of the fairy tale as a literary genre and claims that from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards “the fairy tale flourished. Victorian children were regaled with tales of the Arabian Nights, Ali Baba and Sinbad the Sailor. They heard Norse and Scandinavian tales and stories about Cossacks and Bluebeard. Stories were translated from all the major European languages and from even farther afield – in 1871, for instance, Richard Doyle published *The Enchanted Cow and Other Famous Fairy Tales*, containing Russian, African, Swedish, Polish, Italian and Arabian stories”. James Walvin. *A Child’s World*, 126.

113 Cf. Lewis C. Roberts. “Children’s Fiction.”, 354.

114 Lewis C. Roberts. “Children’s Fiction.”, 355.

115 Lewis C. Roberts. “Children’s Fiction.”, 355.

116 Naomi Wood. “Angelic, Atavistic, Human.”, 116.

children appearing from the presses¹¹⁷ and it was only in the second half that imaginative writing for children fully took hold.¹¹⁸

This time then saw a proliferation of fantastic texts marketed at children that is frequently referred to as the first Golden Age of children's literature. It is a time that is usually understood as "a belated flowering of romantic conceptions of childhood [that was] fertilized by a growing literary marketplace"¹¹⁹. According to Gavin, "this Golden Age produced a rich vein of literature which connected childhood with the fantastic, the imaginative, and the entertaining, and whose primary aim was to delight child readers"¹²⁰. It is generally conceived of as spanning the time between the publication of Carroll's popular and widely-read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.¹²¹

Written in the tradition of nonsense writing, popularised by Edward Lear in his *A Book of Nonsense* (1846), and in line with the criticism levelled at purely instructional children's books, Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* does not only send Alice on a fantastic and imaginative journey through Wonderland, but overtly parodies earlier (children's) books that are emphatic about learning facts by heart. The moral messages propagated in these earlier books are mocked when Alice sees a bottle labelled "'Drink me'"¹²² on the glass table and starts to carefully evaluate the potential implications and consequences its contents might evoke:

It was all very well to say 'Drink me,' but the wise little Alice was not going to do *that* in a hurry. 'No, I'll look first,' she said, 'and see whether it's marked "*poison*" or not'; for she had read several nice little histories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the

117 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 10.

118 Carpenter draws attention to the fact that "Ruskin and Thackeray had attempted to provide something to fill this gap, but Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1851) was really only a Grimm-type story on a larger scale, with the moral all too clearly pointed, while Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* (1855), though witty and deservedly popular, scarcely extended the bounds of imaginative writing for children, being a comic squib chiefly intended as a parody of the then fashionable style of London pantomime". Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 10.

119 James Eli Adams. *A History of Victorian Literature*, 228.

120 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 9.

121 Cf. Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 210.; cf. Victoria Ford Smith. "Return of the Dapper Men and the Nonsense of Neo-Victorian Literature.", 126. While Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is often perceived "as something entirely new", Grenby claims that "it is probably more accurate to regard *Alice* as the zenith of a taste for the whimsical and marvellous that had been established in the early nineteenth century", which is an argument that highlights the importance of the fantastic texts produced earlier in the century. Matthew Grenby. "Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.", 53.

122 Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 17.

simple rules their friends had taught them: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that if you cut your finger *very* deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked ‘poison,’ it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later.¹²³

In this instance, the young protagonist “demonstrates a naïve trust in language – just because it is not labelled poison, Alice assumes that it must be safe”¹²⁴ and thereby foregrounds her childish, unilateral logic. The slightly tongue-in-cheek reference to the books Alice has read and the moral lessons she has obtained through reading comment on a meta-level on earlier didactic children’s fiction, while the heterodiegetic narrator’s choice of words (“the *wise* little Alice”¹²⁵) is used to underscore this point. Throughout *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll also repeatedly subverts Victorian schooling practices and morals, for instance, when Alice struggles to differentiate between latitude and longitude, when she, in fact, “had no idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but thought they were nice grand words to say”¹²⁶, or when “well-known pious rhymes and verses are inverted, such as Isaac Watts’s ‘How doth the busy bee’ which becomes ‘How doth the little crocodile’”¹²⁷. In its parodied form, the poem no longer propagates the Puritan work ethic but idleness, beauty and consumption.¹²⁸ Thus, throughout his children’s novel, “Carroll is suggesting that Victorian schooling, with its emphasis on rote learning, has not provided Alice with the understanding required to deal with her situation”¹²⁹ and leaves her, more often than not, confused, frustrated and insecure when she attempts to navigate her dreamscape.¹³⁰ In parodying both the moral messages and instructions provided by earlier (evangelical) writers as well as Victorian schooling

123 Lewis Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 17–18, original emphasis.

124 Fiona McCulloch. *Children’s Literature*, 52.

125 Lewis Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 17, my emphasis.

126 Lewis Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 13–14.

127 Fiona McCulloch. *Children’s Literature*, 49.

128 Alice’s version of the poem reads as follows: “‘*How doth the little crocodile / Improve his shining tail, / And pour the waters of the Nile / On every golden scale! / ‘How cheerfully he seems to grin, / How neatly spread his claws, / And welcome little fishes in / With gently smiling jaws!’*” Lewis Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 25, original emphasis.

129 Jean Webb. “Alice as Subject in the Logic of Wonderland.” 64.

130 The often-quoted opening of Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (1854), for instance, also critiques the utilitarian learning of facts through an exaggerated emphasis on the learning of factual information: “‘Now, what I [Mr Gradgrind] want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!’” Charles Dickens. *Hard Times*, 7.

practices, the text promotes and highlights the relevance of the fantastic in the development of the childish imagination and the idea of delighting the young.¹³¹

The success of the Golden Age works for children was largely contingent upon two crucial developments, namely advancements in book production as well as changes in the family structure. While the eighteenth century saw the emergence of commercialised children's literature, the nineteenth century witnessed a refinement of printing methods, which was facilitated by technological advances and inventions. As Hunt observes, "[b]ooks became cheaper with the introduction of Hoe cylinder press in the 1860s, cardboard book covers in the 1870s, and inexpensive pulp paper in the 1880s"¹³². These innovations also had a considerable impact on the number of books (not only children's books) that could be produced: "Whereas between 1800 and 1825 only about 580 books appeared each year, by mid-century the figure had risen to over 2,600 titles and by 1900 it was over 6,000"¹³³. Reflecting the higher demand for books, this astonishing number can be ascribed to both the subsiding production costs as well as the Elementary Education Acts, which had a notable impact on primary education and literacy. Yet, despite the fact that books became less expensive, the targeted child audience of the works produced during the first Golden Age remained "almost entirely middle class and affluent"¹³⁴, because for working-class children "six shillings, the original price of *Alice* in book form, represented several days' wages"¹³⁵. As a result, most of the novels that were produced during this time and are, by now, deemed 'classics' of children's literature were (with certain exceptions, beyond doubt) available to children of the middle and upper classes only. In addition, the second half of the nineteenth century also saw several "dramatic social and political shifts", including but not limited to middle-class "[f]amilies [becoming] smaller and more stable, [...] the Empire, at its peak, [which] began to seem a little less sure of itself; and women's position in society[,"

131 The enthusiasm with which the story was apparently received by the three Liddell sisters is aptly captured in the epigraph, in which the origins of the story are described. Their impatience for the story to continue is addressed in the fifth stanza: "And ever, as the story drained / The wells of fancy dry, / And faintly strove that weary one [the narrator] / To put the subject by, / 'The rest next time –' 'It is next time!' / The happy voices cry". Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 9, original emphasis.

132 Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 60.

133 Philip Davis. *The Victorians*, 201. It should be noted that Davis draws on the findings by R.D. Altick, John Sutherland and Simon Eliot.

134 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 17.

135 James Eli Adams. *A History of Victorian Literature*, 230.; cf. Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 62. Grenby notes a different, even higher price: "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* sold for the exorbitant price of seven shillings and sixpence". Matthew Grenby. "Children's Literature: Birth, Infancy, Maturity.", 54.

which] was changing subtly”¹³⁶. These changes and in particular those affecting the family unit also had an impact on the depiction of children and childhood in novels produced for the young of the middle class. The turn towards the nuclear family led to a discernible dip in birth rates, “and it is scarcely surprising that one literary result of the falling birth rate should be a sentimental idealisation of childhood, the creation (chiefly by lady writers) of such beings as Little Lord Fauntleroy”¹³⁷. The increasing idealisation of child characters, thus, suggests that the image of the child propagated in these novels is largely a middle-class one that stood in harsh contrast to the working realities of the poor.¹³⁸

Although the child was often idealised in Golden Age literature for children, writers also increasingly used bleaker representations of children to draw attention to the adverse working and living conditions of the nation’s many poor children, who were exploited in factories and mines or slowly starving in workhouses and on the streets. These “narratives of the working-class child, the laboring child, suggested that for many real children, childhood was experienced as a time not of innocence, but rather of nightmarish exploitation at the hands of adults”¹³⁹. In Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies*, for example, which “is frequently described as a protest in behalf of chimney sweeps”¹⁴⁰, the young climbing boy Tom is ill-treated by his master Mr Grimes.¹⁴¹ In his employment, Tom

cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw; and when the soot got into his eyes, which it did every day in the week; and when his master beat him which he did every day in the week; and when he had not enough to eat, which happened every day in the week likewise.¹⁴²

136 Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*, 60. In *Family Ties in Victorian England* (2007), Nelson draws attention to the fact that the changes in the family size were class-specific: “Significantly, by the end of the period middle-class family sizes had shrunk to reflect the improved life expectancies of the well to do, while working-class families remained large”. Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 4.

137 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 18. McCulloch argues along very similar lines and sees a connection between the size of the family and the depiction of children as innocents: “The impact of childhood innocence coincides with the centrality of the nuclear family as a buffer against an increasingly industrialized and hence, perceived to be, increasingly soulless or unimaginative society”. Fiona McCulloch. *Children’s Literature*, 39.

138 Gavin and Humphries validate this observation for the Edwardian period, which is explored at a later point in this chapter: “The predominant textual portrayal of childhood is of middle-class children living generally pleasant lives”. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 2–3.

139 Lewis C. Roberts. “Children’s Fiction.”, 355.

140 James Eli Adams. *A History of Victorian Literature*, 231.

141 Even though Tom is mistreated, there are also moments of joy in his life, implying that he – like *Oliver Twist* – has retained a certain innocence.

142 Charles Kingsley. *The Water-Babies*, 5–6.

Eventually, he finds his salvation in death and is reborn as one of the titular water-babies.

However, social criticism was not only used to draw attention to the plight of the working poor, but also those children neglected and abused in schools. The depiction of the half-starved boys at Dotheboys Hall in Charles Dickens' realist novel *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), for instance, is used to foreground the corrupt adult world and the social injustices suffered by the young. While the headmaster Mr Squeers promises that the boys in his care will benefit from "[e]very wholesome luxury [...] that Yorkshire can afford, [...] every beautiful moral that Mrs. Squeers can instil; every – in short, every comfort of a home that a boy could wish for, will be theirs"¹⁴³, the actual situation at the school turns out to be the opposite. The titular protagonist Nicholas Nickleby is disillusioned when he sees the gaunt children for the first time:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect.¹⁴⁴

As it turns out, Mr and Mrs Squeers cruelly abuse, mistreat and batter the children in their care, while misappropriating the money that was meant for their young charges and their well-being. Dickens' text criticises the children's precarious situation, their suffering and powerless position in the face of adult hypocrisy and the lack of adult intervention.

The depiction of suffering young children was also incorporated into Victorian poetry. In fact, as Laura C. Berry suggests, "representations of the endangered child, and pleas for social action, cross[ed] generic boundaries with relative ease"¹⁴⁵. For instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one of the most famous poets of her time, wrote her poem "The Cry of the Children" (1843) as a response to the "parliamentary reports [published by the Children's Employment Commission] on conditions in mines and collieries"¹⁴⁶. In this poem, the

143 Charles Dickens. *Nicholas Nickleby*, 50.

144 Charles Dickens. *Nicholas Nickleby*, 102.

145 Laura C. Berry. *The Child, the State and the Victorian Novel*, 3.

146 Marah Gubar. "The Victorian Child, c. 1837–1901.", n.p. Barrett Browning was, by far, not the only writer to respond to social ills directed at children, as, "[v]irtually from the start, social reform writings on child protection were linked with and supported by the efforts of literary writers". Laura C. Berry. *The Child, the State and the Victorian Novel*, 2, original emphasis.

children “are weeping bitterly!”¹⁴⁷, because of the endless hardships they have to endure and the physical work they have to perform in the factories and mines of the nation. Similar to the child workers in William Blake’s “The Chimney-Sweeper”, the children in this poem can hardly abide their precocious childhoods and their lives cannot end soon enough (“‘It is good when it happens,’ say the children, / ‘That we die before our time’”¹⁴⁸), because they are utterly overwrought by the work imposed upon them. Their fatigue and weariness even keep them from playing in the meadows if given the chance to do so, because they “cannot run or leap; / If we cared for any meadows, it were merely / To drop down in them and sleep”¹⁴⁹, which stresses their exhaustion and precocious existence. The cry of Barrett Browning’s children is also discernible in her poem “A Song for the Ragged Schools of London” (1854). The lyrical I of this poem is in Rome, hearing voices praising England’s grandeur. Amidst these voices, the lyrical I also discerns the voice of the suppressed poor: “Over Alps [*sic*] a voice is sweeping – / ‘England’s cruel! save us some / Of these victims in her keeping!’”¹⁵⁰. The poem then turns to focus on the poverty of children in England and, by drawing attention to the “[r]agged children, hungry-eyed, / Huddled up out of the coldness / On your doorsteps, side by side”¹⁵¹, the lyrical I is appealing to humankind’s philanthropic and humanitarian side to release these poor children from their poverty by “tak[ing] them into pity”¹⁵² and setting up ragged schools. Through literary representations of poor children, as these examples highlight, writers directly addressed and exposed the social wrongs in Victorian society that affected children as well as the duration of their childhoods. With the help of “sentimentality[, which] was often used to invoke social consciousness about childhood”¹⁵³, they put forth their demand for a greater awareness of and action against these injustices from both individuals and the state.

Throughout the Victorian era, representations of childhood were also increasingly incorporated into literature for adults, most notably in novels structured as a *bildungsroman*, or novel of development. As “a highly popular form during the Victorian period”¹⁵⁴, the *bildungsroman* typically charts the lives of the protagonists from a retrospective point of view, beginning in their childhood and ending at some point during adulthood, as can prominently be seen in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861) or Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. In *David*

147 Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “The Cry of the Children.”, 128, l. 10.

148 Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “The Cry of the Children.”, 129, ll. 51–52.

149 Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “The Cry of the Children.”, 130, ll. 66–69.

150 Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “A Song for the Ragged Schools of London.”, 649, ll. 14–16.

151 Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “A Song for the Ragged Schools of London.”, 651, ll. 53–55.

152 Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “A Song for the Ragged Schools of London.”, 654, l. 128.

153 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 9.

154 Grace Moore. *The Victorian Novel in Context*, 39.

Copperfield (1850), as Grace Moore claims, “Dickens gently parodies this trend [...] with its famous opening, ‘Chapter One, I am born’, which humorously registers the Bildungsroman’s propensity to assemble every little detail of a character’s growth”¹⁵⁵. *David Copperfield*, however, is also a felicitous example to highlight the increasing attention given to childhood in Victorian adult fiction, as the part encompassing David Copperfield’s childhood takes up roughly one third of the text. The novel reinforces that “[f]or many of these fictional characters [in literature for adults], and perhaps for their creators as well, childhood is an intensely frustrating time, shaped by loneliness, boredom, abuse or neglect, and shame at their own inadequacies or misdeeds”¹⁵⁶. David’s “frustrating time”¹⁵⁷ begins when his widowed mother marries Mr Murdstone and his “happy home”¹⁵⁸ transforms into a place dominated by abuse and neglect, as can be seen when David, for being unable to learn his lessons in the presence of Mr Murdstone and his sister, is beaten (“He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death”¹⁵⁹) and punished with a five-day imprisonment in his room. Later, after David has run away from his employment at Murdstone and Grinby’s, he even admits to the traumatic nature of his experiences: “The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it”¹⁶⁰. In this novel, as in many other Victorian adult novels, childhood is “a vulnerable, often painful, powerless state, frequently lonely, with the child portrayed as a victim of adult power, emotional or physical brutality, social neglect, illness, and early death”¹⁶¹. It is constructed as a time that is hardly enjoyed and a state that is to be left behind as quickly as possible.

155 Grace Moore. *The Victorian Novel in Context*, 40. In the nineteenth century, *David Copperfield* was also read by many children. In fact, as a poll with 987 voters in *The Daily News* in 1900 reveals, *David Copperfield* is considered among the “Best Hundred Books for Children”, as are *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1841) and *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837), all of which are nowadays regarded as works for adult readers. Anon. “Best Hundred Books for Children.” *The Daily News*, 25 January 1900, 6. The article does not specify whether these texts were perhaps read as abridged versions by/to children.

156 Claudia Nelson. “Growing Up.”, 78.

157 Claudia Nelson. “Growing Up.”, 78.

158 Charles Dickens. *David Copperfield*, 38.

159 Charles Dickens. *David Copperfield*, 69.

160 Charles Dickens. *David Copperfield*, 225–226. Even though David highlights the painful nature of his childhood experiences, he later in the narrative “considers his previous experiences, specifically the hardships he has gone through due to his parentless state, as an asset helping him overcome the new obstacles he meets. In other words, his having had to work at the age of ten in retrospect is seen by him as having had a character-building effect”. Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 50.

161 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 9.

Given that childhood in Victorian adult fiction tends to be a time of despair and desolation, it is hardly surprising that child characters are often also depicted as precocious children or ‘children without a childhood’. In *Oliver Twist* (1838), Charles Dickens introduces an entire group of prematurely aged children, namely those living with and thieving for Fagin. Jack Dawkins (better known as ‘the Artful Dodger’), for instance, is introduced as “one of the queerest looking boys that Oliver had ever seen”¹⁶², because he is, as Elizabeth Rees summarises, “[a] strange hybrid of youth and experience, he is a child in years and stature, but his dress and worldly perspective are those of an adult”¹⁶³. His precocity is, however, not only expressed in the fact that his child-like appearance is considerably at odds with his clothes and behaviour, but also through the irresolution of the narrative voice to refer to him *consistently* as a ‘boy’.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, a number of Fagin’s other “boys, none older than the Dodger, [are] smoking long clay pipes, and [drink] spirits with the air of middle-aged men”¹⁶⁵ when Oliver meets them for the first time. Liz Thiel sees the boys’ depiction in this scene as indicative of their advanced state of maturation, arguing that “[t]heir actions might be interpreted as comedic imitations of adult male behaviour, but in physically imbibing alcohol and tobacco, they are symbolically and deliberately incorporating the mores of the adult world”¹⁶⁶. The children’s precocious existence can also be hinted at by smaller, less obvious details, such as their unchildlike laughter. For instance, “Master Charley Bates roars with uncontrollable, often inappropriate laughter at the slightest provocation, in a perversion of the joy supposedly inherent to the state of childhood”¹⁶⁷. The traces of childhood still discernible in the descriptions of these children, who have clearly left behind their childhood days already, contribute to the novel’s reputation as “a knowing critique in which children are commodities to be bought and sold, traded and consumed, used and discarded”¹⁶⁸ and, by extension, frequently without a (proper) childhood.

In contrast to Victorian realist novels, in which children often suffered dismal and pathetic childhoods, late Victorian and Edwardian children’s fiction idealises the child. It “emphasizes the joys of childhood, and often neo-Romantically

162 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 66.

163 Elizabeth Rees. “Dickensian Childhoods.”, 110.

164 From the moment when Oliver meets the Artful Dodger to the point when they reach Fagin’s place, Jack Dawkins is referred to as ‘boy’, ‘young gentleman’ and ‘Mr Dawkins’. Cf. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 66–69.

165 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 71, my emphasis.

166 Liz Thiel. “Degenerate ‘Innocents’.”, 132.

167 Elizabeth Rees. “Dickensian Childhoods.”, 110.

168 Sarah Bickle. “Twisting Dickens.”, 58.

links children with nature”¹⁶⁹. This literary celebration in the context of the first Golden Age of children’s literature can be attributed to the fact that, at the turn of the century, “childhood bec[a]me the focus of intense interest socially, culturally, and fictionally”¹⁷⁰. As a result, children in Edwardian fiction proliferated “to an extent not before seen, nor continued in the same way after the outbreak of World War I”¹⁷¹, during which a generation of young people enlisted and many of them lost their lives.¹⁷² Notwithstanding its rather abrupt ending, “the Edwardian decade was a remarkably fertile one for the publication of children’s literature which was to have an enduring appeal”¹⁷³. Children’s stories, such as Beatrix Potter’s lushly illustrated *Peter Rabbit* (1902), Edith Nesbit’s *The Railway Children* (1906) and *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* (1911), Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories for Little Children* (1902) as well as Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), among many others, gained popularity and remain – albeit to varying degrees – popular to this day. The “unprecedented flowering of children’s literature” at this time led Jonathan Rose to conclude that “no other generation in English history produced so many children’s classics as the Edwardians”¹⁷⁴. The sheer number of texts published during this period, however, also suggests that “we find not one monolithic conception of the child, but rather a confusing variety of attitudes toward, and opinions about, children, sometimes clearly pronounced, sometimes only implied or obliquely hinted at”¹⁷⁵. Despite this heterogeneity, several wider (frequently interrelated) developments can, nonetheless, be identified, and the works produced by J.M. Barrie, Frances Hodgson Burnett and Edith Nesbit are suitable examples to exemplify some of these broader concerns.¹⁷⁶

One concern that distinguishes Edwardian (children’s) literature from their literary predecessors are the categories of age and ageing. As Gavin aptly remarks, “Edwardian literature [...] rarely shows children growing up, but in

169 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 11. Despite the fact that children in Edwardian fiction are idealised, they “are not used for sentimental pathos, rhetorical flourish, or social moralism as they had been in Victorian novels by writers such as Charles Dickens”. Ibid., 5.

170 Adrienne E. Gavin. “Unadulterated Childhood.”, 165.

171 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 1.

172 The First World War is generally seen as the endpoint of both “the Golden Age of children’s literature” as well as “the Edwardian golden age of childhood in fiction”, which was “assisted by wider dissemination of Freud’s theories of childhood”. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 14.

173 Jonathan Wild. *Literature of the 1900s*, 83; cf. Dieter Petzold. “A Race Apart.”, 33.

174 Jonathan Rose. *The Edwardian Temperament*, 181.

175 Dieter Petzold. “A Race Apart.”, 33.

176 In the following, this chapter restricts itself to those developments that inform the neo-Victorian novels that were chosen as case studies.

various ways captures them – most famously Peter Pan – in forever childhood”¹⁷⁷. This is not to say that they eclipse the topic of growing up completely; on the contrary, *Peter and Wendy* (1911), a story that “was not originally intended for children”¹⁷⁸, is a text that “is not simply about childhood but also about the necessity, and the difficulty, of growing up”¹⁷⁹. This thematic focus sets the tone for the story and is explicitly addressed in its opening paragraph:

All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, ‘Oh, why can’t you remain like this for ever!’ This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up.¹⁸⁰

While Wendy Darling eventually has to reach adulthood and is a grown woman with her own daughter in the final chapter of the novel, Peter Pan, as the exception to all other children, remains in a state of perpetual childhood and is equipped with child-like, even infant-like, qualities and reinforces that “the Edwardian obsession was for the pre-adolescent child”¹⁸¹. Unlike the *bildungsroman* of the Victorian era, which focuses on a character’s maturation and growth from childhood (sometimes even infancy) into adulthood, many Edwardian (children’s) novels revolve around a specific, temporary segment of their child characters’ lives and seldom – or as is the case in *Peter and Wendy* with a leap in time – present them as adults.¹⁸² These novels typically neither give direct reference to the exact temporal setting of the plot, nor do they reveal the exact amount of time that has passed. In Barrie’s Neverland, for example, time works differently, because “it is calculated by moons and suns, and there are ever so many more of them than on the mainland”¹⁸³, and it is never revealed how long

177 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 12.; cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 11.

178 Jacqueline Rose. *The Case of Peter Pan*, 5.

179 Dieter Petzold. “A Race Apart.”, 36.

180 J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 69.

181 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 2. Especially at the beginning Peter is constructed as a young, prepubescent child, which is made explicit in the narrator’s comment that “the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth” and that “[h]e had his first laugh still”, when he appears to be much older. J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 77, 94.

182 The incorporation of Wendy as a grown woman at the end of *Peter and Wendy* presumably derives from the focus on the child Peter, who has, in contrast to Wendy, not aged (“Wendy saw at once that he still had all his first teeth”), and who, in his childish disposition, has forgotten to visit Wendy for several years, when time took its course and Wendy grew up. J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 223.

183 J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 136.

the Darling children have been gone before they return home.¹⁸⁴ In other stories, such as Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, the passage of time is only indirectly hinted at, in this case by the passing of the seasons. Yet, even though the narrated time in Burnett's story covers a year's cycle, ten-year-old Mary Lennox is never said to have turned a year older, and birthdays are suspiciously absent from the narrative, which is remarkable since growing up and "liv[ing] to be a man"¹⁸⁵ becomes the chief aim of one of the protagonists. This exclusive focus on childhood can be attributed to the attempts of "many adult readers [...] to recapture their childhoods" and "to rejuvenate – or escape from – a civilization that seemed old, dissolute, and sterile"¹⁸⁶ by longing wistfully for this supposedly unburdened state.

In Edwardian fiction, childhood and adulthood are further regarded as two separate 'realms'. In texts from this time, childhood is constructed "as a world apart from [...] adulthood"¹⁸⁷, where, to put it in David Floyd's words, "[t]he child protagonist [...] frequently display[s] a notable incredulity and confidence, and tend[s] to depend less on the intervention of a miraculous adult saviour figure and more on his or her own exertion of will and creativity"¹⁸⁸. Effectively, "adults move to the margins [...], leaving children free to exist in their own worlds"¹⁸⁹ and fostering their ingenuity and autonomy.¹⁹⁰ This separation is most often realised on a spatial level, where children tend to be connected with natural environments, displaying a neo-Romantic attitude towards nature. In *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* (2005), Susan Honeyman draws attention to this form of binary spatialisation and argues that "[t]he most popular landscapes are the garden and remote island" and that "all of these childhood spaces share one quality – they are clearly bound and inaccessible to adults"¹⁹¹. While both the garden and the island can be considered "childhood spaces", they are not entirely devoid of or inaccessible to adults *per se*; rather, it

184 C.S. Lewis also employs this technique in his *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950–1956). In *the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), for example, hardly any time has passed in the primary world when the Pevensie siblings return from their adventures in Narnia.

185 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 139.

186 Jonathan Rose. *The Edwardian Temperament*, 183, 184.

187 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 11.; cf. Dieter Petzold. "A Race Apart.", 33.

188 David Floyd. *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates*, 8.

189 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 11.

190 This does, however, not mean that adults disappear from these texts. On the contrary, the children typically have to return home for meals and for the night. Even in Mary Lennox's case, where the copious absence of Mr Craven, Mary's uncle and the owner of Misselthwaite Manor in Yorkshire, is soon considered a precondition for Mary's convalescence, she is never completely free of adult supervision, because both Mrs Medlock and Ben Weatherstaff are present and work in the house and the gardens respectively.

191 Susan Honeyman. *Elusive Childhoods*, 51.

seems that these places are – at least temporarily – free of the parents and immediate family relations of the protagonists to foster the children’s developments, enable rites of passage and endow them with a certain degree of agency.

Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries argue along similar lines when they observe that, in Edwardian fiction, the garden often is a child’s realm, symbolising “freedom and adventure”¹⁹², whereas the home/house is considered an adult sphere.¹⁹³ The fact that children, in contrast to adults, seem to be inevitably drawn to natural environments is, for instance, explicitly stressed in Edith Nesbit’s *Five Children and It* (originally published as *The Psammead, or the Gifts* in 1902), in which the age-related binary opposition between house and garden is at work. In Nesbit’s story, the five children Robert, Anthea, Jane, Cyril and the ‘Lamb’, after having lived in London for two years, can hardly wait to explore the garden and the orchard in Kent, whereas their

[m]other, curiously enough, was in no hurry to get out [of the carriage]; and even when she had come down slowly and by the step, and with no jump at all, she seemed to wish to see the boxes carried in, and even to pay the driver, instead of joining in that first glorious rush round the garden and the orchard and the thorny, thistly, briery, brambly wilderness beyond the broken gate and the dry fountain at the side of the house.¹⁹⁴

The natural, even wild, environment surrounding the house is introduced as much more interesting than the house itself, which is “not really a pretty house at all” and “quite ordinary”¹⁹⁵. As the passage quoted above suggests, the outside immediately promises adventures. These are not long in coming and begin when the children dig out a Psammead, a sand fairy granting wishes, from the gravel pit. In the course of the story, during which both parents are mostly absent (“Father had to go away suddenly on business, and mother had gone away to stay with granny, who was not very well”¹⁹⁶), the house retains its status as ‘adult-

192 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 7.

193 Cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 7. Despite its strong focus on adults, E.M. Forster’s *The Longest Journey* (1907) exemplifies the house/garden divide on a somewhat different, but nevertheless striking level. When the protagonist Frederick (Rickie) Elliot tells his college friends about his dismal childhood, he does not do so inside the college (a version of Gavin and Humphries’ ‘house’), but outside in “the shelter of the dell” (a version of the ‘garden’). This dell is described as a naturally enclosed space and as almost paradisiacal: “The green bank at the entrance hid the road and the world, and now, as in spring, they could see nothing but snow-white ramparts and the evergreen foliage of the firs. Only from time to time would a beech leaf flutter in from the woods above, to comment on the waning year, and the warmth and radiance of the sun would vanish behind a passing cloud”. E.M. Forster. *The Longest Journey*, 27–28.

194 Edith Nesbit. *Five Children and It*, 9. Even the baby, which is referred to as the ‘Lamb’, expresses the sentiment and wish to walk around and explore: “The baby said, ‘Wanty go walky’”. Edith Nesbit. *Five Children and It*, 9.

195 Edith Nesbit. *Five Children and It*, 9.

196 Edith Nesbit. *Five Children and It*, 14.

sphere', because the servants as well as the nursemaid Martha work in and occupy the house. At one point, when the children, who usually play and spend their time outside, are grounded for misbehaving on the previous day, only Robert is allowed to go out for about thirty minutes and heads straight for the gravel pit and the Psammead. Unable to think of a wish himself, he asks to give his wish to his siblings, who, still confined to the house, wished to transform their home into something more exciting, because, as the narrator highlights, "few things are amusing indoors when the sun is shining outside and you mayn't go out, however much you want to"¹⁹⁷. Upon his return, Robert comes to realise that his siblings have wished to transform the house into a besieged castle, which makes their dull day inside the house a day full of danger and adventure, transforming the house, at least temporarily, into a child's domain of play.

Another important shift in Edwardian fiction is marked by the authors' tendency to increase the number of children. These texts frequently "favoured groups of children, particularly siblings, living pleasant childhoods and remaining as children"¹⁹⁸. Even though I do not wholly subscribe to Gavin's claim that, "[u]nlike the solitary child of Romantic poetry or the lonely child of Victorian interiors or city streets, Edwardian children companionably play in idyllic gardens or adventurous locations"¹⁹⁹, Edwardian fiction certainly focused more strongly on smaller groups of children and siblings.²⁰⁰ For instance, the Darling siblings meet a whole group of boys in the Neverland, Mary is soon joined by Dickon and Colin in her garden and Robert, Anthea, Jane and Cyril have most of their adventures with the Psammead together, while Gerald, James and Kathleen in Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* meet Mabel, whom they first believe to be a fairy-tale princess, and expand their group. This stronger focus on groups of children reflects what Rose referred to as "[t]he Edwardian spirit of play" and "[t]he Edwardian fascination with games and childhood"²⁰¹, which were often inextricably intertwined and reflected the sentiment of the period.²⁰²

197 Edith Nesbit. *Five Children and It*, 105.

198 Adrienne E. Gavin. "Unadulterated Childhood.", 166.

199 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 12.; cf. Adrienne E. Gavin. "Unadulterated Childhood.", 166.; cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time.", 11.

200 In Victorian fiction there are already exceptions to her claim: in Sinclair's *The Holiday House*, the siblings Laura and Harry Grahame play and have their adventures together, and school stories, such as Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), naturally focus on groups of children.

201 Jonathan Rose. *The Edwardian Temperament*, 178, 181.

202 The fictional representation of groups of children in natural environments was, arguably, also influenced by the scout movement, which was founded in 1907 and is closely linked to Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908), a book that was inspired by his own military career. Its gendered counterpart, the Girl Scouts, were founded in 1910 with Agnes Baden-Powell, Robert Baden-Powell's sister, as patron of the organisation.

All in all, at the beginning of the twentieth century important changes in the fictional representation of childhood took place. The Edwardians linked children with “an idealized world of play and adventure, neo-Romantic connection to nature, imaginative vision, and timelessness”²⁰³. It was a time when childhood was regarded as a time apart from adulthood and became a period of life that was heavily idealised. The political climate of the time seems to have fostered “a cultural desire for escape from the commercialized, de-natured, time-pressured, responsibility-laden adult world into unadulterated childhood”²⁰⁴, and Edwardian children’s fiction was prominently used to express the mounting significance ascribed to childhood and childhood experience.

Along with the ever-increasing attention paid to children and childhood throughout the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the family also became an intense focus of interest to politics, society and literature. In fact, childhood (experience) and the family, as “the most important institution for any child”²⁰⁵, are closely connected and need to be examined in conjunction with one another: “Whichever aspect we care to examine of the history of children (of all social classes) before 1914, we are compelled to confront the existence and importance of the family”²⁰⁶. This section therefore draws attention to important legislative changes that affected husband and wife as well as their children, elaborates on the nuclear family unit by concentrating on the separate spheres ideology and turns to the literary figure of the orphan, whose representation is “informed by the sociocultural coordinates and ideologies of the period”²⁰⁷, among them the Victorian idealisation of the nuclear family.²⁰⁸

Similar to the legislative changes aimed at ameliorating the situation of children, the family also became subject to mounting legal attention, which increasingly curtailed patriarchal power and weakened the position of the father/husband. Among these alterations was the Custody of Infants Act (1839), which was, according to Claudia Nelson, “passed partly in response to the vigorous lobbying of one estranged wife, Caroline Norton, whose 1836 separation from her abusive husband had left him – as was customary at the time – with near-

203 Adrienne E. Gavin. “Unadulterated Childhood.”, 166.

204 Adrienne E. Gavin. “Unadulterated Childhood.”, 179.

205 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 6.

206 James Walvin. *A Child’s World*, 14.

207 Marion Gymnich et al. “Introduction: The Orphan in Fiction and Comics since the 19th Century.”, 2.

208 In the following, a special focus is put on the role and function of the woman/mother, as “[t]he Victorian cult of domesticity was above all a cult of maternity” and is firmly embedded in the middle-class notion of ‘separate spheres’, which is explored below. Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 46. Moreover, various pieces of legislation that were passed throughout the century have contributed to the changing role of the woman/mother and, as a result, the family as a whole.

complete power over her property and children”²⁰⁹. Following the separation from her husband, Norton campaigned for women’s rights and wrote her pamphlet *The Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of ‘Custody of Infants,’ Considered* (1838) to draw attention to the fact that the law does not recognise a mother’s claim on her legitimate offspring: “It is a common error to suppose that every mother has a *right* to the custody of her child till it attain the age of seven years. By a curious anomaly in law, the mother of a *bastard child HAS this right*, while the mothers of legitimate children are excluded from it”²¹⁰. Thus, in case of a separation, the father of legitimate children, “regardless of how brutal, adulterous and generally unfit he was”²¹¹, invariably wielded complete legal power over the offspring, because “[t]he custody of legitimate children, is held to be the right of the Father *from the hour of their birth*: to the utter exclusion of the Mother, whose separate claim has no legal existence, and is not recognised by the Courts”²¹². This was, however, to change with the passing of the Custody of Infants Act, which granted mothers the right to “*petition* the Court of Chancery to give them custody of children under seven and visitation rights to children under sixteen”²¹³. Even though custody rights for young children were not automatically transferred to the mother after 1839, the Act was nevertheless an important milestone in family legislation and mothers’ rights, because it “represented the first crack in English law’s assumption that the family had only one face, namely the husband’s”²¹⁴.

The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 was to change family legislation more significantly and made two crucial provisions concerning legal separation and property. The Act stipulates that a separate court, the ‘Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes’, will deal with all matters concerning separations and that women are entitled to formally apply for a dissolution of their marriage if certain requirements are met.²¹⁵ While it is considered “lawful for any husband to present a petition to the said court, praying that his marriage may be

209 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 8.

210 Caroline Sheridan Norton. *The Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of ‘Custody of Infants,’ Considered*, 1, original emphasis and capitalisation.

211 Sean Purchase. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 65.

212 Caroline Sheridan Norton. *The Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of ‘Custody of Infants,’ Considered*, 1, original emphasis.

213 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 8, my emphasis. A mother, however, still “had to prove that her character was unblemished while the father only had to justify his denial of access” so that the gendered imbalance concerning rights remained intact. Ann Alston. *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, 18.

214 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 8. Even a decade later, a mother’s (custody) rights were still a topical issue and have, for example, been taken up in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848).

215 Cf. UK Government, *Collection of Public Statutes Relating to Probates and Divorce 1857–1858*, Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, 1857, 44, 20 & 21 Victoria, chap. 85, § 6.

dissolved, on the ground that his wife has since the celebration thereof been guilty of adultery”²¹⁶, the grounds on which a woman could obtain a legal separation were much more severe. In order to apply for a dissolution, the wife had to prove that

her husband has been guilty of incestuous adultery, or of bigamy with adultery, or of rape, or of sodomy or bestiality, or of adultery coupled with such cruelty as without adultery would have entitled her to a divorce à mensâ et thoro [a form of divorce where husband and wife live separately but remain married], or of adultery coupled with desertion, without reasonable excuse, for two years or upwards[.]²¹⁷

As Nelson observes, “[t]his double standard reflected the widespread view that a wife’s adultery was more serious than a husband’s, not only because it might foist upon him children not biologically his, but also because woman’s sexual drive was, or should be, different from man’s in being focused on pregnancy rather than pleasure”²¹⁸. In case the court should declare a “judicial separation” – the term that has replaced ‘divorce à mensâ et thoro’ in this Act –, “the wife shall, from the date of the sentence and whilst the separation shall continue, be considered as a feme sole with respect to property of every description which she may acquire or which may come to or devolve upon her”²¹⁹. She thus was able to own property and money, which would, prior to the Act, legally have belonged to her husband. Provided that husband and wife had children and the mother was granted the custody over the children, she was now much more likely to be able to (financially) provide for them than before the passing of the Act.

With the passing of the Married Woman’s Property Acts in 1870 and 1882, a married woman’s property rights were consolidated. At the same time, ‘coverture’, “a timeworn legal concept and custom [...], which for centuries had effectively placed the woman – and everything she owned – under her husband’s ‘protection’”²²⁰, was abolished. While, prior to 1870, a wife was not legally entitled to keep any money she earned, she became the legal owner of any earnings and property acquired by her with the passing of the Act in the same year, and thus, was able to achieve – at least in theory – financial independence from her husband.²²¹ The Married Woman’s Property Act of 1882, “the more far-reaching

216 UK Government, *Collection of Public Statutes Relating to Probates and Divorce 1857–1858*, Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, 1857, 48, 20 & 21 Victoria, chap. 85, § 27.

217 UK Government, *Collection of Public Statutes Relating to Probates and Divorce 1857–1858*, Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, 1857, 48, 20 & 21 Victoria, chap. 85, § 27.

218 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 8–9.

219 UK Government, *Collection of Public Statutes Relating to Probates and Divorce 1857–1858*, Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, 1857, 48, 20 & 21 Victoria, chap. 85, § 25.

220 Sean Purchase. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 6.

221 Cf. J.R. Griffith, *The Married Women’s Property Act, 1870*, 21–22, *The Married Women’s Property Act 1870*, 33 & 34 Victoria, chap. 93, § 1.

of the two"²²², further strengthened property and monetary rights of a wife by extending her claims and recognised her as a separate legal entity: "A married woman shall [...] be capable of acquiring, holding, and disposing by will or otherwise, of any real or personal property as her separate property, in the same manner as if she were a feme sole, without the intervention of any trustee"²²³. Although the Acts "did not take the ultimate step of giving wives property rights and a legal status equal to those of their husbands"²²⁴, they at least acknowledged women's increasing financial and legal independence in the context of their wedded life.

Despite the fact that the family became subject to increasing legal alterations and adjustments, as the acts referred to above illustrate, the "Victorians idealized the family and, in theory, had strict roles for husbands, wives, and children"²²⁵. In this respect, the middle-class ideology of 'separate spheres' is pivotal and still considered "[o]ne of the most potent discourses of the nineteenth century" as well as "the dominant historical paradigm for understanding gender relations in the nineteenth century, particularly among the middle classes"²²⁶. In his lecture "Of Queen's Gardens" (published in 1865 in *Sesame and Lilies*), John Ruskin elaborates on the ideological framework underlying the middle-class ideal of the family by assigning men and women complementary functions:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. [...] Her great function is Praise.²²⁷

By implication, a woman's proper place is in the sanctity of the home, where she is supposedly safe from the 'evils' of the outside world:

By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world [*sic*], must encounter all peril and trial [...]. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home – it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division.²²⁸

222 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 9.

223 H. Arthur Smith, *The Married Women's Property Act, 1882*, 8, *The Married Women's Property Act, 1882*, 45 & 46 Victorian, chap. 75, § 1.

224 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 9.

225 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 3.

226 Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair. *Public Lives*, 1.

227 John Ruskin. *Sesame and Lilies*, 77.

228 John Ruskin. *Sesame and Lilies*, 77.

Thus, it was a woman's duty to transform the home into a place of domestic bliss where she, as the 'Angel in the House', cares for the children and is responsible for the management of the household. Within this happy home, the offspring was supposed to be "dutiful, obedient, and thankful for their parents' support and care"²²⁹ and, following the common wisdom, 'should be seen but not heard'. Thus, the Victorian middle-class ideal of the family was one that followed what would nowadays be considered a conservative, binary distribution of roles, "[w]ith the father at work, the mother reign[ing] within the home, surrounded by her offspring, managing the complex running of the home, organizing the servants, carefully keeping the accounts and educating her children", which James Walvin considers "the apogee of Victorian domestic happiness"²³⁰.

The emergence and persistence of this influential middle-class ideology of domesticity in a society in which "at least 85 percent of the population was working-class"²³¹ is remarkable and was contingent upon different, yet frequently interrelated, factors. With the beginning of the industrialisation, the home became "increasingly separate from the workplace, as the new availability and cheapness of mass transportation, and the rise of factories and corresponding decline of cottage industries, made commuting to work common"²³². The separation of the home from the workplace thus removed the father/husband from the home during the day and made him return after work.

The separate spheres ideology was furthermore supported by the publication of a substantial number of "[n]ewspapers, journals, pamphlets, reviews, images, cartoons, books on correct household management, and cooking manuals", which, according to Sean Purchase, "all played their part in promoting the family idyll"²³³. They were usually produced by the middle class, who "controlled the presses, writing and producing most of the books and periodicals that voiced and shaped public opinion"²³⁴. Among these books is, for instance, Beeton's im-

229 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 11.

230 James Walvin. *A Child's World*, 14.

231 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 6.

232 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 6.

233 Sean Purchase. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 64. Drawing on E. Trudgill's *Madonnas and Magdalens* (1976), Anthony S. Wohl, for example, lists "*The Home Circle, The Home Companion, The Home Friend, Home Thoughts, The Home Magazine, Family Economist, Family Record, Family Friend, Family Treasure, Family Prize Magazine and Household Miscellany, Family Paper and Family Mirror*" as relevant examples that display the Victorians' keen interest in the family and family life, while he simultaneously admits that his list is "by no means an exhaustive list for there were many more journals, such as Charles Dickens's *Household Words* designed for reading *en famille*". Anthony S. Wohl. "Introduction.", 9, 17 n.2, original emphasis. For a more detailed overview of journals and magazines targeting the family, see Catherine Waters. *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, 17–24.

234 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 6.

mensely popular and widely read *Book of Household Management* (1861), which “sold 60,000 copies in its first year”²³⁵ and provides extensive information on the various domestic duties of housewives as well as on the roles of selected members of the household.²³⁶ It can thus be assumed that the wide distribution and propagation of the separate spheres ideology transcended the middle class and also “influenced those both above and below on the social scale”²³⁷, even though it proved elusive, if not downright unachievable, for working-class families reliant on the financial support of *all* of its members.²³⁸

Despite the fact that the concept of separate spheres was popular at the time, it is crucial to acknowledge that it only seldom corresponded to the lived experience of (middle-class) Victorians. In *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (2003), Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair argue that this ideological framework is, in fact, “not sufficient to explain how middle-class women’s experience was shaped and their identities constructed”²³⁹. Historian John Tosh argues along similar lines, albeit from a different angle. He claims that “[f]or most of the nineteenth century home was widely held to be a man’s place, not only in the sense of being his possession or fiefdom, but also as the place where his deepest needs were met”²⁴⁰. The home thus was the place where men “were expected to be dutiful husbands and attentive fathers, devotees of hearth

235 Philip Davis. *The Victorians*, 206.

236 In Chapter 1, “The Mistress”, the author highlights the pivotal role of domestic duties: “Of all those acquirements, which more particularly belong to the feminine character, there are none which take a higher rank, in our estimation, than such as enter into a knowledge of household duties; for on these are perpetually dependent the happiness, comfort, and well-being of a family”. Isabella Beeton. *The Book of Household Management*, 7. As this statement suggests, the prosperity of the family relies on the conscientious execution of these duties and falls into the woman’s area of responsibility – an idea that is further implied by the omission of the domestic role of the father/husband.

237 Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 3.

238 For an informative account on working-class families, see Ginger S. Frost. *Victorian Childhoods*, 12–21.

239 Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair. *Public Lives*, 7. See also Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s foundational study *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (1987).

240 John Tosh. *A Man’s Place*, 1. For Tosh, “the heyday of masculine domesticity from the 1830s to the 1860s was for the most part a period of peace, when the country was untroubled by external threat”. *Ibid.*, 6–7. With the growing expansion of the empire towards the end of the century and due to various other developments, sentiment began to change and “[d]omesticated masculinity came under mounting attack”. *Ibid.*, 7. Natalie McKnight comes to a similar conclusion and argues that “[c]hanging concepts of masculinity contributed to the flight from domesticity” and were, moreover, fuelled by the popularity of the adventure story towards the end of the century, which “lure[d] the male imagination even further from home”. Natalie McKnight. “Introduction: Undermining the Victorian Father.”, 3.

and family”²⁴¹, which means that they, too, had a considerable impact on the happiness and well-being of their family in the confines of the home.

Whilst the family was idealized throughout the Victorian period, it was simultaneously subject to change, especially towards the end of the century, when feminist movements promoting the ideal of the ‘New Woman’ and campaigning for equal rights gained prominence. The family unit was, to put it in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben’s words, “a site of radical instability, ideological conflict and inconsistency”²⁴². Against the very dynamic image of the Victorian family, the ideology of separate spheres, which has been singled out due to its prolonged existence in the contemporary imagination, hence, described only one among a multitude of coexisting images of the family. This middle-class ideology is, however, particularly relevant to the analysis of families in (neo-)Victorian literature, which is filled with families that do not correspond to, and frequently expose, the mythical qualities of and criticise this nuclear middle-class ideal: “[t]he very ideological elevation of the Victorian family endowed its repeated failure to shelter and protect with melodramatic and sentimental potential, [that was] readily exploited by Victorian artists and writers for shock value and affective appeal, as well as social criticism”²⁴³, as numerous novels by Charles Dickens exemplify.²⁴⁴

Many of these fictional families deviating from the nuclear family unit that was propagated by the separate spheres ideology can be referred to as “trans-normative famil[ies]”²⁴⁵, a term that was coined by Elizabeth Thiel. In *The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth-Century Children’s Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal* (2008), she employs the term “transnormative family” to denote “those family units headed by single parents, step-parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings or the state that exists in opposition to the ‘natural’ and ‘complete’ family of husband, wife and children”²⁴⁶. Accordingly,

241 John Tosh. *A Man’s Place*, 1.

242 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. “Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.”, 4.

243 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. “Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.”, 17.

244 Catherine Waters observes with respect to Charles Dickens’ novels that “Dickens’s reputation as the purveyor of cosy domestic bliss would seem to be at odds with the relatively small number of happy and harmonious families depicted in his fiction. Any close examination of his novels reveals a remarkable disjunction between his image as the quintessential celebrant of the hearth, and his fictional interest in fractured families”. Catherine Waters. *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, 15.

245 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

246 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8. Although she coins the term in the context of Victorian children’s literature, it can also be applied to and enhance the analysis of families in Victorian texts written for an adult audience.

the transnormative family is identified primarily by the temporary or permanent absence of a natural parent or parents, often by the presence of a surrogate mother or father, who may or may not be related to the child, and, frequently, by the relocation of the child to an environment outside the 'natural' family home.²⁴⁷

In contrast to the term 'blended families', which "is often used to describe families with a mixture of step-parents, stepbrothers/sisters and/or half-siblings"²⁴⁸, the expression "transnormative family" is broader in that it draws attention to the manifold possibilities of composition and thus comprises more varied constellations. This broadness proves particularly helpful in analysing the representations of orphans in (neo-)Victorian literature, who are likely to become part of a "transnormative family" of one kind or another, especially when considering that "the term ['orphan'] also referred to one who was deprived of only one parent"²⁴⁹ in the Victorian period.

The orphan is among the most popular figures of Victorian literature, whose legacy and seeming omnipresence is further reflected in the substantial number of orphans that can be found in neo-Victorian literature. In fact, "Victorian literature is", as Marion Gymnich observes, "replete with male and female orphans of varying ages and different social classes, some of whom fail in their endeavours or even die, while others prosper and are granted a happy ending, yet often only after having endured a considerable amount of hardship"²⁵⁰. In contrast to eighteenth-century literature, in which the orphan typically features as "a rogue with un-roguish dreams of gentility, a picaro who uses his ability to manipulate lies and appearances for un-characteristically respectable ends"²⁵¹, orphans in nineteenth-century literature "are often significantly younger than their 18th-century predecessors"²⁵² and frequently appear as very young children, who defy and overcome the most adverse circumstances. The popularity and prevalence of the orphan as a literary figure in Victorian literature, is, as Laura Peters argues, tightly bound to "the central role which the family played at the time", because "[t]he family and all it came to represent – legitimacy, race and national belonging – was in crisis" and "at best an unsustainable ideal"²⁵³, so that the orphan served as a means of reaffirmation for the family unit.²⁵⁴ Its popularity is also due to the fact that many (child) orphans existed at the time, so much so

247 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

248 Ann Alston. *The Family in English Children's Literature*, 139 n.1.

249 Laura Peters. *Orphan Texts*, 1.

250 Marion Gymnich. "The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.", 14.

251 Nina Auerbach. "Incarnations of the Orphan.", 396.

252 Marion Gymnich. "The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.", 17.

253 Laura Peters. *Orphan Texts*, 1.

254 Cf. Laura Peters. *Orphan Texts*, 1.

that “[t]he ‘long nineteenth-century’ might also be called ‘the century of the orphan’”²⁵⁵.

Given that representations of orphans in Victorian literature are manifold and the figure is highly versatile, as the depiction of the (child) orphan is tightly bound to the changing conceptions regarding the family as well as childhood, this section cannot give an extensive, let alone an exhaustive, overview of orphans in the Victorian novel.²⁵⁶ Instead, it points out three recurring, interconnected themes in the representation of orphans in early and mid-Victorian literature, which are deemed characteristic of the orphan condition and pertinent to the novels selected for discussion, by focusing on Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Both novels have been chosen for their well-known orphan figures and their very different domestic situations. In addition, *Oliver Twist* is arguably one of the most iconic orphans in contemporary cultural memory, shaping the popular image of this literary figure.

The first of these recurrent themes is that orphan figures are frequently subject to isolation and loneliness, especially when they have lost both of their parents at a very young age. Their isolation is, according to Melanie A. Kimball, who analyses the representation of the orphan in folktales and children’s literature in a comparative study, due to the fact that “[t]hey do not belong to even the most basic of groups, the family unit, and in some cultures this is enough to cut them off from society at large”²⁵⁷. Therefore, it is hardly a coincidence that literary orphans seem to experience alienation and exclusion most notably when exposed to a family environment. When *Oliver Twist* is taken away from the workhouse by Mr Bumble to assume his apprentice trial period at the undertaker’s, he becomes aware of and draws attention to his pathetic and forlorn state: “‘I am a very little boy, sir; and it is so – so –’ ‘So what?’ inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement. ‘So lonely, sir! So very lonely!’ cried the child”²⁵⁸. This sense of

255 David Floyd. *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates*, 1. As Walvin asserts, “[t]here were untold legions of children who were never able to enjoy the benefits of family life of any kind” and the number of orphan children increased markedly. James Walvin. *A Child’s World*, 14. Drawing on Parliamentary Papers, Peters observes that while “[o]n 18 March 1844 there were a total of 18,261 children in the workhouses in England and Wales”, the number had almost doubled in 1877, when there were “a total of 35,187 orphans and deserted pauper children [...] in receipt of relief, either indoor or outdoor, in England and Wales”. Laura Peters. *Orphan Texts*, 7.

256 For an analysis of various orphan types in Victorian literature see Gymnich’s chapter “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel” (2018), for an extensive examination of the orphan in late-Victorian and Edwardian fiction see David Floyd’s *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates: Orphans of Late-Victorian and Edwardian Fiction* (2014) and for a reading of the orphan in the context of the empire see Peters’ foundational *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (2000).

257 Melanie A. Kimball. “From Folktales to Fiction.”, 559.

258 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 33.

loneliness is to increase when he arrives at the Sowerberry family, where he is to sleep below the counter next to the coffins and is overcome by his solitude to the point of wishing himself dead:

He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation. The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him. The regret of no recent separation was fresh in his mind; the absence of no loved and well-remembered face sank heavily into his heart. But his heart *was* heavy, notwithstanding; and he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be laid in a calm and lasting sleep in the church-yard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep.²⁵⁹

His sense of loneliness is enhanced by his position and treatment in the extended Sowerberry family, in which he is regarded as an inconvenience and (financial) burden by Mrs Sowerberry, addressed in a highly derogative fashion, insulted by the apprentice and charity-boy Noah Claypole and hit by the maid Charlotte.²⁶⁰ Thus, in the family environment, the young orphan is painfully reminded of his state as a parentless, solitary child and is hardly shown empathy or kindness by those around him.

In *Jane Eyre*, young Jane also experiences exclusion and isolation in the domestic environment of her relatives at Gateshead. Her marginal position in the Reed family is already made explicit on the first page when Jane is not permitted to join her aunt and her cousins, who occupy the living room in a somewhat picturesque fashion:

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mamma in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fire-side, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group, saying, 'She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were – she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children.'²⁶¹

The grounds on which Jane is excluded from feeling part of the family seem to be rather arbitrary and predominantly based on Jane's alleged otherness from her aunt's own children, who are far from being flawless themselves.²⁶² Mrs Reed's

259 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 36–37, original emphasis.

260 Cf. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 34, 39, 51, 53.

261 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 9.

262 Similar to many orphans in folktales and literature, who are often "clearly marked as being different from the rest of society", Jane is regarded as being different by her Aunt Reed's

stance indicates that she “feels neither sympathy nor affection for her niece, but regards her as an intruder, a nuisance and a burden”²⁶³ and as someone who will only ever be regarded as an unwanted appendage to her family.²⁶⁴ When Jane, barred from the family gathering in the drawing-room, moves into the adjoining breakfast-room to read a book in the window-seat, she wilfully and consciously isolates herself from the family:

I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in *double retirement*. Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day.²⁶⁵

Her position in the window-seat clearly is indicative of her wish to escape the domestic ‘imprisonment’ in her aunt’s house, at least temporarily, behind the almost closed curtain. Her yearning for escape is, furthermore, reflected in the choice of her book, “Bewick’s *History of British Birds*”²⁶⁶, in which not only the birds but also the descriptions of the arctic/northern regions stand in for her wish for freedom and autonomy. Thus, Jane not only separates herself spatially by hiding behind the curtain in the window-seat but also mentally by absorbing the “mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting”²⁶⁷ stories the individual pictures tell.²⁶⁸ Jane’s withdrawal indicates that she is fully aware of her position in the Reed family, from which she escapes as soon as she is provided with the opportunity. As both examples imply, the orphan’s exclusion from a/the family and the resultant sense of loneliness frequently contribute to making him or her a pitiable figure – a feature that is further enhanced by descriptions of the orphan’s outer appearance.

family, and is made aware of this fact by being treated differently than her cousins. Melanie A. Kimball. “From Folktales to Fiction.”, 559.

263 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 28.

264 Had it not been for the promise Mrs Reed made to her deceased husband, she probably would never have taken in Jane, as the young girl explains in Lowood: “‘My uncle is dead, and he left me to her [Aunt Reed’s] care.’ ‘Did she not, then, adopt you of her own accord?’ ‘No, ma’am; she was sorry to have to do it: but my uncle, as I have often heard the servants say, got her to promise before he died, that she would always keep me’”. On her deathbed, Mrs Reed even admits to having “‘disliked [...] [Jane] too fixedly and thoroughly’” during her childhood and still being unable to love her. Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 72, 237.

265 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 9, my emphasis.

266 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 10.

267 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 10–11.

268 In Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, the young orphaned protagonist also uses books to mentally escape his dreadful treatment at home. Reading through the “small collection of books in a little room up-stairs, to which I had access” is David’s “only and [...] constant comfort”. Charles Dickens. *David Copperfield*, 66, 67.

Descriptions of the orphan child frequently arouse compassion or elicit sympathy. They tend to be informed by “what one might describe as ‘a rhetoric of orphanhood’, which one encounters in many Victorian novels”, depicting orphans “as small, frightened and shy [...] to stress their vulnerability and their need of protection in a melodramatic way”²⁶⁹. These attributes are frequently established in the first chapters of the story. In *Jane Eyre*, the titular protagonist is introduced as small and delicate (“‘Her size is small; what is her age?’ ‘Ten years.’ ‘So much?’ was the doubtful answer”) and conscious of her “physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed”²⁷⁰, who continuously torment and mistreat her. A similar rhetoric is at work in *Oliver Twist*, in which “Oliver Twist’s ninth birth-day found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference”²⁷¹ and whose innocent looks and frail appearance are emphasised repeatedly for a melodramatic effect.²⁷² This “‘rhetoric of orphanhood’”, which is reflected in these descriptions, is characteristic of a certain type of orphan who has been identified as “the *pathetic orphan*, who is particularly prominent in the social problem novel”²⁷³; it is frequently used to highlight the physical inferiority of orphan children vis-à-vis adults and peers, which often also makes them victims of mistreatment and abuse.

Considering that “early and mid-Victorian literature directed the attention to the victimized child”²⁷⁴ in general, the *parentless* child appears as an eminently suitable figure to draw attention to the maltreatment of orphan children. According to Kimball, the “mistreatment of the orphan character” is integral to most orphan narratives and “ranges from a simple tongue-lashing to physical abuse or the threat of death”²⁷⁵. In *Oliver Twist*, for example, the child protagonist becomes a victim of abuse on multiple occasions: he “and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation” in the workhouse, he is “sociably flogged as a public warning and example” for daring to ask for more food, he is beaten at the undertaker’s to the point that his “clothes had been torn” and “his face was bruised and scratched” and he receives a death threat from Bill Sikes, who warns him that “‘if you speak a word when you’re out o’ doors with me, except when I

269 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 26.

270 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 34, 9.

271 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 6.

272 In *Great Expectations*, Pip is introduced in a very similar fashion, namely as a “small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all [the death of his family, the marshes and the churchyard] and beginning to cry” and describes himself as “undersized for my years, and not strong”, which renders him completely helpless against the criminal he encounters in the graveyard. Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*, 3, 4.

273 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 24, original emphasis.

274 Christiane Maria Binder. *From Innocence to Experience*, 16.

275 Melanie A. Kimball. “From Folktales to Fiction.”, 561, 562.

speak to you, that loading [in the pistol] will be in your head without notice’ ”²⁷⁶. That these physical and psychological maltreatments are bound to have a lasting impact upon the individual becomes most apparent in Jane Eyre’s punishment in the red-room. After being wrongfully accused of having attacked her cousin, Jane is taken to and locked up in the red-room when she suddenly believes to perceive a ghost. Despite being frightened and crying out in anguish, Mrs Reed remains unsympathetic towards Jane and “thrust [...] [her] back and locked [...] [her] in, without further parley”²⁷⁷, whereupon the child faints. Even though “[n]o severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident of the red-room” it, nevertheless, as the autodiegetic narrator admits in hindsight, “gave my nerves a shock, on [sic] which I feel the reverberations to this day”²⁷⁸. The various forms of mistreatment both at the hands of family members, guardians and caretakers as well as at the hands of those representing the state, make the orphan child “a vehicle for social criticism”²⁷⁹, whose suffering should, in addition to evoking heartfelt sympathy, provoke readers to act on behalf of and better the situation of the many orphaned children.

The physical and emotional mistreatment of these children as well as their (often peripheral) position in the family necessarily also impact their sense of home and belonging. Throughout the Victorian era, “the Victorians deified or at least ascribed spiritual properties to the home”²⁸⁰ and it was regarded as the place that was constitutive in creating and maintaining a sense of belonging: “[b]ecause of the sanctity of the family”, claims Floyd, “the domestic space that physically encompassed and symbolically represented it was particularly revered as an area of reassuring belonging and identity”²⁸¹ for the members of the family.²⁸² Accordingly, it was in the enclosed space of the house where the sense of belonging to a family should be at its most intense and where all the positive attributes connected with family life were supposed to be most acute. This idea is, for instance, also reflected in Isabella Beeton’s book on household management, in which she propagates that it is among the duties of the parents “to make their

276 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 15, 18, 59, 185.

277 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 20.

278 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 22. Jane repeatedly emphasises that she “never forgot the, to me, frightful episode of the red-room” and, when she is about to leave Thornfield Hall, even dreams about this episode: “I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears”. *Ibid.*, 73, 316.

279 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 33.

280 Anthony S. Wohl. “Introduction.”, 10.

281 David Floyd. *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates*, 29.

282 This idea is encouraged by Ann Alston who claims with a focus on children’s literature that “home and family [...] are almost inseparable; the term ‘family home’ barely needs to be voiced, for home is essentially family”, which stresses the significance of the home in the life of a child. Ann Alston. *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, 69, original emphasis.

children feel that home is the happiest place in the world”²⁸³. The home, just like the family, was thus subject to idealisation and celebration. Against the idealising discourses revolving around the domestic sphere and the different situations orphan characters can experience in familial environments, it is hardly surprising that for parentless children in Victorian literature “‘home’ often turns out to be a highly ambivalent concept”²⁸⁴.

Oliver Twist, for example, comes to know very different homes on his journey but he only, and for the first time, truly feels at home at Mr Brownlow’s, where he is nursed back to health by Mrs Bedwin, and is treated kindly by the head of the house. This kind treatment and his earlier experiences undoubtedly must have prompted Oliver’s plea to be allowed to stay with Mr Brownlow: “‘Don’t turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here, and be a servant. Don’t send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir!’”²⁸⁵ Even though Oliver is permitted to stay, his domestic happiness is only short-lived and, before long, he is abducted by Nancy and Bill Sikes and finds himself with Fagin and the boys again, which highlights that, in Victorian literature, “‘home’ may be an object of intense desire for a parentless child, [but] [...] more often than not remains elusive”²⁸⁶. After considerable hardships, however, Oliver is able to return to Mr Brownlow eventually and finds a permanent happy home with his new foster father.²⁸⁷ While Oliver Twist is able to find domestic happiness during his childhood, Jane Eyre is less fortunate in this respect, and her situation can be used to illustrate that “‘home’ may turn into a negative concept from the point of view of an orphan, becoming a prison due to the hostility or downright cruelty of caretakers”²⁸⁸. In the Reed household, Jane is repeatedly told that she occupies a marginal position, is reminded that she

283 Isabella Beeton. *The Book of Household Management*, 27.

284 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 24.

285 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 119.

286 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 24.

287 Despite the fact that Oliver temporarily also lives happily with the Maylie family, his thoughts are preoccupied with finding Mr Brownlow and telling him the truth about his abduction. The strong bond he has formed with the occupants of the house in Pentonville is apparent in his reaction to the news that they have gone to the West Indies: “This bitter disappointment caused Oliver much sorrow and grief, even in the midst of his happiness; for he had pleased himself, many times during his illness, with thinking of all that Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin would say to him: and what delight it would be to tell them how many long days and nights he had passed in reflecting on what they had done for him, and in bewailing his cruel separation from them. The hope of eventually clearing himself with them, too, and explaining how he had been forced away, had buoyed him up, and sustained him, under many of his recent trials; and now, the idea that they should have gone so far, and carried with them the belief that he was an impostor and a robber – a belief which might remain uncontradicted to his dying day – was almost more than he could bear”. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 290.

288 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 24.

“ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us” and is considered “less than a servant, for [...] [she] do[es] nothing for [...] [her] keep”²⁸⁹. Being taunted, bullied and hurt by her cousins and neglected by her aunt, Jane is unable to acknowledge Gateshead as a home. To a large extent, the notion of ‘home’ thus depends on how the orphan child is treated in the familial environment and on the dispositions of caretakers and guardians as well as those living or working in their households.

In the overall context of the fictional representation of the Victorian family, the literary figure of the orphan thus is a particularly fascinating one, precisely because it allows valuable insights into the family unit and its dynamics. The three recurring topics, which have been singled out due to their relevance, have shown that “any study of representations of orphans in Victorian literature is also bound to address the depiction of caretakers, [...] guardians and mentors as well as people working in various institutions whose purpose was taking care of and educating orphans”²⁹⁰. A closer look at the representation of the family thus discloses the power relations governing adult-(orphan) child relationships and allows drawing conclusions about the (orphaned) child’s position in the family, which is also particularly relevant to an analysis of *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, *Journey to the River Sea*, *Fingersmith* and *The Thirteenth Tale*.

289 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 12, 14.

290 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 23.

4. Representations of Children in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Towards a Typology

Despite the fact that children appear in a substantial number of neo-Victorian texts, both as protagonists and as characters of secondary importance, they have not yet garnered the full critical attention they deserve. This is not to say that neo-Victorian scholarship has not “evinced considerable interest in literary children”¹; rather, scholars initially seem to have privileged a certain sort of texts, so that “overall more attention has gone to child characters in *adult literary fiction* than to neo-Victorianism as presented to young readers”². This emphasis on a particular type of text arguably also resulted in a rather one-sided view of the representation of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction, which is, for instance, apparent in the following statement:

[t]he emergence of the child as a nineteenth-century social and literary reality is inevitably taken up in neo-Victorian fiction; it could even be said to be emphasised (or capitalised upon) via *the near systematic presentation of children as molested, abused, or murdered*, casting neo-Victorian fiction as their ‘rescuer’ and righter of historical wrongs against them.³

1 Claudia Nelson. “Foreword.”, xiii.

2 Claudia Nelson. “Foreword.”, xiii, my emphasis. The prevalence of ‘canonical’/‘literary’ neo-Victorian examples in academic publications can, for instance, be seen in Luisa Hadley’s 2015 article on the representation of illegitimate children in neo-Victorian fiction, in which she merely considers adult literary fiction, using novels such as Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Byatt’s *Possession*, Palliser’s *The Quincunx* (1989) and Waters’ *Fingersmith* as her examples. Cf. Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 29–45. In her recent monograph, Jessica Cox observes that despite shifting boundaries in neo-Victorian criticism to include popular fiction in critical contributions, the latter “continues to receive comparatively little attention within neo-Victorian studies”. Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 7. She attributes part of the reason for the lack of exhaustive critical engagement with neo-Victorian YA fiction to the fact that it “does not fit clearly into critics’ traditional definition of neo-Victorian writing as literature ‘self-consciously engaged’ with the Victorian period”. Ibid., 105.

3 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. “Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.”, 24, my emphasis.

The strong focus on the child as victim, which is foregrounded in many neo-Victorian novels for adults, however, leaves aside representations of children in neo-Victorian fiction marketed at child readers, in which they are often described in more positive terms and, in particular, depicted as empowered individuals, which reflects general preferences of children's literature.

Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara K. Day's comparatively recent edited collection *The Victorian Era in Twenty-First Century Children's and Adolescent Literature and Culture* (2018) broadened the corpus of texts under consideration in neo-Victorian scholarship by placing special emphasis on how the Victorian era is reimagined in works for young(er) readers. In their introduction, Fritz and Day stress the relevance of neo-Victorian texts written for children and young adults, claiming that "the relationship between contemporary young people's literature and the Victorian period" is "textured and multivalent" and "that many of the foundational ideas of neo-Victorianism apply to and manifest themselves in children's and young adult literature in productive and compelling ways, enriching both fields of study"⁴. The significance of analysing representations of the child in neo-Victorian children's literature has also been corroborated by Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson, who observe an underlying "tension [...] between narratives of childhood aimed at adults and those aimed at children"⁵ in both Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction, which, consequently, also affects the ways childhood is (re-)constructed and (re-)presented in these texts.⁶ While children in neo-Victorian fiction targeting an adult readership tend to be "subsumed into adult agendas and perspectives, with neo-Victorian writers opting more for a functional instrumentalisation or else [...] subordination of the child to post-modern figurations of trauma in the *Bildungsroman*"⁷, they frequently populate neo-Victorian children's literature as agentic child characters and feature as characters in their own right. Both of these tendencies effectively foreground the versatility and diversity of the child in neo-Victorian fiction. Analysing children in children's literature alongside their counterparts in adult neo-Victorian fiction thus promises to enrich the discussion and add further facets to it.

To systematise the representation of child characters in neo-Victorian fiction for both adults and children, this chapter proposes a typology that facilitates

4 Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara K. Day. "Introduction.", 4, 3–4. It is, however, striking that the title of their edited collection does not embrace the neo-Victorian project more openly, given that they see it "necessary [...] to identify the focus of [...] [their] essay collection as the neo-Victorian". Ibid., 2.

5 Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. "The Secret Sharer.", 4.

6 Cf. Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. "The Secret Sharer.", 4–5.

7 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 134.

assessing and analysing fictional children along the lines of power structures.⁸ Five of the six categories are conceived of as being situated on a scale, which also permits classing children in-between two categories, potentially being situated more towards one pole or the other. The child in neo-Victorian fiction is envisioned in the following way:

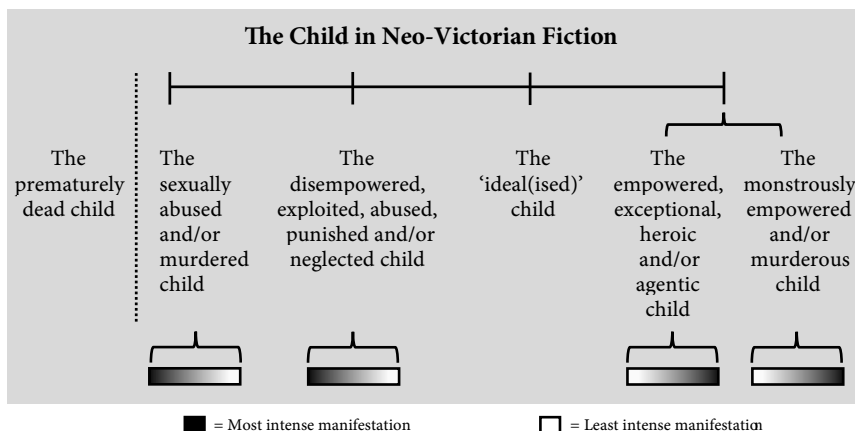


Illustration 4: The Child in Neo-Victorian Fiction⁹

This typology is thought of as a means of assessing the position of a child character within power structures at any given moment in the narrative and as a tool for tracing changes throughout the story, revealing linear as well as circular developments. It furthermore offers a terminology that helps to group several characters from one and the same but also from different novels under one of the headings and thus provides grounds for their comparison. For this purpose, the individual categories are conceived of as covering a spectrum of their own, advocating a maximum use of graded scales instead of relying on closed categories. The two poles of the spectrum are degrees in intensity, ranging from a ‘most intense manifestation’ to a ‘least intense manifestation’. They thus do not exclude potential positions between two categories, but focus on nuances in the categories themselves, which is of particular importance for types such as the **DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD** and the **MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD**, where victimization/empowerment can take different forms. In the figure above, the cat-

⁸ The proposed classification is not necessarily restricted to neo-Victorian fiction and might also be used to explore representations of children in other genres, though the examples used in the remainder of this chapter highlight its suitability and applicability for this particular subgenre.

⁹ The term ‘murderous child’ is used in analogy to Dinter’s subheading “The Murderous Neo-Victorian Child in Action”. Sandra Dinter. “The Mad Child in the Attic.”, 78.

egory of the ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD is not considered as covering a spectrum but rather as a fixed category, where approximations are expressed in positions between the ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD and the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, the EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD or the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD respectively. Similarly, the category of the PREMATURELY DEAD CHILD, which must stand apart from the others, is, for obvious reasons, thought of as a fixed category. To provide a means that allows assessing and analysing child characters in neo-Victorian fiction adequately, the six categories of this typology are explained in more detail below.

The Sexually Abused and/or Murdered Child

The category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD encompasses those (literary) children who fall victim to (adult) sexual desires or whose lives are gruesomely and prematurely put to an end. These children are typically depicted as utterly helpless and unable to fight their (adult) perpetrators; they often have to endure victimisation and sexual abuse for a considerable amount of time. The depiction of such “nightmare childhoods”¹⁰ is especially prevalent in neo-Victorian fiction marketed at adults and highlights the neo-Victorian novel’s double temporal frame of reference, as “children’s sexual endangerment” and child murder are “projected back onto the nineteenth-century past to confront some of the period’s covert abuses that simultaneously presage and mirror those of our own time”¹¹. The latter is, for instance, evidenced by various UK child murder cases, including the murders of two-year-old James Bulger in 1993, three-year-old Rosie Palmer in 1994, fourteen-year-old Hannah Williams in 2001, twelve-year-old Tia Rigg in 2012 and six-year-old Ellie Butler in 2013. The contemporary topicality of both issues is made more visible in our “information age with 24-hour news coverage and investigative documentaries [...] [which] [ensure] that sex crimes against children [as well as the murder of children] are never far from public consciousness”¹². The internet and internet archives likewise

10 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. “Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.”, 29.

11 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 186.

12 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 186. Organisations such as the NSPCC also attempt to raise public awareness of those crimes against children in the UK, as can be seen with their report on “Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today” (2011), in which they found that 4.8% of children aged 11–17 (a group comprising 2,275 children in total) have “experienced contact sexual abuse as defined by the criminal law” at the hands of adults or peers. Lorraine Radford et al. “Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today.”, 26, 89.

contribute to keeping these crimes against children in the public discourse and easily accessible.

In Victorian literature, and especially in canonical works from the period, which predominantly serve as intertexts for neo-Victorian writers, child sexual abuse is hardly featured as a topic. If addressed at all, it is merely alluded to, as (child) sexual abuse was a taboo topic in literature at the time.¹³ However, as many Victorian newspaper articles and other non-fictional texts, including Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) and William Acton's *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects* (1870), indicate, the Victorians were aware of topics such as child prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation of children. This is further reflected in the legal changes surrounding the female age of consent; the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, for instance, was at least in part a response to findings by a committee examining allegations regarding the trafficking of girls for prostitution to other countries and the fact that "prostitution, from an almost incredibly early age, is increasing to an appalling extent in England and especially in London"¹⁴. The Act hence not only raised the female age of consent from thirteen to sixteen, but also criminalised procuration and made stipulations regarding brothels. Legal and socio-political discourses thus reinforce that child sexual abuse as a topic and concern was not far from public consciousness in the Victorian era. By contrast, the murdered child is a type that features more prominently in classic Victorian texts, often in the context of a systemic death and/or as a result of circumstance. This is suggested by texts such as Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838), in which many children on Mrs Mann's baby farm die from severe neglect or in 'accidents', or Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), in which several children, including Jane's friend Helen Burns, die from illnesses

13 P.O. Brennan, for instance, argues that Charles Dickens made such allusions in *Oliver Twist*: "[s]exual abuse was only vaguely referred to in descriptions of Nancy and Betsy, the prostitutes. It is suggested that they were led into prostitution, possibly via alcohol, by Fagin at an early age". P.O. Brennan. "Oliver Twist, Textbook of Child Abuse.", 504.

14 Frederick Mead and A.H. Bodkin. *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885*, "Introduction.", 12., cf. *ibid.* 11. The selling of girls for prostitution on the continent was popularised by the Eliza Armstrong case. After having been made aware of the seeming 'sexploitation' of girls, William Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, set up a committee to investigate this form of sexual abuse and even reverted to radical measures by buying a girl (Eliza Armstrong) himself to make his point, which eventually brought him a prison sentence. He published his findings on child prostitution in a series of newspaper articles entitled "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" (1885), covering more than twenty pages. Cf. Anon. "Notice to Our Readers." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 July 1885, 1.; cf. Anon. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon-I." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885, 1-6.; cf. Anon. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon-II." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 July 1885, 1-6.; cf. Anon. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon-III." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 July 1885, 1-5.; cf. Anon. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon-IV." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 July 1885, 1-6.

such as typhoid and consumption as a result of the poor living conditions at Lowood school. Though these appear to be the exception rather than the rule there are also cases where children are murdered by individuals, as in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in which 'Little Father Time' murders his two younger half-siblings (a girl and a baby boy) before he commits suicide.

Neo-Victorian writers often pick up on and criticise these crimes against children and frequently link depictions of sexual abuse with trauma, which is among the central concerns of the genre.¹⁵ Focusing on trauma narratives and in particular the literary representation of sexual trauma, Jessica Cox observes that, in contrast to Victorian fiction, "neo-Victorian fiction and film frequently references such abuses ['rape and sexual abuse'] in no uncertain terms, yet it often does not *fully* represent these traumas"¹⁶, leaving the lurid details to the imagination of its readers and refraining from turning the texts into pornographic material. Instead, these narratives often emphasise the traumatic consequences deriving from sexual abuse, which retrospectively attest to the child's victimisation and prolonged suffering.

One frequently-quoted example that highlights the traumatic repercussions of child sexual abuse is Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), in which the former adult prostitute Sugar recalls some of her childhood experiences while she is employed as a governess in the Rackham household. The story is mainly set in 1875, the year when the female age of consent was raised from twelve to thirteen years with the Offences against the Person Act. In Faber's novel, Sugar remembers that when she was thirteen (and, by implication, of age), her mother entered her room, "told her [that] she needn't shiver anymore: a kind gentleman had come to keep her warm"¹⁷ and forced the child into prostitution. The immediate physical and lasting psychological consequences attached to child sexual abuse are revealed in her recollections. Instructing the bed-wetting Sophie Rackham to bathe, she sees that the child's "vulva is an angry red"¹⁸ and is immediately reminded

15 When referring to 'trauma', I employ Cathy Caruth's definition of the term. I am aware that this concept has been contested by scholars in recent years, but, for the purposes of this study, it still seems sufficient, since trauma is after all not its main topic. Throughout this book, trauma is hence understood in "its most general definition" as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena". Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience*, 11. For an overview of developments in the field of (literary) trauma studies, see J. Roger Kurtz's introduction to the edited collection *Trauma and Literature* (2018), 1–17.

16 Jessica Cox. "Narratives of Sexual Trauma.", 144, original emphasis.

17 Michel Faber. *The Crimson Petal and the White*, 306.

18 Michel Faber. *The Crimson Petal and the White*, 580.

of her own inflamed genitals, examined in a cracked mirror in Church Lane, the moment the fat old man with the hairy hands finally left her alone. *I have a clever middle finger, yes I have!* was what he'd told her, as he poked and prodded between her legs. *A most frolicsome little fellow! He loves to play with little girls, and make them happier than they've ever been!*¹⁹

This scene indicates that Sophie “functions mainly as a traumatic mirror for the adult female protagonist”²⁰ and prompts a resurfacing of Sugar’s traumatic childhood memories, implying their longevity and severity.²¹

In *The Law of Dreams* (2006), Peter Behrens provides an even more harrowing description of sexual abuse, which results in the death of a small child, the presumably nine- or ten-year-old Mary Cooley. Introduced as a young girl with the habit of sucking her thumb, which foregrounds her age and her childish ways, she is sexually abused by Shamie, one of the ‘Bog Boys’, who appears to care for her like an older brother.²² Despite the fact that Mary is referred to as Shamie’s “little Mary Cooley” and his “little maid”²³, their relationship has a distinct sibling-like quality. This makes the sexual abuse all the more shocking. When Mary’s battered body is discovered, the description of her corpse (“Lips and teeth coated with blood. Eyes open. Blood glued at her chin and throat” and “smeared on her buttocks, her stalky tights”²⁴) indicates the violence of the act. The state of her body further contradicts Shamie’s claim that he did it “‘for love’” and because “‘[s]he wanted me; I was her easy’” and reinforces Luke’s suggestions that he “‘fucked her so brutal’”, “‘[t]ore her up’” and “‘used her wicked’”²⁵. Even though the brutal nature of the act is only implied, the description of her corpse is a far cry from being sentimentalised and, especially due to the young age of the victim, evokes a mixture of shock and anger.

As these two examples illustrate, depictions of child sexual abuse are far from unproblematic. Kohlke suggests that “[t]he trauma of child sex abuse” in neo-Victorian fiction “becomes both crucial facilitator and targeted goal of literary

19 Michel Faber. *The Crimson Petal and the White*, 580, original emphasis.

20 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 132.

21 In the context of the above-quoted passage, Kohlke further suggests that “[t]he imagery and resulting associations in both Sugar’s and the reader’s minds hold out at least the *possibility* that Sophie too has been subjected to sexual violation within the very sanctity of the family home”, which is, however, not corroborated by Faber’s text. Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 133, original emphasis.

22 Cf. Peter Behrens. *The Law of Dreams*, 74, 76, 89.

23 Peter Behrens. *The Law of Dreams*, 87, 99.

24 Peter Behrens. *The Law of Dreams*, 99.

25 Peter Behrens. *The Law of Dreams*, 100. During Mary’s funeral, however, Luke claims that the young girl died not because she was sexually abused, but because she was hungry. The rhetoric underlying her statement is clearly meant to stoke up the Bog Boy’s determination to pillage Carmichael’s farm for food, which they had agreed upon before. The description of her dead body, however, suggests that she died of the consequences of the abuse. Cf. *ibid.*, 102.

consumption, with the neo-Victorian novel providing a prurient peephole onto the past's transgressions"²⁶. Potentially satisfying a voyeuristic desire, readers of neo-Victorian fiction, as she further maintains, "enjoy [...] at least in part to feel outraged, to revel in degradation and revulsion", which Kohlke refers to as "*reading for defilement*"²⁷, and the sexually abused neo-Victorian child appears to be among the literary figures apt to trigger this response. In this respect, the female age of consent, which was only raised gradually throughout the century, and our contemporary perspective are essential, as they suggest slightly different evaluation standards now and then. Thus, children who might have been deemed of age by nineteenth-century legal standards, may be considered minors under current law, which increases the contemporary reader's feeling of outrage and disgust. In addressing and describing instances of child sexual abuse, neo-Victorian novels typically do "not offer remedies to abuse, but through [...] [their] complex manipulations of affect and desire [...] may produce more self-aware and self-critical consumers of commodified child trauma"²⁸ and in particular of forms of sexual abuse, such as rape, incest and prostitution.

In texts for children, there are usually no depictions of sexual abuse and molestation. In rare cases, they are nevertheless incorporated in a highly attenuated form. In Laura Amy Schlitz's *Fire Spell, or Splendours and Glooms* (2012), for example, Lizzy Rose Fawr, an orphan working as a housemaid for Mrs Pinchbeck, is assaulted by Mrs Pinchbeck's adult son. When Dr Wintermute arrives at the house, he hears "a cry of distress" and finds that "[a] young man in a plaid overcoat and chimney-pot hat held the maidservant prisoner; he had both arms around her waist and was planting a series of smacking kisses on her lips. The girl squirmed and struggled, her face screwed up with distaste"²⁹. Only after Dr Wintermute intervened does he realise that the maidservant is not a young woman but a girl, "only a year or two older than his Clara"³⁰, who just turned twelve. Even though Lizzy Rose is not sexually abused, the threat thereof nevertheless looms in the text at this moment and, as it seems, has only been averted due to Dr Wintermute's intervention. The scarcity of such allusions in texts for children – a characteristic feature of children's literature more generally – implies that the revisionist potential of these texts becomes apparent in regard to other neo-Victorian topics and concerns.³¹

26 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Perverse Nostalgia.", 188.

27 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Sexsation and the Neo-Victorian Novel.", 55, original emphasis.

28 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Perverse Nostalgia.", 196.

29 Laura Amy Schlitz. *Fire Spell, or Splendours and Glooms*, 173.

30 Laura Amy Schlitz. *Fire Spell, or Splendours and Glooms*, 174.

31 While representations of the sexually abused child can only seldom be found in (neo-Victorian) texts written for children, they feature more often in texts targeting young adult (YA) audiences, such as Linda Newbery's *Set in Stone* (2006) and Mary Hooper's *Fallen Grace*

The Disempowered, Exploited, Abused, Punished and/or Neglected Child

The trope of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD is frequently employed by neo-Victorian writers to draw attention to shortcomings regarding child protection. It points towards “society’s ethical failures of care and protection vis-à-vis its most vulnerable members”³². In this respect, “the child figure proves crucial to the neo-Victorian ethical turn and its condemnation of past (and, implicitly, present-day) socio-political iniquities”³³. Focusing on fictional children’s suffering, neo-Victorian texts also reinforce the dependent relationship between children and the adults around them (parents, employers, relatives, etc.). At the same time, they reveal the power structures underlying these relationships, with child characters being typically disempowered and inferior to adult authority, power and control in texts for adults, as is Sophie Rackham in Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White*, who is reliant on Sugar’s intervention, and with their counterparts in children’s literature frequently able to change this state themselves.

The DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD in neo-Victorian fiction has a significant number of Victorian predecessors, especially in texts by Charles Dickens. David Copperfield in Dickens’ eponymous novel (1850) experiences physical abuse and disempowerment at the hands of his stepfather Edward Murdstone, Oliver Twist is struck and starved at Mrs Mann’s baby farm, the workhouse and the undertaker’s, Philip (Pip) Pirrip in *Great Expectations* (1861) is regularly beaten by his sister, the boys in Dotheboy Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) have been physically and emotionally neglected and mistreated by the headmaster Wackford Squeers, and young Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) had, as is implied, an abusive father. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), young Jane Eyre’s treatment at the hands of her cousins and especially her aunt can likewise be read as instances of emotional and physical abuse, and the chimney-sweep Tom in Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863) has to endure beatings by his master on a daily basis. Often, the scenes of the children’s mistreatment are among the most memorable ones of their respective texts, evoking pity and compassion in the reader, and hence

(2010). In both texts, child sexual abuse features as a topic but happened prior to the temporal segments narrated in the texts. In an interview, Linda Newbery draws attention to the intended audience of some of her YA novels, namely “people not quite adult but who are accustomed to adult subjects and concerns”, which reinforces the adult nature of the central topics, i.e., incest and abuse, addressed in *Set in Stone*. Denise Burkhard. “Linda Newbery on Writing Historical Fiction and on her Neo-Victorian Novel *Set in Stone*.”, 129.

32 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 135.

33 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 134–135.

immediately come to mind of readers familiar with these texts when encountering instances of physical and/or emotional abuse in neo-Victorian literature.

This type of child is a particularly fascinating one in the analysis of representations of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction, as different evaluation standards can be expected to be at work for Victorian and contemporary readers. For instance, many Victorians widely and readily accepted child labour, as Miss Minchin's treatment of and attitude towards the child servant Becky (and temporarily also Sara Crewe) in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905) indicates, while modern readers are bound to classify this arrangement as exploitation. Even though child labour was one of the topical concerns of the time, as the substantial changes in the legal situation regarding working children suggest, it was not abolished in the Victorian era. Nowadays, this position comes readily under attack, especially in the Western world, and is an issue through which neo-Victorian fiction's revisionist potential often comes to the fore, not least because the work-related exploitation of children continues to exist in today's world. The different evaluation criteria become even more apparent when past and present attitudes towards physical and emotional abuse in the context of education are at stake. In Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847), for example, some of Agnes Grey's actions towards the unruly Bloomfield children, whom she is not allowed to punish, and her reflections on the means she would have preferred to use to keep them in line are in fact likely to be considered instances of child abuse nowadays. Victorian readers in all likelihood would have perceived Agnes' wish to give Tom Bloomfield "[a] few sound boxes in the ear" for violent outbursts against his sister and his governess or to use a "birch rod"³⁴ when he refuses to learn as acceptable 'educational practices' and would tolerate, if not endorse her methods. Contemporary readers, by contrast, are apt to consider these instances physical child abuse, condemning and rejecting her methods due to modern notions of education.

An example that addresses the different evaluation standards in the context of physical punishment of children is Helen Peters' neo-Victorian time-slip novel *Evie's Ghost* (2017). Upon waking one night in her aunt's flat, Evie Tregarron finds that she has slipped back in time to 1814, where she is a maidservant in a grand mansion. Not used to physical punishment in her present, she is slapped for the first time by the housekeeper Mrs Hardwick, her superior, upon disobeying the latter's orders, wanting to postpone the washing up and going to bed instead: "In a flash, she lifted her hand and smacked me hard on the side of my head. I stared at her open-mouthed, tears springing to my eyes from the shock of it. 'You hit me!' I shouted. 'You actually hit me! That's against the law!'"³⁵. After

34 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 22.

35 Helen Peters. *Evie's Ghost*, 33.

Mrs Hardwick has slapped her once more and hit her fellow housemaid Polly Harper at a later point for punishment, Evie threatens to report her, identifying her practices as “‘child abuse’”³⁶ and thus applying modern attitudes to the reimagined Victorian world. This example suggests that she has not adjusted her frame of reference, as cornerstones in child protection are still to be achieved at the time she moves back to, and has to learn to accept that physical punishment – especially in domestic service – was a common practice to ensure the child’s efficiency and subordination in the household hierarchy. In this context, time slip appears to be a suitable plot device to draw attention to differences in attitudes towards children and childhood, due to the explicit juxtaposition of different temporal layers and the incorporation of a ‘contemporary voice’.

In *Mary Reilly* (2003), Valerie Martin provides a different take on child abuse in describing an instance of severe physical childhood abuse in retrospect. Responding to an inquiry about the scars on her hands and in proximity to her ear, the titular Mary Reilly confesses her drunkard father’s harsh methods of punishing her in a report to her master. As it transpires, her father repeatedly shut her into a cupboard as a child, where the ten-year-old had to “fold [...] up into a painful crouch to fit into the narrow, dirty space”³⁷. The situation escalates when she, one day, accidentally breaks a cup and hides its remains, which – according to her own perception – not only makes her “a careless, loutish girl”, but also “a liar [...] and probably a thief”³⁸. Upon finding the pieces, her father not only shuts her into the narrow cupboard for an indefinite amount of time, but subjects the child to torture when he, in a drunken state, brings in a rat from the alleyways and drops it into the cupboard with the frightened child. Besides physical scars, remnants of the rat bites resulting from her attempts to protect herself against the rodent, she seems to carry emotional scars into her adult life. As many other neo-Victorian children’s and adult texts, *Mary Reilly* suggests that the family, which “form[s] the backbone of the neo-Victorian novel”³⁹, and the family home are no safe environments for a child. The family home in particular is the place of intense childhood suffering – contrary to the Victorian ideal of home as a ‘safe haven’, which is an aspect that is explored in more detail at a later point in this book.

Where *Evie’s Ghost* and *Mary Reilly* address the (severe) physical punishment/abuse of children, Laura Amy Schlitz’s children’s novel *A Drowned Maiden’s Hair* (2006) provides an apt example of the (emotionally) NEGLECTED CHILD. It illustrates that “[n]eglect is more pernicious and less easily identified than the

36 Helen Peters. *Evie’s Ghost*, 76.

37 Valerie Martin. *Mary Reilly*, 1.

38 Valerie Martin. *Mary Reilly*, 1.

39 Louisa Yates. “The Figure of the Child.”, 93.

sexual or physical abuse suffered by child prostitutes”⁴⁰ and children more generally. In this children’s novel, the young protagonist Maud Flynn is adopted from the Barbary Asylum to aid the elderly Hawthorne sisters deceive gullible customers during séances by impersonating dead children. Discovered by Hyacinth Hawthorne, Maud immediately forms a deep attachment to her, which is made even more personal by the fact that the other two sisters meet her with quasi-indifference, because they reject Hyacinth’s idea to initiate Maud into “*the family business*”⁴¹. As it turns out, Hyacinth is more interested in the money to be gained from her affluent customers than in Maud and soon starts to neglect her. Frustrated, Maud is “sick of being a secret child, of feeling lonely and invisible and forlorn”⁴² and starts to defy Hyacinth’s orders to stay hidden in the house in Cape Calypso.⁴³ Eventually, however, Hyacinth’s neglect of the child takes an extreme form when she denies her existence when the house is accidentally set on fire during a séance and Maud almost dies in her secret hiding place. Maud thus is callously treated as a commodity and means to the Hawthorne sisters’ success during their séances; once their reputation is threatened, Hyacinth rather disposes of the child (“‘They knew I was in the house.’ [...] ‘Hyacinth knew,’ Maud said in a muffled voice. ‘She left me there.’”⁴⁴) than admit her existence in the house and have her rescued by the firefighters. Given that neglect, commodification and deliberate child murder are not far apart in this example, Schlitz’s novel reinforces the continuum between the categories: in this case from being emotionally neglected and exploited to being almost murdered.⁴⁵

These three examples illustrate that the figure of the child in neo-Victorian texts is subjected to adult authority and control to varying degrees and the child is

40 Louisa Yates. “The Figure of the Child.”, 111.

41 Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden’s Hair*, 149, original emphasis.

42 Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden’s Hair*, 237.

43 Despite the fact that Maud is temporarily empowered when she leaves the house in the evenings while the sisters are at dinner parties, she also at one point nearly drowns and realises that, “[f]or the first time, the horror of Caroline Lambert’s death [who drowned as a result of slipping from the rocks of the jetty and falling into the sea] struck home” and understands the risks of playing all by herself in the sea. Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden’s Hair*, 226.

44 Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden’s Hair*, 305.

45 Besides Maud, Sophie Rackham in *The Crimson Petal and the White* also becomes subject to neglect of both the physical and the emotional kind. In Faber’s novel, Sophie “grow[s] up isolated and lonely: her mother is incapable of acknowledging her existence, her nurse is cruel, and her self-interested father fails to value a girl child who cannot inherit his business, cannot maintain the family name, and may not even be marriageable”. Elizabeth Rees. “Dickensian Childhoods.”, 122–123. She is, in effect, left in the nursery, probably the space most commonly associated with children; yet in her case, the nursery becomes a place of confinement and stands in for the neglect she experiences at the hands of various characters in the story. For an analysis of Sophie Rackham’s childhood, see Louisa Yates’ “The Figure of the Child.”, 107–115, and Elizabeth Rees’ “Dickensian Childhoods.”, 122–124.

often shown to be dependent on the adults around him/her/them. The literary works thus reinforce that punishment, exploitation, abuse and neglect informed many Victorian childhoods across all social classes and are still very current issues today, though advancements in child protection have undeniably been achieved. While adults are often responsible for a child character's disempowered state, child-on-child violence can similarly result in the disempowerment and victimisation of one of the children, as the discussions of Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* and Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* illustrate. It seems that, while the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD dominantly tends to evoke "powerless outrage and fascinated horror"⁴⁶, which Kohlke sees as characteristic of neo-Victorian representations of the child more generally, the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD seems to arouse empathy and pity in the reader as well. Similar to representations of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD, those of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD point towards issues of child protection, capturing for instance discourses on and advancements in anti-smacking campaigns and legislation in the UK and elsewhere.⁴⁷

The 'Ideal(ised)' Child

The category of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD refers to children essentially conforming to the Romantic notion of childhood, which both Victorian and neo-Victorian texts draw upon. According to the Romantic idea of childhood, the child is "enveloped in a concept of 'original innocence' derived from Rousseau" and that childhood is, according to "[t]he influential Wordsworthian perception of childhood", considered as "a special (genderless) time of life, filled with childlike qualities"⁴⁸ and a blissful, innocent, carefree existence.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that the Victorians inherited the Romantic notion and "reformers pushed the idea of an idealized childhood as the natural state for *all* children"⁵⁰, idealised childhoods often were a far cry from the lived experience and plight of many Victorian children, in particular those belonging to the working classes. Nevertheless, they were often included in classic Victorian (children's) texts, which

46 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 144.

47 In 2020, Scotland became the first part of the UK to legally ban smacking and was followed by Wales, where smacking children has been illegal as of 21 March 2022.

48 Harry Hendrick. "Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood.", 37.

49 For a closer examination of the Romantic notion of childhood, see the beginning of the previous chapter.

50 Fiona McCulloch. *Children's Literature in Context*, 14, my emphasis.

were dominantly marketed at middle- and upper-class (child) readers and should hence reaffirm the Romantic ideal.

In Victorian literature, the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD can be found in literary figures such as Little Nell (Nell Trent) in Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), Cathy Linton in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Arthur Graham in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Eppie in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861), Cedric Errol in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* (1905), Anne Shirley in Lucy M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and Pollyanna Whittier in Eleanor Hodgman Porter's eponymous novel (1913). In some texts the child figures belong to this group from the start and remain in this category throughout the entire narrative, as is the case in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, whereas in others this state serves as a starting point to introduce conflict or as an objective to be achieved. Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905), for instance, employs the former pattern and uses Sara's deteriorating position on the childhood scale – from 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD to DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD – to direct readers' sympathies, elaborate on what it means to be a child and criticise child labour. In neo-Victorian fiction, the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD occurs only rarely, as it serves a comparatively limited range of purposes and contradicts the neo-Victorian revisionist drive as far as childhood experiences are concerned. These texts, by contrast, rather tend to question and frequently disavow this middle-class ideal by dominantly focusing on other types on the childhood scale. If the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD appears at all, it can usually be found in neo-Victorian fiction for young readers, where such a state may be achieved as part of a happy ending after significant trials and tribulations (in line with conventions of children's literature) or is described as a state in the past that is no longer attainable.

Arguably, the PREMATURELY DEAD CHILD, which constitutes a separate category (see below), is also often heavily idealised. These children's idealisation is generally bound to the memories of other characters and specifically parents, who often want a *particular image* of their dead offspring to be remembered. This idea is, for instance, implemented in Emma Carroll's *Frost Hollow Hall* (2013), in which the Barrington family still mourns for their dead son and only heir Christopher (Kit), who drowned while skating ten years ago. When Tilly Higgins, an outsider to the household of Frost Hollow Hall, is employed as a maid, she unearths some information about Kit, which all caters to a specific, very positive image, namely that of a prosperous and beloved son.⁵¹ The Barringtons' enduring

51 In the novel, no one dares to get near the house, because "[t]he tragedy had turned the Barringtons quite strange" and because "there [...] [are] stories of queer happenings in the house too". Emma Carroll. *Frost Hollow Hall*, 13. When Tilly, during a skating accident on the

love for their son and the pain caused by his demise become most apparent in Kit's grave and his room. The boy's well-tended grave, with an angel figure on top and an inscription at its base, imply Kit's central position in the hearts of his parents. The inscription is particularly revealing in this respect, because he is referred to as a "sweet prince" who has merely fallen asleep when he drowned in the lake: "Christopher Edward Barrington / *Fell asleep* February 6th 1871 / Our beloved Kit / 'Goodnight *sweet prince* / And flights of angels / sing thee to thy rest' " ⁵². The quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (published probably between 1599 and 1601) not only hints at Kit's untimely death but also points to the wish that he may have an afterlife in heaven. While the grave and the inscription clearly acknowledge Kit's death, his room is preserved in a state that might signify his immediate return. ⁵³ Even after he has died, the Barringtons insist on " 'keep[ing] a fire burning up there [in Kit's room] every day' " ⁵⁴, in all likelihood to uphold the impression that he is still well cared for and alive, and keep his room as a shrine to and living memory of their boy. The grief inflicted upon his parents and the comparatively limited amount of information given about him largely contribute to rendering Kit an 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD, who seems to have had a pleasant and carefree childhood and who should be remembered as a romping and happy boy. The fact that he is always presented through mediators, who either reveal specific information about him or interpret certain situations, necessarily contributes to a highly selective and, in this case, extremely favourable image that furthers his idealisation.

same lake in which Kit drowned, suddenly sees a beautiful, ghostly boy who rescues her life, she decides to find out more about Frost Hollow Hall and the tragedy that struck the family ten years ago.

52 Emma Carroll. *Frost Hollow Hall*, 66, my emphasis.

53 Throughout the story, Kit's room serves as a constant reminder of his absence, even though it looks as if he had only left for a moment. When Tilly enters Kit's room for the first time, she realises that "[t]he lamps were lit and the room was unusually warm because a good fire glowed in the grate. I stared about me. Books lay open on a table, fresh clothes were draped over the chair. There was a half-empty glass of water, a pen with its lid off, bed covers all crumpled and slept in. [...] Over by the hearth a pair of filthy riding boots caught my eye. They stood upright like someone had just stepped out of them". Emma Carroll, *Frost Hollow Hall*, 160–161. The material objects and their arrangements indicate that Lady Barrington has not yet managed to cope with her son's death ten years ago, while it simultaneously allows some insights into the boy himself and how he might have spent his childhood.

54 Emma Carroll. *Frost Hollow Hall*, 158.

The Empowered, Exceptional, Heroic and/or Agentic Child

The type of the EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD is very common in neo-Victorian fiction written for children. While in neo-Victorian literature targeting an adult readership “[c]hild agency is repeatedly denied or severely circumscribed, reducing many young characters to little more than manipulated puppets, even when seemingly central to a novel’s plot”⁵⁵, texts specifically marketed at young readers frequently equip their child characters with pluck, agency, resourcefulness and self-determination.⁵⁶ Moreover, in neo-Victorian children’s literature, children tend to become what has been frequently denied to them in adult texts, i. e., “fully-fledged characters, [...] being accorded distinct narrative identities, voices or agency”⁵⁷, all of which situates them firmly in the tradition of Western children’s literature. Thus, “[w]hile the cry of Kohlke’s traumatized child is certainly to be found in some of the works [...], other neo-Victorian children’s and adolescent texts present children not as victims but as consumers, fans, adventurers, feminists, and more”⁵⁸ – in other words, as empowered, exceptional, heroic and agentic. This does not mean that these texts peremptorily exclude the sexually exploited or psychologically and physically abused child, but that these child characters simultaneously often experience empowerment and display a high degree of agency in the same story, even if their agency and empowerment are slightly anachronistic.⁵⁹ The strategies at work with representations of this type of child resemble those that inform neo-Victorian depictions of women culminating in what Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin refer to as “the exceptional woman”, which they explain in the following way: “what is striking about the exceptional woman is that, in many ways, she figures as a kind of time-travelling figure, an anachronistic modern woman thrown back into the nineteenth century, with hyper-awareness of gender codes and even of feminist theory”⁶⁰. Adapting this thought, the ‘exceptional child’ then draws attention to both modern conceptions of and contemporary discourses on

55 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. “Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.”, 29.

56 In this respect, neo-Victorian children’s literature draws clearly on developments in Edwardian fiction for children, in which “[a]utonomy, integrity, and agency become the hallmarks of childhood”. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 11.

57 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 131.

58 Claudia Nelson. “Foreword.”, xii.

59 Thus, similar to “[t]he heroes of classical children’s literature[, who] demonstrated new ways of looking at children in their time”, the heroes and heroines of neo-Victorian children’s literature likewise afford a fresh look at Victorian as well as contemporary notions about children and childhood. Roni Natov. *The Courage to Imagine*, 103.

60 Tara MacDonald and Joyce Goggin. “Introduction: Neo-Victorianism and Feminism.”, 7.

childhood that are reaffirmed, contested or fought out by the characters in fictionalised versions of the nineteenth century.

In Victorian literature, the EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD can predominantly be found in texts targeting a child readership. The child in neo-Victorian children's literature thus seizes upon its (late) Victorian literary predecessors. As Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson observe,

the protagonists of Victorian children's fiction conquer African jungles, come home with pirate treasure, or become the spiritual and emotional centres of their families, demonstrating power rather than pathos. If adult readers were instructed to protect and nurture the young, child readers were often encouraged to imagine themselves as infinitely resilient and effective.⁶¹

The Victorian child characters coming readily to mind as empowered, exceptional, heroic and/or agentic are not David Copperfield or Oliver Twist, who also at times claim agency (for instance when running away from their abusive environments), but rather child figures such as Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Jim Hawkins in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894–1895), the Waterbury siblings in Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906) and the various children in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911). These Victorian children's texts thereby draw on the essentially *timeless* figure of the child hero/ine that can be found in children's fiction more generally and was celebrated by many late-Victorian and Edwardian writers. Here, again, Victorian and neo-Victorian children's writers seem to draw on a very similar notion of childhood, while adult neo-Victorian fiction appears to question the possibility of child agency and empowerment by attempting to expose the 'dark side' of Victorian childhood and privileging other types of the typology.

A neo-Victorian children's novel empowering its protagonist and equipping her with agency is Eloise Williams' *Gaslight* (2017). This text arguably substantiates that "child protagonists may be resilient, wily, and/or lucky enough to evade [...] trauma and even to put an end to its manifestations within the individual narrative"⁶². Told from the perspective of fourteen-year-old Nansi Sullivan, the story revolves around the child's search for her mother, who "disappeared on the sixth of September, 1894"⁶³. The main narrative is set in 1899,

61 Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. "The Secret Sharer.", 5. Julian Petley comes to a similar conclusion: "By the end of the nineteenth century the child protagonist had become quite commonplace, especially in books written for children themselves where they were represented in largely positive terms". Julian Petley. "The Monstrous Child.", 91.

62 Claudia Nelson. "Foreword.", xi.

63 Eloise Williams. *Gaslight*, 1.

when the young girl is living in the Empire theatre, working on stage or thieving for Sid Sullivan, who, as it turns out, is her uncle and had her mother institutionalised in an asylum to get his hands on the family inheritance. While Nansi initially only receives death threats in no uncertain terms from him (“‘Don’t tell me he didn’t see you or I’ll kill you, understand?’ [...] I try to speak, but he’s strangling me”⁶⁴), Sid later attempts to dispose of the child, because she has secretly witnessed him murdering Constance, the assistant to a magician performing at his theatre. In spite of having already been introduced as a resourceful and strong-minded girl, the moment Sid attempts to murder her and has her body thrown into the river equips Nansi with the agency she needs to eventually find and rescue her mother: “As I hit the river, reality slaps me hard. My mother. She is in this life somewhere. I can’t die. I have to find her”⁶⁵. Unbeknownst to Sid, Nansi survives and uses his lack of knowledge to find her mother and heroically free her from the asylum. On the one hand, this example suggests that fictional children in neo-Victorian children’s literature can achieve what their counterparts in adult literature usually cannot, i.e., escaping their abusive and unloving environments for a better alternative and bringing about their own happy ending. On the other hand, it reinforces that the development of these child characters throughout their respective narratives can span various categories of the typology and that they are not confined to one or two of the categories but could theoretically even embrace the full spectrum in different stages of their development. Since there is a continuity between Victorian and neo-Victorian children’s texts in how they depict their child characters, the revisionist take of the latter tends to find expression in the subject matter or in specific situations with which the characters are confronted.

The Monstrously Empowered and/or Murderous Child

Empowerment of children is not necessarily presented in an entirely positive way in neo-Victorian fiction. Children in neo-Victorian literature can also feature as MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILDREN, capable of inflicting severe harm on others and even putting an end to their own or others’ lives, which strongly contradicts the innocence paradigm informing Western conceptions of childhood since Romanticism.⁶⁶ The depiction of the child as monster stands in the tradition of Gothic fiction, in which ‘monstrosity’ typically

64 Eloise Williams. *Gaslight*, 20.

65 Eloise Williams. *Gaslight*, 119.

66 The idea of the ‘child as monster’ is also resonant in Ellen Pifer’s designation “satanic child-monsters”, which she uses to refer to those children in films “ready to beat and bludgeon helpless animals or unsuspecting adults”. Ellen Pifer. *Demon or Doll*, 15.

refers to both physical deformity and “monstrous deeds, to cruelty and murder, that is, to the psychological side of things”⁶⁷, as can prominently be seen in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). But, in contrast to Gothic fiction, the term ‘monstrous’ is employed here solely to denote extremely brutal and cruel behaviour. This extreme form of monstrous and murderous empowerment of the child character has, in all likelihood, been derived from the fact that “children have repeatedly committed murders, most infamously in 1993 when the toddler Jamie Bulger was abducted by two ten-year-old boys, who violently abused and finally killed him”⁶⁸ as well as the monstrous child’s “long cinematic lineage”⁶⁹, which has kept this type of child in public discourse and consciousness.⁷⁰

The MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, however, also has its predecessors in Victorian literature, both implied and otherwise. When Oliver Twist, after having been thoroughly provoked, flings himself at Noah Claypole, he is accused of the attempt of murder: “‘He’ll murder me!’, blubbered Noah. ‘Charlotte! missis [*sic*]! Here’s the new boy a murdering of me! Help! Help!’”⁷¹ Looking more closely at this passage, Sharon A. Bickle observes that “the words murder/ murderer/ murderous are repeated ten times within four pages of text”⁷². This repetition serves the purpose of invoking the image of the MURDEROUS CHILD, which seems to be at odds with Oliver’s previous actions and might therefore be dismissed as unreasonable by the reader. While the MURDEROUS CHILD is only hinted at in *Oliver Twist*, it takes action in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1896). When the family’s financial situation worsens and they have trouble finding lodgings in Christminster, “a brooding undemonstrative horror seemed to have seized” Little Father Time and he realises that “‘[t]is because of us children, too, isn’t it, that you can’t get a good lodging?’”⁷³ Seeing no other means of improving the situation of the family, the boy murders his two younger half-siblings and kills himself, leaving a note that explains the motive behind his action: “Done because we are too menny”⁷⁴. The utter despair reflected in this note provides a psychological explanation for the shocking action,

67 Margarita Georgieva. *The Gothic Child*, 50.

68 Sandra Dinter. “The Mad Child in the Attic.”, 80.

69 Julian Petley. “The Monstrous Child.”, 91.

70 In one of her 1994 Reith Lectures, Marina Warner draws attention to the trial following the murder of James Bulger and argues that this trial “was conducted as if they [the two perpetrators] were adults not because they had behaved with adult consciousness, but because they had betrayed an abstract myth about children’s proper childlikeness”. Marina Warner. *Managing Monsters*, 35. The Bulger case illustrates that “the boundary separating our collective fears for children from those we harbor of them has become increasingly blurred”. Ellen Pifer. *Demon or Doll*, 12, original emphasis.

71 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 52.

72 Sarah Bickle. “Twisting Dickens.”, 62.

73 Thomas Hardy. *Jude the Obscure*, 406, 407.

74 Thomas Hardy. *Jude the Obscure*, 410.

which turned Little Father Time into a MURDEROUS CHILD. Notably, this type of child can only very seldom be found in Victorian texts for young readers. If these texts include a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, this child usually is cast in the role of the antagonist. Harry Flashman in Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), for instance, is endowed with a monstrous agency when he bullies and tortures the children at school with his accomplices and deliberately roasts Tom Brown at the fire, who receives bad scorchers in the process. Such an image of childhood clearly undermined the Victorian's notion of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD.

By comparison, this type of child features more often in neo-Victorian literature. A neo-Victorian text in which a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND MURDEROUS CHILD commits shocking and horrifying deeds, albeit with a different, and more sinister, intention than Little Father Time, is John Harding's *Florence & Giles* (2010), a rewriting of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Florence, the twelve-year-old orphan protagonist and first-person narrator, commits murder multiple times, most notably when she gruesomely kills her governess Miss Taylor, which has been considered an act that "erases the symbolic boundary between the liability of adults and the innocence of children"⁷⁵. Florence describes the murder of Miss Taylor with much self-awareness in the following way:

I cast around and saw a hefty branch lying by the well. I picked it up and swung it hard and struck the hand that was holding the pole [of the well 'that had once held the bucket rope']. I swear I hit it so hard you could hear her metacarpals snap, but she hung on for dear life, her knuckles white as bone. I swung again and caught her another one even harder than the first. There was another crack and her fingers uncurled from around the pole. I dropped the wood and flung my full weight at her and with both hands gave her such a shove that over she went, into the well. She was gone with a single scream.⁷⁶

According to Yvonne Griggs, the depiction of "the troubled mind of a child capable of calculated murderous acts, bring[s] to the fore the cultural anxieties of our contemporary times and indicat[es] that romanticized Victorian notions of childhood innocence have no currency in a post-Bulger cultural climate"⁷⁷. It is then equally shocking that Florence, subsequent to murdering her governesses, denies assistance to Theo Van Hoosier, the child living next door, because she "knew that he had seen"⁷⁸ her murdering Miss Taylor and therefore withholds his asthma spray. Thus, "Theo's death is not an accident, and Florence does not even

75 Sandra Dinter. "The Mad Child in the Attic.", 82.

76 John Harding. *Florence & Giles*, 234.

77 Yvonne Griggs. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies*, 161.

78 John Harding. *Florence & Giles*, 238.

try to present it as one to the reader”⁷⁹, implying that she is fully aware of her acts. Evoking shock and repulsion in the reader by luring the governess to the well and murdering her in cold blood, as well as by deliberately letting Theo suffocate to death, Florence displays a “dark side of agency”⁸⁰. She thus “moves beyond mere lack of innocence – as far as the Victorians were concerned, a shocking enough state for a child to occupy – to an obsessive insistence on her own authority”⁸¹ and agency.

Where the children in the category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD are generally denied agency and victimised, those belonging to the type of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD are endowed with an excessive amount of agency that casts them into the role of the perpetrator, inverting the power relations that inform the group at the other end of the spectrum.

The Prematurely Dead Child

While the depiction of child characters proves to be highly versatile, as my typology indicates, there are also those fictional children who do not survive childhood due to reasons other than murder and which need to be addressed separately from the above-mentioned categories. These PREMATURELY DEAD CHILDREN, who die of either natural causes or accidents and often prior to the events of their narratives, retain their significance through the seemingly insurmountable grief they inflict upon their parents, and in particular their mothers. As Marah Gubar observes, this trope of the PREMATURELY DEAD CHILD can be traced back to Romantic writing: “Romantic literature is littered with spectral children who never get to grow up, including Lamb’s dream-children, the dead child-friends who haunt Thomas De Quincey’s prose, and Wordsworth’s Lucy Gray”⁸². Notably, Wordsworth’s “The Thorn” (composed and published in 1798) elaborates on the grief the death of a child inflicts upon the mother by repeating her sorrowful cry “‘Oh misery! oh misery! / Oh woe is me! oh misery!’”⁸³ several times.⁸⁴ This type of child can also be found in Victorian liter-

79 Sandra Dinter. “The Mad Child in the Attic.”, 82.

80 Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. “The Secret Sharer.”, 7. In fact, Griggs claims that Florence lacks agency, which is – in the light of her monstrous deeds – an untenable claim. I thus agree with Morey and Nelson and ascribe her with a darker sense of agency, which is considered an integral part of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD. Cf. Yvonne Griggs. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies*, 161.

81 Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. “The Secret Sharer.”, 7.

82 Marah Gubar. *Artful Dodgers*, 13.

83 William Wordsworth. “The Thorn”, ll. 65–66, 76–77, 252–253.

ature, for instance, in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), in which Tess Durbeyfield christens her ill baby 'Sorrow' shortly before he dies and attempts to convince the vicar to give the child a Christian burial.

In neo-Victorian fiction, PREMATURELY DEAD CHILDREN also feature prominently. A case in point is Susan Hill's novella *The Woman in Black* (1983), in which Jennet Humfrye had "been forced to give her illegitimate child for adoption to another woman"⁸⁵, in all likelihood to avoid causing a scandal and public degradation. When Jennet's son, who is adopted by her married sister, accidentally drowns on the marshes, Jennet holds her sister accountable for the child's death and is overcome by grief. She soon "contract[s] a disease which cause[s] her to begin to waste away"⁸⁶ and eventually dies before she returns as the dreaded Woman in Black, taking vengeance in her spectral form on the patriarchal (Victorian) society and in particular the inhabitants of Crythin Gifford. Similar to Jennet Humfrye, Eleanor Lambert in Schlitz's *A Drowned Maiden's Hair* mourns for her daughter Caroline, who died, unbeknownst to her mother, in an accident. Overcome by sorrow and the untimely demise of her daughter, Mrs Lambert turns to séances and "'offer[s] five thousand dollars to any medium who could produce a genuine manifestation of her child'"⁸⁷, hoping to hear the voice of her daughter again. Thereby she becomes susceptible to the influence of the impudent Hawthorne sisters, who take advantage of her guilt-ridden conscience ("Only if Mrs. Lambert had followed her that day – [...] [t]hat's all she can think about"⁸⁸) and trick her most cruelly.⁸⁹ These PREMATURELY DEAD CHILDREN and their blighted childhoods thus remain central to their narratives *due to* their absence and affirm child mortality and untimely deaths as central topics. Despite the fact that these deceased children, more often

84 A similar emotional response to the absence of the child can be found in narratives using what Kohlke refers to as "the motif of the 'stolen child'" or what Katherina Dodou terms, with a focus on McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987), "[t]he figure of the lost child", whose fate often remains unclear. Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Perverse Nostalgia.", 196., Katherina Dodou. "Examining the Idea of Childhood.", 243.

85 Susan Hill. *The Woman in Black*, 176.

86 Susan Hill. *The Woman in Black*, 185.

87 Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden's Hair*, 129.

88 Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden's Hair*, 190.

89 In John Harwood's *The Séance* (2008) a similar gullibility towards mediums and séances is discernible in Constance Langton's mother. After the death of her child Alma, Constance's "mother [had] changed beyond recognition" and, after several months of keeping to her room, "remained sunk in lightless misery". John Harwood. *The Séance*, 2. Completely neglected by her mother, Constance eventually introduces her mother to séances and even performs a séance herself (which is in and of itself an interesting comment on the fraudulent nature of séances). Instead of helping her mother overcome Alma's death, the séances serve as a constant reminder of the child's absence, aggravate her condition and eventually prompt her to end her life by taking an overdose of laudanum that will reunite her with her dead child.

than not, remain voiceless in their respective narratives, the story of their demise is uncovered and eventually told so that their childhoods can be assessed through their parents' memories of their prematurely dead offspring.

Representations of children and childhood in neo-Victorian literature are a fascinating field that is explored in more depth in the chapters and case studies of selected texts that are to follow. In the analysis of the fictional children in these neo-Victorian children's and adult novels, I thus not only pay heed to class, age and gender, which determine the position of a child in society, but also to the representation of their families, because "it is *en famille* that we like to remember the Victorians and re-imagine them in neo-Victorian fictions"⁹⁰. The power structures governing adult-child relationships are therefore as important as child-child interactions, as both afford relevant insights into how neo-Victorian novelists reimagine (orphaned) children and their childhoods. The "trans-normative family"⁹¹, to borrow Elizabeth Thiel's term, is an especially promising subject in this respect because it allows evaluating the position of the child within the foster family, his or her sense of belonging to a family (sometimes even for the first time) as well as his or her relationship to the individual members of the family, including but not limited to foster/step parents, step/half siblings, cousins and servants, which all, to varying degrees, shape and influence childhood experiences.

90 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. "Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.", 2, original emphasis.

91 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

5. Possible-Worlds Theory as a Tool for Analysing Historical Fiction

Possible-worlds theory (or PWT) is a highly versatile approach that has increasingly been used in literary studies in recent years.¹ Alluding to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's idea of 'possible worlds', PWT was, as Marie-Laure Ryan argues, "originally developed as a means to solve problems in formal semantics"² and used for "the definition of truth conditions for the modal operators of necessity and possibility"³. Nowadays, PWT is applied in multiple and productive ways across fields and disciplines and has turned into what Lubomír Doležal terms "an interdisciplinary paradigm"⁴. Although philosophical PWT and its terminology are far from unambiguous, and "dialogue among the disciplines is more intricate than it seems, because talk about possible worlds turns out to be talk about different things in each particular discipline"⁵, the underlying concept offers "a collection of analytical tools [...] in the service of many purposes"⁶, including the analysis of fictional texts.⁷ In literary studies, PWT has found various areas of application, including "(1) Theory and semantics of fictionality (2) Genre theory/typology of fictional worlds (3) Narrative semantics, including theory of character (4) Poetics of postmodernism"⁸. While these macro-struc-

1 Possible-worlds theory uses abbreviations extensively. An overview of the abbreviations used throughout this book can be found at the end of this chapter.

2 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 528.

3 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.", 557.

4 Lubomír Doležal. "Possible Worlds of Fiction and History.", 786.

5 Ruth Ronen. *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, 47.

6 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 550.

7 Given that PWT is used in different fields and disciplines, PWT scholars occasionally employ different/alternative terms; in addition, the italicisation of terms is not entirely consistent.

8 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 528. Andrea Gutenberg expands the list proposed by Ryan in 1992: "Literaturwissenschaftler haben die PWT seit den siebziger und achtziger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts für ihre Zwecke eingesetzt, u. a. um 'Fiktionalität' als Konzept zu bestimmen, um Gattungsunterschiede aufzuzeigen, um Sprechakte zu analysieren, die bei der fiktionalen Produktion verwendet wurden, um den Leseprozess und die semiotische Dechiffrierung des literarischen Textes zu beschreiben und um bestimmte poetologische Probleme zu klären, die durch neuere literarische Trends entstanden sind".

tural or even ‘extra-textual’ fields of application point towards PWT’s manifold potential and broad applicability, this chapter focuses on an intra-textual use of PWT, which, according to Carola Surkamp, is of particular interest to and benefits the field of narratology.⁹ Even though Thomas Pavel was the first to adapt the philosophical PWT to the worlds created in literary texts in 1975, this chapter is highly indebted to findings by Ryan, who elaborated on the applicability of PWT to fictional texts and the intra-fictional/intra-textual domain in various scholarly contributions.¹⁰

In this chapter, PWT is introduced specifically as an instrument for analysing fiction that is set in the past or juxtaposes different time levels. After elaborating on the idea that literary texts project modal universes of their own, this chapter distinguishes between three types of (alternative) non-actual(ised) possible worlds (or (A)PWs): *knowledge-worlds* (or *K-worlds*), *wish-worlds* (or *W-worlds*) and *obligation-worlds* (or *O-worlds*), whose characteristics are illustrated by examples from Victorian literature.¹¹ Moreover, it has a closer look at *fantasy universes* (or *F-universes*), which are variously created by “dreams, hallucinations, fantasies, and fictional stories told to or composed by the characters”¹² and project a modal system of their own. In this context, it is suggested that Ryan’s idea of accessibility relations can be used to describe the relationship between the world that characters consider their ‘real world’ (the textual actual world or TAW) and the world created in *F-universes* (the fantasy textual actual world or FTAW). After extending her set of accessibility relations by elaborating on a

Andrea Gutenberg. *Mögliche Welten*, 43. [My translation: Literary scholars have used PWT for their own purposes since the 1970s and 1980s, for instance to define ‘fictionality’ as a concept, to highlight differences between genres, to analyse speech acts that are used in the fictional production of the text, to describe reading processes and the semiotic decoding of the literary text, as well as to address poetological problems arising from new literary trends.]

- 9 Cf.: “Die PWT erweist sich insbesondere dann als Gewinn für die Narratologie, wenn die Unterscheidung zwischen einer tatsächlichen Welt und ihren möglichen Alternativen nicht zur Beschreibung des Verhältnisses zwischen der Welt außerhalb des Textes und der fiktionalen Wirklichkeit eingesetzt wird, sondern innerhalb des narrativen Textes selbst verankert wird”. Carola Surkamp. “Narratologie und *possible-worlds theory*.”, 167. Even though PWT has been used variously in narratology, Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell argue that “[s]everal relatively recent developments [...] in theory, culture, and technology suggest [...] that the field of application of PW theory stretches far beyond literary theory. The theoretical development is the expansion of narratology into a project that spans every medium capable of storytelling, such as film, drama, comics, painting, and videogames”. Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell. “Introduction: Possible Worlds Theory Revisited.”, 15.
- 10 For a brief outline of “Possible Worlds Approaches to Literature and Narrative”, see Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell’s “Introduction: Possible Worlds Theory Revisited” (2019), 9–15. For a brief overview of pioneering scholars (David Lewis, Thomas Pavel, Lubomír Doležal and Umberto Eco), see Marie-Laure Ryan. “Possible Worlds.”, 728–732.
- 11 In PWT, the terms alternative possible world (APW) and possible world (PW) tend to be used interchangeably.
- 12 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 119.

relation that is considered crucial for the analysis of historical/neo-Victorian (time-slip) novels, this additional relation is applied to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), because Ebenezer Scrooge has to recentre repeatedly to an *F-universe* (in the past, the present and the future) when he is visited by the Christmas ghosts. This text is further used as an example to elaborate on the idea that the FTAW can impact the character's perception of his/her/their TAW, as is the case in most neo-Victorian time-slip stories, including Ruth Park's *Playing Beatie Bow* (1980) and Peni R. Griffin's *Switching Well* (1993).

The basic assumption of PWT is "that reality forms a 'modal system'"¹³, consisting of an 'actual world' (or AW) and (alternative) non-actual(ised) possible worlds (APWs), which revolve around and are accessible from the AW. When applied to a literary text, the world created by the text is not merely regarded as an APW, but as an entire fictional universe: "The semantic domain of the text is not an individual world in a modal system, but is itself a system of worlds centered on what I shall call 'the textual actual world'"¹⁴. A fictional world is hence "constructed as [...] having its own distinct ontological position, and as a world presenting a self-sufficient system of structures and relations"¹⁵. As "fictional equivalent of the actual world"¹⁶, the TAW at the centre of the fictional universe becomes – for the duration of reading – the reader's frame of reference: "In creating what is objectively an APW, the literary text establishes for the reader a 'new actual world' which imposes its own laws to the surrounding system, thereby defining its own horizon of possibilities"¹⁷. Reached by the reader through an act of 'recentring' (to employ Ryan's term), this TAW simultaneously is "the sphere regarded as real by the characters, who thus relate to it in the same way we do to the 'reality' of which we are members"¹⁸. It hence forms their frame of reference. Accordingly, the modal system projected by the fictional text is surrounded by the characters' alternative, non-actual(ised) private worlds, or textual possible worlds (TAPWs). They are created when characters engage in "world-creating and/or world-representing acts", including "forming beliefs,

13 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 529.

14 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.", 554. In 1975, Thomas Pavel already made this observation in claiming that "[e]ach literary work explores its own, autonomous world" and indicates that a similar argument can already be found in Friedrich Waismann's "Language Strata" (1952). Thomas G. Pavel. "'Possible Worlds' in Literary Semantics.", 172.; cf. *ibid.*, 176 n.13.

15 Ruth Ronen. *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, 8.

16 Marion Gymnich. "Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales.", 205.

17 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 531.

18 Marie-Laure Ryan. "The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes.", 720.

wishing, dreaming, making forecasts, and inventing stories”¹⁹. The three basic types of (T)APWs – though scholars sometimes make further differentiations – are *K-worlds*, *W-worlds* and *O-worlds*. Inside the fictional universe, “the dynamic interaction of competing possible worlds”²⁰ makes up the plot, whereby the characters’ attempts to actualise individual TAPWs or prevent others from actualising their own propel the story forward.²¹

Knowledge-worlds (or *K-worlds*) encompass the knowledge about the TAW accumulated by a character. This type of world “can be measured in terms of their accuracy and completeness as far as their relationship to the textual actual world is concerned”²². However, this “distinction between the textual actual world and a character’s subjective knowledge-world, of course, presupposes that one can establish some kind of objective backdrop, some kind of reliable ‘reference world’ in a fictional text”²³, against which the accuracy of a character’s *K-world* can be gauged. Since *K-worlds* can, cannot or can only partially correspond with the TAW, Ryan proposes a subdivision into four different categories:

- + (Correspondence, knowledge): x holds p firmly for true
- (Conflict, misbelief): x holds p firmly for false, while p is true
- 0 (Absence, ignorance): p is unknown to x
- i (Indeterminacy, uncertainty, question): x is either uncommitted to the truth of p or leans to some degree toward the truth (i.e., considers p possible, probable, unlikely, etc.) A scale of coefficients, from 1–99 (low probability) to 50–50 (indeterminacy) to 99–1 (high probability) could be used to represent the various degrees of commitment to the truth of a proposition.²⁴

19 Marie-Laure Ryan. “The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes.”, 722. It should be noted that Ryan considers alternate universes (a different term for what is usually referred to as *fantasy-universes* in her contributions and to which “dreaming” and “inventing stories” refer in the above quotation) as “relative worlds” and thus, strictly speaking, APWs. However, she shortly afterwards declares that they possess a slightly different status, as “these alternate universes are not planets revolving around the actual world of the narrative system [as do *K*-, *W*- and *O*-worlds], but systems in themselves”. Marie-Laure Ryan. “The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes.”, 722, 730. The idea of *fantasy-universes* is explained in more detail below.

20 Hilary P. Dannenberg. *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, 46.

21 Ryan and Bell suggest that, “[b]ecause of antagonistic relations between characters, conflict is hardly ever completely eliminated from narrative universes, but narratives typically end when the conflicts in the main character’s domain are resolved or when this character is no longer in a position to work toward the resolution of those conflicts”. Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell. “Introduction: Possible Worlds Theory Revisited.”, 20.

22 Marion Gymnich. “Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen’s Fairy Tales.”, 206.

23 Marion Gymnich. “Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen’s Fairy Tales.”, 207.

24 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 115.

A fitting example to illustrate a state of conflict between the *K-world* of a character and the TAW can be found in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911). Upon being awakened by a mysterious wailing sound in her uncle's manor in Yorkshire, Mary Lennox starts exploring and soon finds out about her cousin Colin Craven's existence. During their first encounter, Colin's and Mary's *K-worlds* are updated (using Ryan's operators: from 0 to +) and the condition of not having known about each other's existence is changed. In the course of this nightly meeting, both children get to know each other, and Colin soon starts talking about his (imagined) illness and physical condition, which he explains in the following way: "I am like this always, ill and having to lie down. [...] If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan't live. My father hates to think I may be like him"²⁵. Since Colin's *K-world* revolves around the belief that he is seriously ill, which has been fostered by his uncle-cum-doctor, he lacks life force, feels miserable and frequently works himself into tantrums. During one of their meetings, Mary openly opposes him, and only after she examined his back, checking whether she can see a lump, is his *K-world* adjusted. The fact that Colin's *K-world* now corresponds to the TAW is confirmed by the heterodiegetic narrator:

If he had ever had any one to talk to about his secret terrors [...] if he had had childish companions and had not lain on his back in the huge closed house, breathing an atmosphere heavy with the fears of people who were most of them ignorant and tired of him, he would have found out that most of his fright and illness was created by himself.²⁶

Only after Colin's epistemic misconceptions have been resolved does he believe in life and gain strength; or, to phrase it in PWT terminology, only after Colin's *K-world* has been adjusted does it comply with the TAW and the conflict is resolved.²⁷

Wish-worlds (or *W-worlds*) of a character contain a character's wishes and intentions.²⁸ This world "is defined over propositions involving the axiological

25 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 74.

26 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 104.

27 This example reinforces an observation by Ryan, who maintains that "[f]rom the reader's point of view, the *K-world* of characters contains a potentially inaccurate image of the actual world of the narrative universe, but from the character's point of view this image is the actual world itself". Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds.", 733.

28 In her 1985 article "The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes", Ryan differentiates between wishes and intentions and describes the *intention-world* (or *I-world*) as a world that "is created when a character commits himself, privately or to witnesses, to reaching a certain target by following a certain course of action". Marie-Laure Ryan. "The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes.", 725. In more recent scholarly discussions, *W-* and *I-worlds* are often not distinguished from one another. For instance, Gutenberg sees the criteria differentiating between the two as merely gradual and argues that intentions, in fact, are wishes which have already been evaluated against possible courses of action and have been formulated as goals. Cf.: "Das Differenzkriterium zwischen Wünschen und Intentionen ist m. E. lediglich ein

predicates good, bad, and neutral”²⁹, which “are judged purely within the wish-world itself”³⁰. Ryan illustrates the form of “constitutive propositions”³¹ of *W-worlds* in the following way³²:

x considers that $\begin{bmatrix} \text{state} \\ \text{action} \end{bmatrix}$ p is $\begin{bmatrix} \text{good} \\ \text{bad} \end{bmatrix}$ for x

The *bildungsroman* frequently starts with the *W-world* of a character that is to be actualised in the course of the story, as can be seen in novels such as Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861) and *David Copperfield* (1850). However, this does not mean that *W-worlds* are exclusive to the *bildungsroman*. In Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847), for instance, the titular protagonist wishes to become a governess to sustain and support her family financially after her father has lost their money in a misguided attempt to improve their financial situation. Instead of selling drawings, as her mother suggested, Agnes has a plan and “secret wish”³³ of her own:

‘But I have another scheme in my head, mamma, and have had long, only I did not like to mention it.’ ‘Indeed! pray tell us what it is.’ ‘I should like to be a governess.’ My mother uttered an exclamation of surprise, and laughed. My sister dropped her work in astonishment, exclaiming, ‘You a governess, Agnes! What can you be dreaming of?’³⁴

Despite the fact that Agnes’ family remains sceptical about her wish, they support her, and Agnes is “full of bright hopes and ardent expectations”³⁵ when she is about to become governess to the Bloomfield children at Wellwood House. Once her *W-world* has been actualised, Agnes realises that her situation does not meet her expectations: “I found my pupils very backward, indeed; but Tom, though averse to every species of mental exertion, was not without abilities. Mary Ann could scarcely read a word, and was so careless and inattentive that I could hardly get on with her at all”³⁶. Given that in *W-worlds* “the law of desire defines these

graduelles, denn Intentionen sind Wünsche, die bereits unter Berücksichtigung der zur Verfügung stehenden Handlungsmöglichkeiten, der Rahmenbedingungen der TAW also, reflektiert und in Handlungsziele [...] umgewandelt sind”. Andrea Gutenberg. *Mögliche Welten*, 53. Adopting Gutenberg’s argument, I, too, refrain from differentiating between *W-worlds* and *I-worlds*.

29 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 117.

30 Marion Gymnich. “Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen’s *Fairy Tales*.”, 211.

31 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 117.

32 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 117.

33 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 4.

34 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 9, original emphasis.

35 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 11.

36 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 19.

predicates ['good, bad, and neutral'] relatively to the individual"³⁷, characters can have diverging perspectives on the realisation of a *W-world*. While Agnes continues to regard the actualisation of her *W-world* as 'good' for her family, it simultaneously affects her physically and leaves her unhappy and exhausted. Exhibiting concern for Agnes' health, her mother draws attention to the dual effect of her occupation in pointing out that "'you are a good deal paler and thinner than when you first left home; and we cannot have you undermining your health to hoard up money, either for yourself or others'"³⁸. Notwithstanding her mother's objection, she places the well-being of her family above her own and, after having been dismissed by the Bloomfields, she soon starts looking for another occupation as governess to re-actualise her *W-world*. This example shows that the conflicting positions between the *W-world* of a character and the TAW do not necessarily have to be resolved upon the actualisation of this world. In addition, the conflict between the *W-world* and the TAW can also be more complex, for instance, when more agents are involved and attempt to actualise the same *W-world* simultaneously (provided only one of these worlds can be actualised) or when they attempt to actualise contradictory *W-worlds*.³⁹

Obligation-worlds (or *O-worlds*) are created by obligations and prohibitions. According to Ryan, the "system of commitments and prohibitions" underlying *O-worlds* is "defined by social rules and moral principles"⁴⁰. She maintains that, "[w]hile the social rules are issued by an external authority, the moral principles may be defined by the characters themselves"⁴¹. The rules and regulations governing a character's *O-world* thus "specify actions as allowed (i.e., possible), obligatory (necessary), and prohibited (impossible)"⁴² and often interfere with their *W-worlds*. An apt example to illustrate the interference of social rules and moral principles can be found in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and revolves around the sudden interruption of the wedding ceremony of Edward Rochester and Jane Eyre. Mr Briggs, who is responsible for the interruption, explains that there is a hindrance, which, as he puts it, "'consists in the existence of a previous marriage. Mr Rochester has a wife now living'"⁴³. During their conversation, Mr Briggs draws Rochester's attention to the fact that his intention to marry Jane, and thus an actualisation of his *W-world*, is against the law: "'I would remind you

37 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 117.

38 Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 42.

39 Ryan argues that this constellation results in "[n]arrative conflict", whereby "[t]he mutual compatibility or incompatibility of the private worlds of characters divides the cast into opposing factions, and defines interpersonal relations as either cooperative or antagonistic".

Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 122.

40 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 116.

41 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 116.

42 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 116.

43 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 288.

of your lady's existence, sir, *which the law recognizes, if you do not*"⁴⁴. In this case, the social consensus is represented by the solicitor, who invokes the law to prevent the crime of bigamy. In attempting to marry Jane and actualising his *W-world*, Rochester disregards social conventions and laws, while his moral compass sees his claims of having been conned into marriage by Bertha's family as valid and sufficient reasons to remarry. In other words, he shapes his *O-world* to conform to his *W-world*. The ensuing conflict and all further measures undertaken by the characters are grounded in and can be traced back to the collision of different worlds, because "[t]he relations among the worlds of the narrative system are not static, but change from state to state"⁴⁵. For instance, the extension of Jane's *K-world* (she was unaware of the existence of Bertha beforehand) also affects her *O-* and *W-worlds* and she cites Mr Rochester's previous marriage as her reason for leaving him. Refusing to become his mistress, Jane thus highlights that she and Rochester act according to different moral principles and their *O-* and *W-worlds* no longer concur. Thus, while *O-worlds* can be contradictory in and of themselves, interfering on the level of social rules and moral principles, whereby individuals are "subjected to incompatible systems of rules", this world can also prevent a character from actualising a *W-world*, because the actualisation of this world would entail the "the nonsatisfaction of another"⁴⁶ world. The intricate interaction between the different worlds thus can initiate a series of causally determined events.

In contrast to *K-*, *W-* and *O-worlds*, *fantasy-universes* (or *F-universes*), which are sometimes also referred to as 'fantasy worlds' or 'alternate universes', project modal systems of their own. These *F-universes* are "formed by the mind's creations"⁴⁷, for instance while dreaming or telling stories.⁴⁸ Unlike the (T)APWs mentioned above, they "outline an entirely different system of reality, complete with its own actual world surrounded by satellites" (i.e., APWs), and "function for characters as escapes from their native system"⁴⁹. Hence, when characters enter an *F-universe*, they recentre to the world at the core of the modal system, the

44 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 288, my emphasis.

45 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 119. The relations between and actualisations of the different worlds have been used, amongst others, by Ryan, to formulate a theory of plot, which provides a model for commenting on the plot dynamics of narrative texts. In this context, Marion Gymnich, who uses this model to explain the plot dynamics at work in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, explains that, "[a]ccording to possible-worlds theory, the plot is driven either by conflicts between different possible worlds or by conflicts between the textual actual world and one or more possible worlds". Marion Gymnich. "Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales.", 205.

46 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 117, 121.

47 Marie-Laure Ryan. "The Modal Structure of Narrative Universes.", 730.

48 Cf. Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 119.

49 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 544.

FTAW, which is surrounded by the (dream-/story-world) characters' private *K*-, *W*- and *O*-worlds. For the duration of the recentring and potential immersion, the FTAW becomes the world of reference for the characters and can collide with the world of reference created by the TAW. Characters in neo-Victorian novels sometimes also enter *F*-universes to access the Victorian past, as in Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), in which Tom enters the childhood dreams of the old Mrs Bartholomew, and Dianne Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), in which an *F*-universe is created through storytelling. Neo-Victorian time-slip fictions (and time-slip stories more generally) even suggest that *F*-universes are not necessarily merely the mind's creations: an *F*-universe may also be entered through a shift in time that is often brought about by magical or supernatural means. The relationship between the worlds of reference in neo-Victorian time-slip fiction (usually one in the text's present and one in the Victorian past) can be used to bring across criticism and/or elicit nostalgic feelings.

Given that narrative texts are by definition incomplete, readers explore and compare their AW and the world projected by the text, using what has become known as the 'principle of minimal departure'. According to Ryan, the principle of minimal departure describes the following: "when reconstructing a fictional world, fill in the blanks left by the text by assuming its similarity to the actual world"⁵⁰. This principle is necessary because the history of the narrative universe typically "stretches beyond the time segment represented in the plot, and its inventory is not limited to the cast of characters and settings made visible by the story"⁵¹. In this respect, "[t]he gaps in the representation of the textual universe are regarded as withdrawn information, and not as ontological deficiencies of this universe itself"⁵². These epistemic gaps can be 'filled' using the reader's knowledge of the AW by comparing the AW to the TAW and assuming that they are similar in all areas until the text contradicts this assumption.⁵³ In this respect, neo-Victorian novels are an extremely fascinating genre, because they pre-suppose that readers fill the gaps not with their knowledge of their AW but rather with their (supposed) knowledge about the Victorian era, which stresses the temporal distance between the reader and the fictional universe and potentially

50 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory.", 533. In historical fiction, this principle is essential, as Ryan observes: "The need for the principle of minimal departure in interpreting fiction is made particularly compelling by historical narratives. If it weren't for the principle, a novel about a character named Napoleon could not convey the feeling that its hero is *the* Napoleon". Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 52, original emphasis.

51 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 127.

52 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 53.

53 Cf. Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 51.

amplifies the revisionist impulse characteristic of the genre. While this principle is especially useful on the level of reception, it can also be employed on a story-internal level, because characters, too, compare the world they consider their AW (the TAW) to the world at the core of the *F-universe* and assume that the FTAW corresponds with the TAW in all respects, until proven otherwise.

A suitable means of describing the relationship between the TAW and the FTAW is the notion of accessibility relations, as developed by Ryan. Literary texts, as Doreen Maitre observes, are “full of worlds in which the physical laws of the actual world are violated – animals use human language, human beings have superhuman powers and physical objects have properties which no physical objects in the actual world have ever been known to possess”⁵⁴, as is often, though not exclusively, the case in fairy tales or stories belonging to the genre of fantasy. In a similar vein, when recentring to *F-universes*, characters can encounter talking animals or elements that otherwise violate (natural) laws that remain firmly in place in their TAW. In this respect, the idea of accessibility relations, which Ryan first and foremost employs to distinguish between genres, while simultaneously focussing on various areas pertaining to world building, can be used to determine the proximity and distance between the FTAW and the TAW and describe their relationship.⁵⁵ The different types of accessibility relations Ryan introduces include:

Identity of properties: <i>A/properties</i>	TAW is accessible from AW if the objects common to TAW and AW have the same properties. ⁵⁶
Identity of inventory: <i>B/same inventory</i>	TAW is accessible from AW if TAW and AW are furnished by the same objects.
Compatibility of inventory: <i>C/expanded inventory</i>	TAW is accessible from AW if TAW’s inventory includes all the members of AW, as well as some native members.

54 Doreen Maitre. *Literature and Possible Worlds*, 30.

55 Ryan endorses a story-internal application by remarking that “the conceptual repertory which describes trans-universe relations may also be applied to the intra-universe domain”. Marie-Laure Ryan. “Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.”, 558.

56 As can be seen with the examples Ryan uses to elaborate on these accessibility relations, the term ‘objects’ also refers to people, which is crucial for the understanding of *B/same inventory*.

Chronological compatibility: <i>D</i> /chronology	TAW is accessible from AW if it takes no temporal relocation for a member of AW to contemplate the entire history of TAW. (This condition means that TAW is not older than AW, i.e., its present is not posterior in absolute time to AW's present. We can contemplate facts of the past from the viewpoint of the present, but since the future holds projections rather than facts, it takes a relocation beyond the time of their occurrence to regard as facts those events located in the future.)
Physical compatibility: <i>E</i> /natural laws	TAW is accessible from AW if they share natural laws.
Taxonomic compatibility: <i>F</i> /taxonomy	TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds contain the same species, and the species are characterized by the same properties. (<i>F</i> usually follows from <i>E</i> , but some divorces of taxonomic and physical compatibility do occur [...].)
Logical compatibility: <i>G</i> /logic	TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds respect the principles of noncontradiction and of excluded middle. ⁵⁷
Analytical compatibility: <i>H</i> /analytical	TAW is accessible from AW if they share analytic truths, i.e., if objects designated by the same words have the same essential properties.
Linguistic compatibility: <i>I</i> /linguistic	TAW is accessible from AW if the language by which TAW is described can be understood in AW.

Table 1: Types of 'Accessibility Relations' according to Marie-Laure Ryan⁵⁸

While these relations, as Ryan implies, are expandable and “can be used to ascertain the compatibility between a fictional world and the actual world”⁵⁹, they can also, when employed entirely story-internally, be used to determine the compatibility between the TAW and the FTAW and the amount of willing suspension of disbelief required during the recentring and/or immersion of both characters and readers.⁶⁰

57 Ryan explains that “[w]hen philosophers speak of possible worlds, they usually interpret the accessibility relation as a logical one. A world is possible if it satisfies the logical laws of noncontradiction and of the excluded middle: (*p* OR *-p*) AND NOT (*p* AND *-p*) (A proposition must be true or false, and not both at the same time)”. Marie-Laure Ryan. “Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.”, 557, original emphasis and capitalisation.

58 The table is based on: Marie-Laure Ryan. “Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.”, 558–559. The definitions have been taken over verbatim and the original emphasis has been retained.

59 Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell. “Introduction: Possible Worlds Theory Revisited.”, 21.

60 Even though fictional texts can approximate the AW, they are, according to possible-worlds semantics, “not imitations or representations of the actual world (*realia*) but sovereign realms of *possibilia*; as such, they establish diverse relationships to the actual world, situate themselves at a closer or further distance from reality. They range from realistic worlds closely

The example Ryan uses to explain an intra-textual use of accessibility relations is Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). She starts with an observation regarding the relationship between the AW and the TAW and proposes that "the TAW is a realistic world related to the [reader's] AW through all relations except *A/properties* and *B/same inventory* [...] [while] [...] [t]he passage through this world is too swift to decide whether or not *C/expanded inventory* holds"⁶¹. When Alice starts to dream and recentres to the FTAW, however, she embarks on a journey through Wonderland, which violates even more accessibility relations on a story-internal level:

[f]rom the world originally designated as the TAW, [...] the text takes a trip to the dreamworld of Wonderland by lifting *E/natural laws* and *F/taxonomy*, and this dreamworld momentarily takes the place of an actual world through an internal gesture of recentering (as opposed to the external recentering through which Lewis Carroll makes the entire textual universe come into being).⁶²

Breaking with these and other accessibility relations renders Wonderland a fantastic dreamscape. In her dream, Alice is not only able to encounter and interact with talking animals or playing cards, but is also confronted with a topographically alien environment where physical laws are violated. For instance, Alice has to readjust her *K-world* regarding eating and drinking, both of which affect her size in the dreamscape, making her grow or shrink in analogy to how much and what she consumes. Her unfamiliarity with the setting and the rules governing her dreamscape are expressed in her questions and attempts to make sense of this world. In this respect, Carroll's text reinforces a more general tendency, which is also evident in Ryan's genre distinction: the more accessibility relations are violated, the more fantastic and unrealistic the world at the centre of the *F-universe* becomes and the more willing characters need to be to adapt to this world and immerse themselves in the fantastic realm; or, to put it somewhat differently, the more accessibility relations remain in place, the less extensive the world building tends to be within the text.

Going beyond the accessibility relations just applied to Carroll's novel, Ryan already suggests an expansion of the types of accessibility relations in her monograph *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (1991), where she proposes four additional relations:

- (1) *Historical coherence*: TAW is accessible from AW if TAW not only includes AW's population, but contains no anachronisms with respect to AW. [...]

resembling the actual world to those violating its laws – fantastic worlds". Lubomír Doležel. "Possible Worlds of Fiction and History.", 788, original emphasis.

61 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.", 569.

62 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.", 569.

- (2) *Psychological credibility*: TAW is psychologically accessible from AW if we believe that the mental properties of the characters could be those of members of AW. [...]
- (3) *Socio-economic compatibility*: TAW is accessible from AW if both worlds share economic laws and social structure. [...]
- (4) *Categorical compatibility*: Under this label I understand the respect for distinctions between basic logical categories. Through this relation, it is possible to explain the semantic difference between TAWs containing allegorical characters such as Death and Beauty, and TAWs excluding such entities.⁶³

While all four are pertinent to the analysis of fictional texts, (1) *Historical coherence* is of particular relevance to historical novels, and especially those narratives employing time slip as a plot device. In these stories, “the protagonist slips back in time, characters from the past reappear in the present, or both”⁶⁴, and different historical periods, which are sometimes separated by centuries, are connected.⁶⁵ Following Ryan, “[t]hrough this relation, it becomes possible to distinguish standard historical narratives, as well as what I have called historical fabulation, from works of fantasy [including time-slip stories] which allow the meeting of characters, objects, and preoccupations from different periods”⁶⁶. Accordingly, all time-slip novels break this accessibility relation, as the characters who slip back in time are anachronistic themselves. They do not belong to the FTAW’s population at the time when the events in the past take place and often have not even been born. On a story-internal level, these characters can introduce further anachronisms in the form of objects, as is the case in Karen Inglis’ *The Secret Lake* (2011), in which Stella and Tom Hawken introduce the children 100 years in the past to iPhones and, hence, confront them with technological advancements that will not be made in their time.⁶⁷

For the analysis of historical novels and time-slip narratives more specifically, I propose an additional accessibility relation that places a special focus on the temporal dimension and extends *D/chronology*. This accessibility relation, which is called *J/temporal continuity*, describes the temporal compatibility between worlds:

63 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, 45–46, original emphasis.

64 Tess Cosslett. “‘History from Below’”, 243.

65 In Alison Uttley’s *A Traveller in Time* (1939), for instance, Penelope Taberner’s TAW is in 1934, but she slips back in time to rescue Mary, Queen of Scots, in the sixteenth century.

66 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, 45.

67 In the sequel *Return to the Secret Lake* (2022), Tom, Stella and the time-slipping Lucy Cuthbertson bring back antibiotics to Lucy’s present in 1912, when they had not yet been discovered, to rescue her friend Emma Gladstone, who is suffering from septicaemia after falling down the outside steps of her home.

Temporal compatibility: J/temporal continuity	(F)TAW is accessible from (T)AW if no act of temporal relocation (into the past or the future) is required to contemplate or navigate this world. ⁶⁸

Unlike the accessibility relations proposed by Ryan, this accessibility relation cannot be used for a genre differentiation, as any text written prior to the reader's present breaks with this relation, e.g., a text written during the Victorian era. Hence, this temporal criterium is not static but in constant flux.⁶⁹ Similar to the accessibility relations proposed by Ryan, this additional relation can be used to describe the relationship between the (F)TAW and the (T)AW in terms of world building and their proximity to or distance from one another, that is, their accessibility for characters/readers during the act of recentring.

As many postmodern novels, which often question the linear progress of time in the context of experimental ways of storytelling, as well as science-fiction novels, which are typically set in the future, historical novels break this accessibility relation on purpose. They are either set entirely in the past or juxtapose two or more time periods, usually one in the character's present and one in the past. This requires – depending on the number of levels – a recentring to a time or times in the past on the part of the reader and occasionally on the part of the characters as well. Historical novels sometimes acknowledge breaking this relation by displaying a self-reflexivity about having been written *after* the period when they are (partially) set. The prostitute Sugar in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), for example, draws attention to this at the beginning of the story and cautions the reader: "You may imagine, from other stories you've read, that you know it [London] well, but those stories flattered you, welcoming you as a friend, treating you as if you belonged. The truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether"⁷⁰. Even if a text does not self-reflexively draw attention to its moment of creation or its retrospective perspective, readers of historical fiction are usually aware that they have to recentre to a world (or

68 A similar idea can be found in Gutenberg's interpretation of Ryan's accessibility relation *D/* chronology. She translates this accessibility relation in the following way: "(D) chronologische Kompatibilität: die fiktionale ist von der realen Welt aus zugänglich, ohne daß eine zeitliche Relokalisierung notwendig wird (dies schließt Zukunftswelten wie in der Science Fiction aus)". Andrea Gutenberg, *Mögliche Welten*, 45.

69 For instance, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) was read differently in the late 1990s than it is read today, as present-day readers might, for instance, stumble across the fact that the titular protagonist does not have a mobile/smart phone and has trouble with her answering machine and her VCR, which readers from the late 1990s would not have regarded as particularly noticeable.

70 Michel Faber. *The Crimson Petal and the White*, 3.

worlds) in the past, as the genre label 'historical fiction' already suggests. They accept and even expect the breaking of *J*/temporal continuity.⁷¹

This additional accessibility relation is particularly promising for the analysis of time-slip stories, which can often be found in neo-Victorian fiction for children, such as Helen Cresswell's *Time Out* (1970, rev. ed. 1987), Jill Paton Walsh's *A Chance Child* (1978), Karen McCombie's *The Whispers of Wilderwood Hall* (2016) and Sally Nicholls' *A Christmas in Time* (2020). When characters in neo-Victorian fiction temporarily slip back in time and/or recentre from their present-day TAW to a Victorian *F-universe*, their system of reference needs to be adjusted (as does the reader's, who sometimes has to recentre doubly, depending on where in time the story's TAW is situated). The diverging norms and moral values, the different attitude towards gender (roles) and differences in legal frameworks, for instance, all harbour potential for conflict and place the world at the core of the *F-universe* at some distance from the characters' TAW. This potential for conflict is particularly evident when characters *physically* recentre to the FTAW (as opposed to a mental recentring) and have to navigate this world, as is frequently the case in time-slip narratives, and thus break *J*/temporal continuity on a story-internal level.

Breaking *J*/temporal continuity on the story-internal level also permits making further assessments about the temporal make-up of the FTAW and its relationship to the TAW, especially when the characters actually *experience* the FTAW as acting characters. Is the world at the core of the *F-universe* presented as a temporally coherent world? I.e., do the events follow in chronological succession, or do the experiences in the FTAW break with the chronology of events due to repeated acts of recentring, which do not lead to the same moment in time, as is the case in *Tom's Midnight Garden*? If the latter is the case, how much time has lapsed between the visits and have any significant changes occurred in the meantime the character is not yet aware of? To which moment in time do the characters recentre and how large is the distance between the FTAW and their TAW? Does the distance increase or decrease during repeated recentrings? A departure from the chronology of the events may confuse characters and may even result in impossible events, according to the characters' perception, e.g., when they recentre to an earlier moment in time where certain events have not yet taken place or even seem reversed. Likewise, sudden jumps in time during a repeated act of recentring to the same world can cause confusion and possibly also disorientation, even if these jumps follow a chronological order.

71 Strikingly, in several (urban) fantasy novels, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, *J*/temporal continuity remains in place, while the fantasy genre usually breaks with various other accessibility relations.

While this additional accessibility relation is pivotal for the analysis of historical novels, other texts can break *J*/temporal continuity as well. For instance, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* violates this accessibility relation in several ways and on different levels. Even though the text never openly acknowledges Scrooge's experiences to have been a dream, Dickens provides various (though sometimes subtle) hints that Scrooge's adventures with the ghosts could be regarded as such, not least by framing his experiences by going to sleep and awakening the next morning.⁷² Assuming that Scrooge dreams his adventures, he at one point in the story recentres from the TAW, which is Victorian London on a foggy and cold Christmas Eve, where the absence of his Christmas spirit dominates the scene, to a FTAW (henceforth FTAW^I), in which he encounters Marley's ghost and is then visited by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. Similar to the dream world in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, this world "momentarily takes the place of an actual world"⁷³. The breaking of *J*/temporal continuity in the FTAW^I is implied when Scrooge, who is convinced to have gone to bed after two, hears the clock inexplicably toll One (again), which contradicts the linear progress of time and the information Marley's ghost provides about the ghostly visitations: "'Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls One. [...] Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate'"⁷⁴. The breaking of this accessibility relation perplexes Scrooge, who cannot believe to "'have slept through a

72 Pointing to the ambiguity created by the text in this respect, Elaine Ostry suggests that, even though "it is very likely that Scrooge, waking up in his bed, has dreamed the entire adventure, neither he nor the narrator draw attention to the possibility". Elaine Ostry. *Social Dreaming*, 101. Further hints that Scrooge's experiences were part of a dream experience can, for instance, be found in references to his health. Catherine A. Bernard explains that in the Victorian era "[p]hysiological disorders were [...] believed to produce dreams. Indigestion was the most common culprit, but other 'morbid' conditions of the body such as 'sanguineous derangement,' liver disorders, and cerebral diseases were cited in medical literature as the causes of disturbed dream visions". Catherine A. Bernard. "Dickens and Victorian Dream Theory.", 200. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's health is affected in different ways. When he enters his rooms, the narrator mentions in passing that "Scrooge had a cold in his head". Moreover, upon encountering the ghost of Jacob Marley, Scrooge assigns his ghostly visitor to a trick of the senses: "'[A] little thing affects them [the senses]. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are'" . Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 18, 21.

73 Marie-Laure Ryan. "Possible Worlds and Accessibility Relations.", 569.

74 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 24. The temporal paradox created by the clock striking the hour a second time during the same night can be explained by assuming that Scrooge went to bed earlier that evening, dreamed that he went to bed a second time (past two) and awakens in the middle of the night, which suggests that, in a fictional text, "the creation of fantasy universes [is rendered] at least theoretically indefinitely recursive". Marion Gymnich. "Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales.", 214.

whole day and far into another night' ”⁷⁵ when he hears the clock strike One. It is only when he awakens that he realises that, instead of appearing on consecutive nights, “‘[t]he Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like’ ”⁷⁶. *A Christmas Carol*, as Stephen Prickett asserts, thus “relates and compresses the action, not merely to the point of being unrealistic, but into literal impossibility”⁷⁷ by seemingly breaking the linearity of time in the FTAW¹.

From the FTAW¹, the three Christmas Ghosts take Scrooge to scenes from the past, the present and the future, whereby each scene constitutes and can be regarded as an individual FTAW (henceforth FTAWⁿ, whereby the ‘n’ designates the various universes) and each requires an act of recentring. The different FTAWⁿs the Ghost of Christmas Past visits with Scrooge, for example, all break with J/temporal continuity. While the individual scenes are in the order in which they would most likely have taken place, first showing events from his childhood and then from adolescence and adulthood, they overall break with the additional accessibility relation, because Scrooge needs to recentre to his past, and a temporal relocation is necessary. However, since the scenes the Ghost of Christmas Past shows him are *memories* from his own past and therefore part of Scrooge’s *K-world*, the FTAWⁿs have a certain proximity to Scrooge’s TAW, because they are already part of his realm of experience. This is not the case with the scenes the other two Christmas Ghosts show him, which situate the FTAWⁿs they visit with Scrooge at a further distance from the TAW.

Since *A Christmas Carol* functions like a time-slip story, Scrooge is physically present and features as a character in the various FTAWs. Following Ryan, “[t]he recentring of dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations differs from fictional recentering in that the basic identity of the subject is preserved through the relocation”⁷⁸. In this context, the differentiation “between *spectators and participants*”⁷⁹, as conceptualised by Maitre, albeit in a slightly different context, is useful in further specifying the position of characters while recentring to a FTAW. She explains that “[o]ne is a spectator of a state of affairs if one experiences it without contributing to its change or resolution – except insofar as the very fact of one’s being a spectator is a contribution. One is a participant in a state of affairs if one experiences it and does contribute to its change or resolution”⁸⁰. In contrast to Alice in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, who negotiates her identity by interacting with and being an active participant in her dreamworld,

75 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 27.

76 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 78.

77 Stephen Prickett. *Victorian Fantasy*, 59.

78 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 119.

79 Doreen Maitre. *Literature and Possible Worlds*, 45, original emphasis.

80 Doreen Maitre. *Literature and Possible Worlds*, 45–46.

Scrooge is merely a spectator.⁸¹ The Ghost of Christmas Past makes this clear by explaining that “‘[t]hese are but shadows of the things that have been, [...] [t]hey have no consciousness of us’”⁸², suggesting that Scrooge is supposed to witness the events, but is unable to make his presence known, interfere or even change the (course of) events.

Beyond illustrating the breaking of *J*/temporal continuity on different levels, Scrooge's encounters with the Christmas Ghosts reinforce that the events in FTAWs can have an impact on the perception of the TAW. According to Ryan, *F-universes* “may fulfill metaphorically the function of K-worlds or W-worlds with respect to the primary narrative system”⁸³. Upon encountering the Ghost of Christmas Past, “Scrooge is not taught how to imagine, but is forced to remember”⁸⁴ and his *K-world* is recovered when the Ghost takes him back to memories of his childhood. In taking Scrooge to events of his past, the Ghost aims at triggering an emotional reaction in the miser, preparing him for the lesson he is to learn during that night. The effect of exposing Scrooge to a vision of his childhood self can be observed almost immediately: watching his younger self in the dilapidated building that once was his schoolhouse, he sees “a lonely boy [...] reading near a feeble fire”⁸⁵ and begins to weep. For the duration of the experience, Scrooge “becomes that boy again”⁸⁶ mentally and emotionally, whose sole refuge from the joyless world around him was reading stories. After having seen this dismal memory, Scrooge immediately connects what he sees in his dream to the TAW and his own recent behaviour:

‘I wish,’ Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: ‘but it’s too late now.’ ‘What is the matter?’ asked the Spirit. ‘Nothing,’ said Scrooge. ‘Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something; that’s all.’⁸⁷

81 The fact that Scrooge sees himself as a (child) character in the scenes/memories the Ghost of Christmas Past visits with him also ties in with the distinction between *observer memories* and *field memories*. Following Daniel L. Schacter, field memories are those which are remembered “from a perspective similar to the one you had during the original event”, while in observer memories the person who is remembering sees himself/herself/themselves as an actor. Drawing on a 1983 study by Georgia Nigro and Ulric Neisser, he argues that “[w]e tend to see ourselves as actors in [...] older memories [...], whereas we tend to reexperience more recent memories from something like the original perspective”. Daniel L. Schacter. *Searching for Memory*, 21.

82 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 30.

83 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 119.

84 Elaine Ostry. *Social Dreaming*, 91.

85 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 31.

86 Philip Davis. “Victorian Realist Prose and Sentimentality.”, 26.

87 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 32.

Thus, by being exposed to his past, Scrooge learns to be more attentive to his environment and develop empathy. As Aleksandra Kędzierska suggests, “only by seeing his own misery can Scrooge become sensitive towards others”⁸⁸. The recollection of this experience implies that in “learning something positive and constructive for once, he can rediscover the value of memory and imagination he has forgotten he possessed”⁸⁹, and be redeemed eventually.

Where the Ghost of Christmas Past refreshes Scrooge’s memory, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come exposes Scrooge to a vision of the future in which he will have died. Prickett remarks that “what the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows him is not the *real* future at all, but merely projections based upon his present way of life”⁹⁰, implying that this situation might be actualised in the future if Scrooge does not change radically. Contradicting Scrooge’s *W-world* and providing him with knowledge he cannot yet have, the actualisation of this future projection is what he attempts to prevent at all cost. Given that Scrooge is not only confronted with his own demise but also with what it entails (for instance that there is no one to mourn his death), this bleak projection has the strongest (emotional) impact on him. This is evident when Scrooge, prompted by the Ghost, sees his own name on the tombstone. Realising that he is the deceased person everyone talks about, he hopes to alter the course of events by reassuring the Ghost “‘I am not the man I was’”⁹¹. This final episode of Scrooge’s dream vision reinforces that, “[f]or the duration of a dream, the dreamer believes in the reality of the events he or she experiences, and the actual world of the dream takes the place of T/AW”⁹². Only when the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come “shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost”⁹³ is Scrooge back in his TAW and his dream vision has come to an end. By then, Scrooge is redeemed and starts to lead a life of generosity.

As this chapter has shown, PWT is a highly versatile approach and offers the conceptual repertoire to analyse fictional universes created in literary texts and the relations among them. In the discussion of Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), Eva Ibbotson’s *Journey to the River Sea* (2001), Sarah Waters’ *Fingersmith* (2002) and Dianne Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), PWT’s underlying ideas and terminology are used for analysing (re-)constructions of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction. In this process, I attempt to confirm a number of working hypotheses, which focus on both generic and structural

88 Aleksandra Kędzierska. “A Christmas Carol,” 97.

89 Aleksandra Kędzierska. “A Christmas Carol,” 89.

90 Stephen Prickett. *Victorian Fantasy*, 57, original emphasis.

91 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 75.

92 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 119.

93 Charles Dickens. *A Christmas Carol*, 77.

characteristics of historical/neo-Victorian fiction as well as more specific ideas related to childhood and childhood experience:

- PWT is a particularly promising approach to (neo-Victorian) time-slip narratives, especially for describing their structural peculiarities. In the specific case of neo-Victorian time-slip narratives, the characters most often leap back in time to the Victorian past, where they are able to experience varying degrees of (cultural) otherness.
- *F-universes* in neo-Victorian texts are often created when characters in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries are engaged in (mental) acts such as dreaming or telling/hearing stories that take place in the Victorian era.
- When characters temporarily recentre from their present-day TAW to a Victorian *F-universe*, their system of reference needs to be adjusted as well, otherwise diverging norms and moral values may cause conflicts or raise questions.
- The degrees of agency and autonomy of child characters in the TAW and the *F-universe* do not necessarily have to correspond. Moreover, the degrees of agency and autonomy determine (the nature of) their wishes, actions and intentions in both the TAW and the *F-universe*.
- Children's literature often focuses on the *W-worlds* of the characters and in particular those of the protagonist(s). The central conflict tends to revolve around the actualisation of their individual *W-worlds*, most often in the peer group or in the context of the nuclear, extended and/or “transnormative family”⁹⁴.
- Family and family structures (or the absence thereof) have a crucial influence on the characters' TAPWs. For instance, an orphan from the lower classes typically has different *W-* and *K-worlds* than a child character of the same age with a middle- or upper-class background.
- Given that child characters tend to be subjected to adult authority (especially in familial environments), prohibitions seem to be a particular apt means to initiate child agency and action (via transgression) or highlight the child character's utter disempowerment.
- The actualisation of a child character's *W-world* within a family environment is often contingent upon adult intervention on behalf of the child.
- Parental indulgence and a lack of boundaries frequently result in distorted *O-* and *W-worlds*.

94 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8. For an explanation of the term “transnormative family” see chapter 3 “Children and Childhood: Historical Developments and Literary Representations in Victorian Literature”.

The number of working hypotheses already indicates that PWT can be used to explore various topics related to and features of neo-Victorian fiction, and especially issues connected with childhood (experiences).

List of Abbreviations

PWT	Possible-Worlds Theory	
(A)PW	(Alternate) Possible World	Alternative, non-actual(ised) possible worlds, such as <i>O</i> -, <i>K</i> - and <i>W</i> -worlds
T(A)PW	Textual Possible World	Alternative, non-actual(ised) possible worlds, such as <i>O</i> -, <i>K</i> - and <i>W</i> -worlds, in the fictional text
AW	Actual World	The reader's world
TAW	Textual Actual World	The actual world at the core of the fictional text
FTAW	Fantasy Textual Actual World	The actual world at the core of an <i>F</i> -universe
<i>O</i> -World	<i>Obligation-world</i>	Contains obligations and prohibitions
<i>W</i> -World	<i>Wish-world</i>	Contains a character's wishes and intentions
<i>K</i> -World	<i>Knowledge-world</i>	Contains a character's knowledge about the TAW
<i>F</i> -universe	<i>Fantasy-universe</i>	Created by mental activities (dreams, telling stories, etc.); an ontologically coherent world surrounded by the characters' T(A)PWs

6. Ephemeral (Neo-)Victorian Childhood in Pearce's Time-Slip Novel *Tom's Midnight Garden*

Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) is an enormously successful time-slip novel for children and is among the author's most famous works. It "has received probably more critical praise than any other post-war book"¹, Peter Hunt remarked in 1994, and enjoys sustained popularity as a classic of British children's fiction. Her critically acclaimed story was awarded the prestigious Carnegie Medal for children's literature in the year of its publication and was even shortlisted for the 'Carnegie of Carnegies' in 2007.² It is regarded as "Pearce's finest novel"³ by Linda Hall and belongs, according to John Rowe Townsend, among "the tiny handful of masterpieces of English children's literature"⁴. The enduring appeal of Pearce's time-slip narrative is also reflected in the numerous adaptations of the story across different media, including three serialisations by the BBC in 1968, 1974 and 1989, a feature-length movie in 1999, a stage dramatisation in 2000 and a graphic novel in 2015. What has gone largely unnoticed so far, however, is the novel's significance as a neo-Victorian text.

In *Tom's Midnight Garden*, childhood is first and foremost presented as a transient phase of life that can only be retrieved through memory and is characterised by a proximity to natural environments, in this case the titular garden. When Tom Long is forced to spend his summer holidays in quarantine at his

1 Peter Hunt. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, 137.

2 The term 'Carnegie of Carnegies' refers to a special award introduced to celebrate the medal's 70th anniversary in 2007. Among all Carnegie medalists, Philip Pullman won this most acclaimed award for his fantasy novel *Northern Lights*, which was first published in 1995. Despite the fact that "Northern Lights won with 40% of the vote against Tom's 16%", i.e., by a comparatively large margin, Pullman "gracefully indicated that he thought the runner-up – Philippa Pearce's long-accepted classic *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) – was the better book. 'Personally I feel they got the initials right but not the name,' he said. 'I don't know if the result would be the same in 100 year's time [*sic*]; maybe Philippa Pearce would win then'". John Ezard. "Pullman Children's Book Voted Best in 70 Years.", n.p. The fact that *Tom's Midnight Garden* was voted second in place reinforces the enormous and persistent popularity of Pearce's novel.

3 Linda Hall. "'Time no longer'.", 49.

4 John Rowe Townsend. *Written for Children*, 236.

childless aunt and uncle's suburban flat, because his brother Peter has come down with measles, he longs – and arguably this “‘longing’ is even expressed in his name”⁵ – for a garden and a playmate as part of his *wish-world* (or *W-world*). One night, when the old grandfather clock in the hall inexplicably chimes thirteen, Tom is transported back in time to the late nineteenth century, prior to the house's later-day conversion for multiple occupancy, and finds a magnificent garden where there is only a bleak concrete yard in his present. During his repeated visits to the midnight garden, which, however, is most often a daytime garden in the past, Tom meets and befriends Harriet (Hatty) Melbourne, a late-Victorian girl, who gradually turns into a young woman during his visits on consecutive nights. As is eventually revealed, the garden Tom is able to access and enter is created by the dreams of the old landlady, who occupies the attic flat and was dreaming about her childhood days, longing for a playmate. Finding out that the old landlady is Hatty, Tom comes to realise that childhood is only a transitional stage in human life and that he, too, has to grow up eventually. In many ways, Pearce's novel “is a truly profound study of the joys and pains of growing up”⁶ and a story which “brings together the childhood yearnings of a twentieth-century boy and a late-Victorian girl”⁷, who are able to bridge time through dream and memory.

This chapter explores the depiction of childhood as an ephemeral state in *Tom's Midnight Garden* by taking into account the spatial and temporal tensions underlying the story as well as the text's representation of growing up. It starts with an analysis of Tom's textual actual world (or TAW) in the 1950s, including the depiction of the Longs' small town garden and his relatives' narrow flat, where Tom is subject to boredom and experiences a sense of imprisonment. After elaborating on the novel's depiction of time slip, it scrutinises the titular garden at the heart of the fantasy textual actual world (or FTAW), arguing that this place constitutes an actualisation of Tom's *W-world* and becomes a place of temptation when he attempts to extend his visit indefinitely. This subchapter on Tom's childhood in the 1950s closes with a look at the novel's ending and Tom's realisation that time must progress and cannot be halted and that childhood is only an ephemeral state. The next subchapter focuses on Hatty's childhood experiences in the late Victorian era and the significance of the childhood garden, which is endowed with multiple meanings in Pearce's text. Following an analysis of Tom and Hatty's childhood play, it looks at the complex ambiguity the garden has for Hatty, claiming that while Tom finds liberation and freedom in the garden, it is a place of imprisonment and restriction for Hatty, who can only find

5 Angelika Zirker. “‘Time No Longer’”, 268.

6 Raymond E. Jones. “Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*”, 212.

7 Donna Cox. “‘Through a Door’”, 146.

freedom in growing up. The intersection between freedom and growing up is more fully explored with a focus on the symbolism of the river, especially in its frozen state. The skating trip to Ely and climbing the cathedral tower are considered instances reflecting Hatty's maturation and growth and signify the end of her childhood. This subchapter closes with the idea that childhood experience may be ephemeral but not altogether beyond retrieval. The closing remarks of this chapter briefly glimpse at Edith's eponymous graphic-novel adaptation and more specifically its visual implementation of the sense of captivity Tom experiences in his present, the idea of imprisoning himself in the midnight garden and Hatty's punishment in the garden.

Published in 1958, *Tom's Midnight Garden* can be regarded as a post-WWII children's novel and can be analysed in the context of what is commonly referred to as the second Golden Age of children's literature (roughly spanning the decades from the 1950s to the 1970s). During this time, a substantial number of texts were published that tended to express "the period's passion for a perceived past stability, often through twists of fantasy which allow lonely child protagonists to escape to a British past"⁸ and return with a deeper understanding of history, (national) identity and the passing of time. According to Humphrey Carpenter, this thematic link to the past is characteristic of "the *greater part* of children's fiction produced in this period", most of which were concerned with "the discovery or rediscovery of the past"⁹ and its immediate or far-reaching impact on the present.¹⁰ Besides Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Lucy M. Boston's *Green Knowe* series (1954–1976), K.M. Peyton's *A Pattern of Roses* (1972), Penelope Lively's *The House in Norham Gardens* (1974) and *A Stitch in Time* (1976) as well as Valerie Weldrick's *Time Sweep* (1976) make use of the time-slip pattern to explore this temporal connection.¹¹ Likewise, the return to a rambling green garden can also be accounted for by the novel's date of publication. It was the time when "Britain set about sweeping away the bombed remains of architectural gems and medieval city centers"¹². This meant that in particular cities changed dramatically, but to some extent smaller towns were affected as well. As Linda Hall observes, "[i]n an epidemic of modernity and apparent hatred of the past, loved landmarks and townscapes succumbed to rebuilding mania", whereby "[t]he past was often obliterated by anonymous modern blocks"¹³, which were, however, necessitated by a shortage of housing. Therefore, the journey back into

8 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 14.

9 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 217, my emphasis.

10 Cf. Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Past Reimagined.", 159.

11 For a more extensive list of time-slip novels published in the twentieth century, see Tess Cosslett. "'History from Below'.", 243.

12 Linda Hall. "'House and Garden'.", 154.

13 Linda Hall. "'House and Garden'.", 154.

a past unaffected by these extensive urban developments must have contributed to the particular appeal of Pearce's narrative for her contemporary readers (and arguably still does so for today's readers) and elicited a sense of nostalgia for a greener and more 'natural' world.

Specifically revisiting and revising the *Victorian* past, *Tom's Midnight Garden* arguably is also among the earliest British neo-Victorian children's novels.¹⁴ Like many later neo-Victorian novels, Pearce's text explores the tension between the Victorian past and the present by having "one foot in the nineteenth century and one in the twentieth", which emphasises the story's "bi-directionality"¹⁵. The two temporal layers and Tom's recurrent movements between these layers are part of the novel's metahistorical engagement with and exploration of the Victorian period, which revolves in particular around childhood. The child characters' different temporal backgrounds are used to establish a range of contrasts and foreground developments as well as juxtapose their childhood experiences in the late Victorian era and the 1950s respectively. Throughout *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Pearce arguably anticipates several concerns that are nowadays considered core topics in neo-Victorian scholarship, such as (traumatic) memory, the tension between past and present and the recuperation of voices marginalised by the historical record.

As a text employing time slip as a plot device, Pearce's novel also deliberately breaks various accessibility relations as developed by Ryan.¹⁶ Most notably, the text introduces fantastical elements by lifting *E/natural* laws as an accessibility relation, because Tom, like a ghost, is invisible to almost all characters in the FTAW, except for Hatty and the gardener Abel, gradually begins to 'thin out' and is incapable of affecting objects in the *fantasy-universe* (or *F-universe*). Not only does he not leave any footprints on the dewy grass, but he can also walk through doors, even if pushing himself through solid objects takes "enormous effort and [creates] peculiar, if indescribable, sensations"¹⁷ in his body. Accordingly, accessibility relation *A/properties*, which describes the compatibility of properties of objects in the (T)AW and the (F)TAW, is lifted as well. Arguably, the text also breaks with *B/same inventory* and *C/expanded inventory*, because Tom travels back several decades into the past. In the FTAW, he does not encounter members of his TAW, because most of them were not even born at this time, including his own parents as well as Aunt Gwen and Uncle Alan. Notable exceptions in this

14 For instance, Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sarah K. Day identify *Tom's Midnight Garden*, amongst others, as a precursor text of many twenty-first-century neo-Victorian time-slip narratives. Cf. Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara K. Day. "Introduction.", 9–10.

15 Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 15.

16 For more information on accessibility relations, see chapter 5 "Possible-Worlds Theory as a Tool for Analysing Historical Fiction".

17 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 49.

regard are Hatty Bartholomew, who is a member of his TAW and whom he meets in the FTAW, albeit in the form of her younger self, and his brother Peter, who, at one point and only very briefly, dreams himself into the FTAW. As a result of sending Tom physically back to the late Victorian era, the text also lifts what Maire-Laure Ryan referred to as “[h]istorical coherence”¹⁸, as Tom himself is an anachronistic presence in the past. Breaking with these accessibility relations renders the FTAW a fantastic, though still fairly realistic, dreamscape.

As many time-slip stories, the text also breaks with J/temporal continuity on a story-internal level.¹⁹ In Pearce’s story, Tom physically recentres to and has to navigate the Victorian past, which is presented as a chronologically incoherent world, as is shown in more detail below. As a result, Tom does not know which phase of Hatty’s life he will enter when he steps through the door in the hall and, before long, begins to question the workings of time. He even has to recentre *within* this *f-universe* once to an earlier memory, in which he encounters a much younger Hatty, which places the FTAW at a further distance from the TAW in which jumps into the past/in time are considered impossible. In this context, the FTAW also lifts *G/logic* due to being created through childhood dreams and memories. This becomes most apparent when Tom enters the garden and sees how a tall fir tree falls during a storm, but stands again during his next visit, which prompts him to question the workings of time. In presenting the FTAW as a world questioning the chronology of time that is contrasted with Tom’s present, the text foregrounds the differences between linear time and dream-/memory-time and allows Pearce to place a special emphasis on the topics ‘childhood’ and ‘growing up’ and on the changes in the perception of childhood that had taken place until the 1950s.²⁰

18 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, 45, original emphasis.

19 On a story-external level, the text nowadays breaks J/temporal continuity on an additional level: in contrast to Pearce’s contemporary readers, who only had to recentre to the late Victorian period with Tom, the present-day reader has to mentally recentre doubly, to Tom’s present in the 1950s and, together with Tom, to the Victorian past. The time that has elapsed between the publication of Pearce’s work and a present-day reading of the text makes the reader acutely aware of the passing of time (a topic that is pivotal in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*) and the temporal distance between the Victorian era and the present moment, which has inevitably increased since the 1950s.

20 Scholars variously employ the terms ‘dream-time’ and ‘memory-time’ to refer to the temporal make-up of the FTAW. For instance, Lesley Aers considers “the idea of dream time” crucial in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, while Maria Nikolajeva, elaborating on “[t]he double nature of Time”, considers the midnight garden in the context of *kairos*, arguing that “[k]airos is in this case equal to what may be called ‘memory-time,’ which is naturally nonlinear: everything that happens in the garden is evoked by Hatty’s memories of her childhood”. Lesley Aers. “The Treatment of Time in Four Children’s Books.”, 78.; Maria Nikolajeva. *From Mythic to Linear*, 104, 105.

6.1. Tom: Growing up in the 1950s

Tom Long is introduced as a child growing up in the 1950s and as a character able to slip back in time to the Victorian past. Even though the text does not provide information on his age, because Pearce “never give[s] any central child character an age”²¹ in her stories, Tom is presumably “about nine or ten years old”²² and thus still a prepubescent child when he is to stay at his aunt and uncle’s. Though Tom is not a representative of a Victorian childhood in this text, he nevertheless fulfils a crucial function: as the story’s primary focalizer, his childhood experiences are used to contrast Hatty’s in the late Victorian era. Accordingly, the text elaborates on Tom in the context of notions of imprisonment, disempowerment and liberation to revisit these ideas with regard to Hatty’s childhood. This subchapter looks at Tom’s TAW in the 1950s, the imminent, though temporary, separation from his family and the living arrangements at his aunt and uncle’s during his ten-day quarantine stay, before elaborating on the aspect of time slip by focusing on the agents involved in his slips back in time. These include Mrs Bartholomew’s old house and the old grandfather clock as well as the hall, as the place where Tom recentres to the Victorian version of the house night after night. This subchapter then proceeds with an analysis of the FTAW, more specifically the midnight garden, where Tom is seemingly presented with an actualisation of his *W-world* and ‘free’ from adult supervision. It closes with an examination of the encounter between Tom and old Mrs Bartholomew – a key moment in the novel’s depiction of the ephemerality of childhood –, and Tom’s endeavours to locate Hatty and his experiences in the midnight garden in time, which foreground the novel’s metahistorical engagement with the Victorian past.

The story opens with a chapter aptly entitled ‘Exile’ and describes the reasons for and Tom’s reaction to his quarantine stay at his aunt and uncle’s suburban flat. As a child who had looked forward to his summer holidays with his brother Peter in the garden and in a tree-house they wanted to build, Tom is disappointed and far from pleased about his parents’ decision to send him to his relatives due to Peter’s measles infection. His dissatisfaction is explicitly expressed in the opening paragraph of the story, which discloses the conflict between his *W-world* and the TAW: “If, standing alone on the back doorstep, Tom allowed himself to weep tears, they were tears of anger. He looked his good-bye at the garden, and raged that he had to leave it – leave it and Peter. They had planned to spend their time here so joyously these holidays”²³. Tom’s emotional response (i.e., feeling anger) testifies that “one of the dysphoric states or unwanted actions is ac-

21 Roni Natov and Geraldine DeLuca. “An Interview with Philippa Pearce.”, 81.

22 Donna Cox. “‘Through a Door.’”, 145 n.1.

23 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 1.

tualized”²⁴ in his TAW, which conflicts with his original summer holiday plans and implies that he has to yield to his parents’ authority and comply with their decisions as part of his *obligation-world* (or O-world) – an experience that is presumably typical of childhood. The immediate consequences resulting from the imminent separation from both his brother and playmate and their garden are foreshadowed in Tom’s location on the back doorstep, where he is feeling lonely, an emotional state that will be revisited in the Kitsons’ narrow flat.²⁵

Despite the fact that the Longs only have a small town garden that is referred to briefly, it receives special relevance at the beginning of the story to emphasise Tom’s feeling of loss. The significance of the garden correlates with the idea that “children’s books powerfully reflect the idea of myriad links and overlaps between the child and the natural”²⁶ inherent to the Romantic conception of childhood and is hinted at in the opening paragraph, in which the garden is given precedence over his brother (Tom had to “leave it and Peter”²⁷). Consisting of “a vegetable plot and a grass plot and one flower-bed and a rough patch by the back fence”²⁸, the Longs’ garden is introduced as a place of childhood play, which seems to revolve mostly around an apple tree. This tree “was large, but bore very little fruit, and accordingly the two boys had always been allowed to climb freely over it. These holidays they would have built a tree-house among its branches”²⁹ and hence would have spent a considerable amount of time in the cultivated natural environment.

From the onset of his stay at his aunt and uncle’s flat, Tom expresses his anger through his seemingly profound aversion to both of his relatives. His attitude towards his uncle borders on animosity, as “he did not much like Uncle Alan, and he did not want to like him at all” and “would have preferred him to be a brutal uncle”³⁰ to have an excuse to return home to his family – this arguably is a nod towards Victorian novels such as *Jane Eyre*, in which cruel and callous relatives feature prominently. Utterly disappointed about having his holiday plans thwarted, Tom even thinks Aunt Gwen “‘worse, because she’s a child-lover, and she’s kind’”³¹. This reveals Tom’s egocentric, distorted and petulant view as well as his hostile stance towards both of his relatives, who are presented as unfit

24 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 118.

25 His location on the doorstep is also important in another way, as he is neither properly in the house nor wholly in the garden, which presages his later movements between both places in the late-Victorian version of Mrs Bartholomew’s house and stresses the overall significance of crossing thresholds in the novel.

26 Karin Lesnik-Oberstein. “Children’s Literature and the Environment.”, 209.

27 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 1.

28 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 1.

29 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 1–2.

30 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 3.

31 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 3.

company, let alone playmates, for the young protagonist. Despite the fact that both Uncle Alan and Aunt Gwen apparently have the best intentions, they cannot fulfil Tom's immediate, emotional needs or actualise his *W-world* during his quarantine stay. For the duration of his visit, Tom thus turns into "a displaced child"³², and temporarily becomes part of what Elizabeth Thiel termed a "transnormative family"³³, headed by his aunt and uncle, who determine Tom's *O-world* throughout his stay.³⁴

Given that Pearce uses a plethora of settings to establish spatial contrasts and endow the individual places with emotive and symbolic meaning, the tension between the TAW and Tom's *W-world* also surfaces on the spatial level and is inseparably intertwined with the notion of home. Focusing on the representation of home in children's literature, Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis argue that, "while story settings in children's literature are varied and diverse (cities and countrysides, gardens and forests), they all can be categorized in terms of the relationship of the main character to two places: 'home' and 'not home'"³⁵. The perception of the "sense of place", a term employed by geographer T. Cresswell to describe "the feelings and emotions a place evokes"³⁶, is thus inevitably bound to the focalizing subject. For Tom, the Kitsons' flat constitutes a "'not home'", "a place where [his 'physical and emotional'] needs are not met"³⁷. It becomes a place of boredom and loneliness for the young protagonist, who lacks physical exercise and is utterly spoilt with food, which makes him "merely resentful and lifeless"³⁸ and gives him indigestion that keeps him awake at night. As Tom plans to confide to Peter, the narrow flat is "miserably dull" and there is "nothing to do, nowhere to go, nobody – to speak of – to do things with"³⁹, making his temporary abode an unsuitable place for a boy. The inadequacy of the place also becomes evident in the spatial contrast created between the small garden attached to Tom's home and the concrete yard of Mrs Bartholomew's house. This backyard merely consists of "a narrow, paved space enclosed by a wooden fence, with a

32 Kimberley Reynolds. *Children's Literature*, 38.

33 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

34 Kimberley Reynolds uses the term "displaced child" in the context of Lucy M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* (1954), which "is another story of a displaced child", as seven-year-old half-orphan Toseland (Tolly) Oldknow is sent to live with his great-grandmother. Kimberley Reynolds. *Children's Literature*, 38.

35 Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis. "'Home' and 'Not Home' in Children's Stories.", 223.

36 T. Cresswell. "Place.", 169.

37 Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis. "'Home' and 'Not Home' in Children's Stories.", 223.

38 Margaret Rustin and Michael Rustin. "Loneliness, Dreaming and Discovery.", 208.

39 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 13.

gateway on to the side-road at one end”⁴⁰ where the dustbins and an old car are kept; it does not provide Tom with a natural retreat or an attractive place to play.

Quarantined and hence by necessity confined to the Kitsons’ flat, Tom experiences a sense of imprisonment that goes beyond merely having to bide his time inside in case he might be contagious. Upon his arrival and entering the guest room, which, for the duration of Tom’s stay is to be his room, he immediately notices that “‘there are bars across the bottom of the window!’”⁴¹; in other words, he finds himself in a former nursery, a (small) child’s space. In light of his protest (“‘I’m not a baby!’”), Aunt Gwen attempts to reconcile him by explaining that the bars have “‘nothing to do with you’”⁴² and had been there prior to their move to the flat. They nevertheless signify that Tom remains “trapped in a child-centered world”⁴³, as is further suggested by the reading material he is provided with, which chiefly consists of Aunt Gwen’s former childhood books. As Sandra Dinter observes, “[t]he claustrophobic atmosphere” in the house “culminates in Tom’s room”⁴⁴ and arguably intensifies his longing for freedom.

In the TAW and especially at the opening of the story, Tom considers himself a powerless boy and evokes the type of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD.⁴⁵ He perceives his ‘disempowerment’ in the context of familial decisions and in particular those of his relatives, as is evident in a conversation with his uncle, who caught him wandering around in the flat after bedtime. Uncle Alan admonishes him, “‘Tom, there must be no more of this. You are not to put the light on again once it has been put out; nor, equally, are you to get out of bed’”⁴⁶. Ignoring that Tom suffers from food-induced insomnia and insisting that children require at least ten hours of sleep, Uncle Alan makes Tom “‘promise to observe *our* [his aunt and uncles’] *wishes*’”⁴⁷, which is indicative of the clash between Tom’s *W-world* and his *O-world*. The conflicting positions and Tom’s ‘powerlessness’ are reinforced by the heterodiegetic narrator, who summarises Tom’s thoughts by means of psychonarration: “Why could a boy never refuse to promise these large demands?”⁴⁸ While child readers are presumably apt to identify with Tom at this point and share his perception, considering him a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED,

40 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 30.

41 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 6.

42 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 6.

43 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 219.

44 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 225.

45 See chapter 4 “Representations of Children in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Towards a Typology” for a more general assessment of this type of child in neo-Victorian fiction.

46 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 12.

47 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 13, my emphasis.

48 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 13.

PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, the response of adult readers might differ significantly. They are much more likely to place him in the category of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD, because his aunt and uncle's demands (i.e., going to bed early and sleep) are not unreasonable and meant for his own good. This categorisation is further reinforced when taking the overall situation into account: Tom is loved and missed by his family, who send him to his aunt and uncle to protect him, he does not have to help in the household but is allowed to play, and his aunt and uncle do their utmost to make his stay as pleasant as possible. Tom's response and self-perception hence derive from his utter dissatisfaction with the overall situation (forfeiting the garden, staying with his relatives, bars across the window, etc.), which seems unfair to his mind and leads him to resent the adults' authority. It is only when the old grandfather clock in the hall heralds the magical thirteenth hour and he is transported back to the Victorian past that Tom can temporarily escape the authority and control of his relatives and achieve a simultaneous actualisation of his *W-* and *O-worlds*.

Similar to other neo-Victorian children's texts, Pearce uses an old house as a link and means to access the past. In neo-Victorian children's stories, this temporal connection between the two periods tends to take two predominant forms, though further subdivisions can be made.⁴⁹ In one variant, the child protagonists physically or mentally slip back to the Victorian past and explore the Victorian version of the house and its premises, as is the case in Karen McCombie's *The Whispers of Wilderwood Hall* (2016) or Mary Downing Hahn's *Time for Andrew* (1994).⁵⁰ In the other type, the past intrudes and resurfaces in the child protagon-

49 Temporal shifts in neo-Victorian fiction can take different "direction[s] of movement (backwards in time, forwards in time, simultaneous reciprocal 'switching', or incursion without movement)" and different "mode[s] of temporal transposition (physical, re-embodied, disembodied, or visionary projection), with categories sometimes overlapping within the same texts". Marie-Luise Kohlke and Denise Burkhard. "The 'Shiftology' of Time Slip in Neo-Victorian Children's and YA Fiction.", forthcoming.

50 In McCombie's novel, the connection between the past and the present is an audible one at first. Hearing voices in the large, derelict Scottish mansion where she is to live, Ellis finds herself going back and forth between her present and the year 1912 to uncover what happened to the large family that inhabited the house about 100 years ago. In the FTAW, she can only be seen by the young housemaid Flora and merely becomes, to adopt the terminology provided by Doreen Maitre, a spectator in the past. In Downing Hahn's *Time for Andrew*, by contrast, Drew is 'forced' to adopt Andrew's identity and fill in his place in the family temporarily and hence becomes a participant in the past. In this story, Drew and his aunt find several marbles in an old cigar box hidden underneath the floorboards in the attic and a note saying that "[t]hese marbles belong to / ANDREW JOSEPH TYLER / If you take them you will be sorry. / 7 June 1910". Against Drew's better judgement, his aunt takes the marbles, but promises put them back on the next day. At night, Drew suddenly hears sounds from the attic and sees a boy called Andrew, who looks like a mirror image of himself but suffers from diphtheria. Knowing that modern medicine will cure Andrew, the two boys switch places. However, after he has been cured, Andrew, who fears that he might still die in one way or another in 1910, refuses to

onists' present in the form of echoes and perceptible traces connected with the house and/or its former inhabitants. Both Lively's *A Stitch in Time* (1976) and Ann Pilling's *Black Harvest* (1983) make use of this intrusion of the past into the present and suggest that, although the past cannot be revisited, it still reverberates in the present and provides a sensory and immersive experience for (child) characters.⁵¹ Pearce's story, a text "famous, in particular, for its time-slip narrative"⁵², makes use of the former pattern and belongs to those neo-Victorian novels "in which children exist both in the present and in the Victorian past"⁵³. The use of this structural pattern enables Pearce to revisit the past, which is presented as a much greener world than Tom's present and hence is likely to elicit a sense of nostalgia in the reader.⁵⁴

swap back and suggests a bargain. Drew is henceforth 'trapped' in the past and has to live Andrew's life unless he is able to win a game of marbles against him. Cf. Doreen Maitre. *Literature and Possible Worlds*, 45–46.; Mary Downing Hahn. *Time for Andrew*, 27.

51 In Lively's *A Stitch in Time*, Maria Foster keeps "hear[ing] the squeaking noise" of a swing in the garden and "a little dog that keeps yapping" while she is on summer holidays with her parents in Lyme Regis. Penelope Lively. *A Stitch in Time*, 18. Never seeing either dog or swing, Maria, who is an imaginative child, is convinced that they are both real. As it turns out, both belonged to a Victorian girl called Harriet Polstead and her family, who lived in the house around the middle of the nineteenth century. While uncovering Harriet's story, Maria sometimes feels as if she temporarily and only always very briefly slips into the Victorian girl's skin, sharing her experience, without however, slipping back in time in the conventional sense. In Lively's novel, the past reverberates in Maria's present in different ways, even if it can only be perceived by Maria. In Pilling's *Black Harvest*, the past intrudes the present in a similar, albeit more intense way, when Mrs Blakeman, her children and their cousin are invited to spend their holidays at Dr Moynihan's newly-built and not yet finished bungalow near Ballinagliesh on the coast of Ireland. Near and in the house, they feel unwell, have nightmares and repeatedly discern "a rich, sweetish, rotten smell" and other sensory phenomena, all of which are, as it turns out, in some way or other connected to the potato famine that struck Ireland in the 1840s, and to one family in particular. Ann Pilling. *Black Harvest*, 19–20. In the end, Oliver accidentally discovers the final hiding place of the evicted Morrissey family, who starved to death on the premises over a hundred years ago. The novel thus establishes a strong connection between place and past and provides an even more immersive experience than Lively's novel in terms of both intensity and frequency of the events.

52 Heather Montgomery. "Introduction.", 203.

53 Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. "The Secret Sharer.", 2.

54 An ecocritical thrust can be observed in Pearce's narrative when Tom asks his aunt if there is a river near the Kitsons' flat, hoping to see the same river – "clear, gentle-flowing, shallow, and green with reeds and water-plants" – he had seen in the meadows flowing past Hatty's home. When they stand on a bridge and look down on the water, Tom comes to realise that "the weeds below the surface of the water, instead of being slim and green and shining [like they were in the late Victorian era], were clothed in a kind of dingy, brown fur. There were no geese about, nor any waterfowl. There certainly seemed to be no fish. On the other hand, there was a large quantity of broken glass, broken crockery and empty tins dimly to be seen on the river-bed". This form of pollution is, as Aunt Gwen claims, a direct result of "all the houses that have been built, and the factories'" and apparently also people's carelessness towards and a lack of reverence for the natural environment. Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 51, 147. Similarly, when Tom sees Hatty's room (he partly shares in his present) for the first time,

Old Mrs Bartholomew's house turns out to provide a strong link to the Victorian past, even though it has been subject to modernisation and converted into flats over the intervening years. The special role of the house is already hinted at in the description of the surroundings, where the neighbourhood is "crowded round with newer, smaller houses" while the old house is perceived as "oblong, plain, grave"⁵⁵ and stands out from among the more recent buildings. Yet, this connection surfaces more strongly in the hall of the house, which is still infused with a sense of the past. When Tom steps inside, he is greeted by "a smell of old dust" and "felt a chill"⁵⁶ as he starts looking around:

The hall of the big house was not mean nor was it ugly, but it was unwelcoming. Here it lay at the heart of the house – for it went centrally from front to back with a sideways part to the stair-foot, in a T-shape – and the heart of the house was empty – cold – dead. Someone had pinned bright travel-posters on to the high, grey walls; someone had left a laundry-box with its laundry-list, in a corner; there were empty milk-bottles against a far door, with a message to the milkman: none of these things seemed really to belong to the hall.⁵⁷

In its present-day manifestation, the hall's former glory and splendour are only vaguely perceptible and its description suggests that this place "reflects [the] [tension] between tradition and change"⁵⁸ that is characteristic of Pearce's novel more generally. While certain objects, such as the travel posters or the laundry box, strike Tom as being anachronistic, the old grandfather clock, which has been "'screwed to the wall at the back'" with "'the screws [...] rusted in'"⁵⁹, appears to fit house and hall perfectly. It is a fascinating, antiquated object and "a sentinel reminder of the building's grander days"⁶⁰ that immediately catches Tom's attention, but which he is not permitted to touch. The continuous "tick, and then tick, and then tick"⁶¹ of the old clock emphasises the steady flow and progression of time that even the hall cannot fully escape, making it a liminal place, one that brings together the old and the new, preservation and progress, past and present.

It is in the hall where Tom recentres to the Victorian version of the large house one night when the idea of the time-slip journey into the past is introduced and where the departure from J/temporal continuity occurs on a story-internal level.⁶²

he says that he likes her room and the view much better, because the area was still unaffected by the houses built after the Victorian period. Cf. *ibid.*, 146.

55 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 4.

56 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 4.

57 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 5.

58 Peter Hunt. *Children's Literature*, 227.

59 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 5.

60 Valerie Krips. *The Presence of the Past*, 61.

61 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 5.

62 Despite the fact that *Tom's Midnight Garden* can be regarded as one of the earliest neo-Victorian novels for children, the time-slip pattern had been made use of numerous times

In time-slip novels, “[t]he jumps in time [...] are not usually arbitrary; there is normally some link, an object which existed in the past and exists still in the present”⁶³. In neo-Victorian children’s time-slip novels, these objects can be as diverse as a Victorian brass bed, as is the case in Weldrick’s *Time Sweep*, a white statue with a sun-/moondial in Helen Cresswell’s *Moondial* (1987) or a mirror with age spots behind a painting in Kristine Asselin and Jen Malone’s *The Art of the Swap* (2018), all of which stress the significance of material culture in neo-Victorian children’s novels. In *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, the magical journey into the past is initiated by an object, the grandfather clock, and a place, the old house.⁶⁴ From the onset, the clock is a highly unreliable object, as it keeps “measuring a time out of time”⁶⁵ by striking hours that do not exist in ordinary, linear time. As an object that is ever present and audible in the hall, the clock may even function as a mnemonic device for the old landlady that triggered her dreams of her childhood days, in which the clock was already standing in the hall. Similarly, the house is also endowed with magical qualities and “is not only personified but also animated”⁶⁶. On the night of his first visit to the garden, Tom hears the grandfather clock strike thirteen and is convinced that “[h]e must have imagined it”⁶⁷. It is in this moment of doubt and uncertainty that the house seems alive and responds to Tom’s thoughts with sighing and whispering:

The house, which appeared to have been following the argument, sighed impatiently. ‘At least, I [Tom] think it isn’t true; and anyway it’s muddling.’ Meanwhile you’re missing your chance, whispered the house. ‘I can’t honourably take it,’ said Tom, ‘because I don’t

before. Drawing on Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs, Hall notes that it in fact has its origins in the Edwardian period: “In *The House of Arden* (1908), E. Nesbit invented the time-slip story as we know it today”. Linda Hall. “‘House and Garden’”, 153.

63 Lesley Aers. “The Treatment of Time in Four Children’s Books.”, 69.

64 The grandfather clock as an object measuring the passing of time is an especially apt object to be associated with time travel. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the opening credits of the 1989 BBC adaptation directed by Christine Secombe and the 1999 feature film directed by Willard Carroll both feature clocks. The former focuses on the clock face of the old grandfather clock and opens with a shot of the angel on the clock face. The face then starts to slowly spin counter clockwise, showing greenery, a meadow with cows and Ely cathedral. The progress of time is implied by the change of the times of day, from day to night, and by the display of different seasons, from spring/summer to winter. While both the time of day and the different seasons imply the linearity of time, the anti-clockwise movement hints at a circularity of time and a turning back of the clock. The opening credits hence disclose the story’s underlying thematic focus. Carroll’s adaptation, by contrast, opens with a shot of a sundial. It is shown at different times of day and at different seasons and lingers on a winter scene, which foreshadows the significance of winter in the overall story. Christine Secombe (dir.). *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 00:03–00:40.; Willard Carroll (dir.). *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 00:11–01:52.

65 Valerie Krips. “Plotting the Past.”, 100.

66 Angelika Zirker. “‘Time No Longer’”, 270.

67 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 15.

believe the grandfather clock was telling the truth when it struck thirteen.’ Oh, said the house coldly, so it’s a liar, is it?⁶⁸

In this instance the house “tempts Tom to explore the premises”⁶⁹ and lures him out of bed, down into the hall, where his adventure begins. This conversation might also be considered a projection of Tom’s *W-world*, because he takes his ‘conversation’ with the house as an excuse to get out of bed and start an exploration.⁷⁰ Thus, it is only through the magical workings of the thirteenth hour and a story-internal act of recentring, whose precise moment in time cannot be determined, that Tom can enter and explore the FTAW, which chiefly takes the form of a lush and copious garden.

The midnight garden is introduced as an idyllic setting that forms a stark spatial contrast to Tom’s TAW. As in much Edwardian fiction, this garden “offer[s] freedom and adventure”⁷¹ to Tom and evokes a sense of wonder in the boy when he opens the door that he expects to lead to “‘[a] sort of back-yard, very poky, with rubbish bins’”⁷²; instead, he finds

a great lawn where flower-beds bloomed; a towering fir-tree, and thick, beetle-browed yews that humped their shapes down two sides of the lawn; on the third side, to the right, a greenhouse almost the size of a real house; from each corner of the lawn, a path that twisted away to some other depths of garden, with other trees.⁷³

The natural, almost paradisiacal, environment of the garden with its size and sheer spaciousness “compensates for the narrowness of the flat”⁷⁴ and immediately triggers Tom’s interest in exploration, which he plans on satisfying the next day, because his *O-world* prevents him from doing so at this particular moment.⁷⁵ Juxtaposing the rambling garden with the small, narrow yard in Tom’s

68 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 16.

69 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 226.

70 This idea is drawn upon in the BBC adaptation, in which Tom appears to have this dialogue with his own thoughts. Cf. Christine Secombe (dir.). *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 20:07–21:52.

71 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 7.

72 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 19.

73 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 19–20. The 1989 adaptation emphasises the spaciousness associated with the garden by employing a ‘dolly zoom shot’, a shot by which “the camera dollies in toward a subject” while “the lens is zoomed out” (or vice versa). This cinematic “effect is extremely overt and unsettling, and is therefore reserved for moments in a story when something especially meaningful is taking place”, in this case Tom’s discovery of the garden, which appears to become larger the further the camera zooms out. Gustavo Mercado. *The Filmmaker’s Eye*, 149.

74 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 226.

75 On the next day, “[h]e would run full tilt over the grass, leaping the flower-beds; he would peer through the glittering panes of the greenhouse – perhaps open the door and go in; he would visit each alcove and archway clipped in the yew-trees – he would climb the trees and make his way from one to another through thickly interlacing branches”. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 20.

present, Pearce “presents urbanity as an unsuitable environment for children because it alienates the child from what the Romantic imagination constructs as its natural habitat”⁷⁶. In the garden, the bond between the child and the natural environment is instantly established when Tom, after finding the garden behind the door, is said to have “stepped forward *instinctively*” and even plans on “hid[ing], silent and safe as a bird, among this richness of leaf and bough and tree-trunk”⁷⁷ should his relatives come and look for him.⁷⁸

Similar to Mary Lennox in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, probably the most obvious intertext of *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, Tom is nurtured by the green space immediately. Even though he has only just discovered the garden and merely had a cursory glance at it, he takes the positive feeling the garden evokes back to the Kitsons’ flat. Back in bed and thinking about what he could do in the garden the next day, Tom “almost had the feel of tree-trunks between his hands as he climbed; he could almost smell the heavy blooming of the hyacinths in the corner beds”⁷⁹, a fragrance that evokes recollections of his home, to which he eventually falls asleep. As I have argued elsewhere, these kind of nourishing feelings are reminiscent of those described by Romantic poets.⁸⁰ The last stanza of William Wordsworth’s poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” (published in 1807), for instance, highlights the prolonged nurturing influence of the field of daffodils on the lyrical I: “For oft when on my couch I lie / In vacant or in pensive mood, / They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude, / And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the Daffodils”⁸¹. Similar to the lyrical I in Wordsworth’s poem, Tom takes the positive feeling and the strong impression the garden evokes back to the Kitsons’ flat and is nourished by the green space even in his sleep: “The next morning, when Tom woke, he could not think why he felt so happy, until he remembered the garden. The appearances in the hall seemed less likely than ever; but the impression on his

76 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 225.

77 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 20, my emphasis.

78 In the 1989 BBC adaptation, this idea has been incorporated in the opening. Instead of standing on the doorstep, Tom is hiding from his mother in one of the trees in the Longs’ garden, which establishes the connection between childhood and natural environments and highlights Tom’s fondness of the green area. Cf. Christine Secombe (dir.). *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 01:49–02:25. At this point, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) might have served as an intertext, because Alice, too, sees a garden through a door, which becomes the object of her desire. It is referred to as “the loveliest garden you ever saw”, and Alice’s efforts at adjusting her size by consuming food and drink constitute her attempts to bring about an actualisation of her *W-world*, while the place of desire simultaneously establishes the link between child and natural spaces. Lewis Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, 16.

79 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 24.

80 Cf. Denise Burkhard. “Agency and Spatial Transformation in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*.”, 377–378.

81 William Wordsworth. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.”, 304, ll. 13–18.

mind of what he had seen through the garden door remained unchanged”⁸². For Tom, the garden thus bears a host of positive associations, evoked by the strong spatial contrast between the green space and the flat, and provides him with a temporary wish fulfilment and actualisation of his *W-world*.

Throughout Pearce’s story the garden becomes a site of exploration. For Tom, the garden is part of an alternative realm and appears to be devoid of adult supervision and control. Being invisible to almost all characters of the FTAW, he can roam the garden, map its extents and climb its trees without receiving punishment or being scolded for misconduct. Arguably, Tom’s “unusual physicality in the midnight garden serves as a way to stage the garden as a counter-space opposed to a domestic sphere in which movements have become automatized”⁸³ and which does not permit running and romping about. Being in the garden thus has a liberating effect on him, which is hinted at by the extensive amount of movement possible within the garden’s boundaries, as is evident during his first proper visit to the garden. At first, Tom follows the outer gravel paths before stepping “on a cross-path”, which “tunnelled through the gloom of yew-trees arching overhead from one side, and hazel nut stubs from the other”⁸⁴. He finds the kitchen gardens, a pond and the summer-house and creeps through a tunnel in the hedge leading outside the garden. Upon return to the walled enclosure, he gradually begins “to make himself familiar with it – its paths and alleys and archways, its bushes and trees” and “noted some of its landmarks”⁸⁵, including the trees and a sundial. In other words, he explores the garden thoroughly within a very short amount of time, apparently excited about what he sees and which possibilities the garden affords.

As soon as Tom meets and befriends Hatty after several solitary explorations of the FTAW, the garden takes on its meaning as place of childhood play and friendship. Finding out that the garden is inhabited by the Melbourne children Hubert, James and Edgar and their cousin Hatty, Tom immediately attempts to befriend the boys and hopes to join in their games, establishing the connection to friendship and play immediately. However, he quickly finds out that he can only be seen by Hatty, who has spied on him several times before and is seemingly keen on making him his playmate, and befriends her instead. At this point, the

82 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 25. The idea of the nurturing influence of the garden is also drawn upon when Tom catches a cold and has to stay in bed: “At the beginning of Tom’s illness, his head had really felt a little light; and his eyelids gummed themselves up easily. He did not mind keeping them closed: then, in his imagination, he could look into his garden and see, in fancy, what Hatty might be doing there”. *Ibid.*, 101. Similar to Mary Lennox when she cannot be in her garden, Tom imaginatively escapes to and thinks about the green space and his playmate.

83 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 228.

84 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 37.

85 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 39.

novel introduces a cross-gender friendship, which, due to Edwardian children's fiction's strong focus on groups of children, has been increasingly incorporated in children's literature since the early twentieth century, as is exemplified by texts such as *Peter and Wendy* (a text that hints at and arguably acknowledges a cross-gender friendship already in its title) and *The Secret Garden*. Strikingly, Hatty also establishes the garden's connection to play in engaging Tom in a game of hide and seek shortly before introducing herself as "'Princess Hatty'"⁸⁶ in the context of make-believe play. During his subsequent visits to the garden, a deep friendship between Hatty and Tom develops and both enjoy having each other as playmates. In spite of Tom's own explorations beforehand, he only comes to fully realise the garden's potential in Hatty's company, who "showed Tom many things he could not have seen for himself"⁸⁷, including a host of hiding places. During their play, Hatty even compensates Tom's "physical inability to affect anything in the garden"⁸⁸ and intensifies his experience by opening doors Tom cannot open by himself, such as the ones leading to the orchard, the potting shed, the heating house and the greenhouse. She even allows him to share experiences he would not have been able to have on his own, such as catching a goldfish from the tank. When Hatty is about to plunge her arm in the water,

Tom laid his arm along hers and behind it, with his open hand behind hers, finger to finger. So, as with one arm and one hand, they dipped into the water and hunted. Tom could have done nothing by himself; but when Hatty very nearly caught a fish, Tom's hand seemed one with hers in the catching.⁸⁹

In this respect, Hatty clearly "enrich[es] his understanding of the garden and, hence, the pleasures of childhood"⁹⁰. It seems that the more time Tom spends and plays in the garden with Hatty, who temporarily has substituted his brother Peter as playmate, the stronger their friendship becomes and the more Tom relies on Hatty's presence and their joint explorations.⁹¹

Overall, Tom experiences the garden as a place of liberation and as an actualisation of his *W-world*, which impact his position on the childhood scale. While slipping back in time and returning to his present multiple times, Tom appears to alternate between the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR

86 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 71.

87 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 74.

88 Virginia Wolf. "Belief in *Tom's Midnight Garden*.", 143.

89 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 76.

90 Raymond E. Jones. "Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*.", 214.

91 At one point, he seems to conflate Hatty and the garden. While the garden initially entices Tom, it "seem[ed] a green emptiness" at a later point in the story when Hatty is in one of the smaller gardens, not responding to Tom's calls. Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 114. Similarly, in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, Mary's friendship with Colin Craven and Dickon Sowerby seems to increase the nurturing and healing powers of the titular garden.

NEGLECTED CHILD he considers himself to be in the TAW and the EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD he becomes in the FTAW, which arguably even intensifies his feeling of liberation in this world. For him, the garden is mostly an Edenic place of childhood play, where he can overcome the containment, stricture and excessive care imposed upon him by his relatives and exercise a certain amount of agency and movement the flat does not permit.⁹² It is in this garden where Tom, similar to the speaker in Wordsworth's "Nutting" (composed 1798–99) when he finds the pristine spot in the wood, is filled "[w]ith sudden happiness beyond all hope"⁹³ and to which he wistfully returns every night during his stay.

However, the nightly actualisation of Tom's *W-world* soon adds another, more sinister layer of meaning to the garden when it turns into a place of temptation for the young protagonist. In this respect, the garden takes on the double meaning associated with "the *locus amoenus*" and is at first the "pleasant place that restores" before it gradually "takes on the other quality of the traditional enclosed garden [i. e., entrapment], becoming a garden of earthly delights"⁹⁴. The enticing prospects offered by the garden prompt Tom to ask for an extension of his stay and turn his post-quarantine existence in the TAW into a mere presence, as can be seen in his reaction to his aunt's proposition of going sightseeing and doing day trips:

Tom said, 'Thank you'; but without enthusiasm. He would have much preferred to be left to dullness indoors, as he used to be. He lived his real and interesting life at night-time, when he went into the garden; in the daytime, he wanted only peace – to think back and to think forwards, always to the garden; to write of the garden to Peter. He did not want to sleep, but, all the same, the daytime in the flat was like a period of sleep to him. He needed its rest.⁹⁵

The seeming inversion of night and day and the omnipresence of the garden in Tom's thoughts suggests that the TAW begins to fade into the background and that Tom runs the risk of succumbing to temptation.⁹⁶ The garden starts to preoccupy him to an unhealthy, even dangerous extent, which reaches its pin-

92 The degree of Tom's agency is discussed in more depth in the next subchapter.

93 William Wordsworth. "Nutting," 153, l. 27.

94 Raymond E. Jones. "Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*," 214, original emphasis.

95 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 99–100.

96 In a similar vein and while missing his brother sorely, Peter also succumbs to the temptation of repeatedly dreaming himself into the midnight garden, even though he cannot physically recentre to it. After a disappointing discussion with his mother about staying at the Kitsons' too, Peter eventually falls asleep and expresses his longing for the garden and Tom through his facial expression: "He must have been dreaming of something, for the expression on his face changed a little, even in sleep. Once he smiled, and then sighed; and once such a far-away look came into his face that his mother bent over him in an impulse to wake him and recall him to her. She restrained herself, and left him". Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 127.

nacle when he deliberately attempts to extend his stay in Hatty's world infinitely, trapped, like Peter Pan, forever in childhood.

Tom's desire and longing for the garden as a place of pleasure and amusement is expressed in his efforts to understand the workings of time. Given that the FTAW is created by memories, sometimes several months pass in-between Tom's visits and Hatty begins to outgrow him. After having noticed the discrepancy in body size, Tom suddenly "begins to ponder the meaning of time and to question Hatty about the clock"⁹⁷ in the hall. Determined to find out more about the workings of time, Tom reminds Hatty of her promise to look at the inscription of the old grandfather clock during his next visit. Instead of receiving answers to his queries, the inscription on the pendulum, "'Time no longer'"⁹⁸, which is a quotation from the biblical Book of Revelation, raises more questions and leaves Tom unable to grasp its full meaning. Even after consulting the gardener's bible in the heating house and thus updating their *knowledge-worlds* (or *K-worlds*), where Tom and Hatty find out that the passage is "about the promise of the annihilation of time at the end of the world"⁹⁹ and "learn that the Book of Life will be opened on the Day of Judgment and that then 'there should be time no longer'"¹⁰⁰, Tom has neither understood the quotation's meaning nor been able to lift the secrets of the workings of time. Instead, "the three words began to seem full of enormous possibilities"¹⁰¹ and keep his mind preoccupied to the extent that he even leaves the garden and slips back into the TAW to ponder his findings and ask his uncle how time works.

Despite the fact that Tom attempts to permanently stay in his Edenic childhood garden, he comes to understand that his efforts are doomed to fail and that he eventually also has to grow up. Believing that time "can be dispensed with perhaps; or, rather, it can be dodged"¹⁰², Tom frantically seeks for a way to stay in the garden forever. When he is at Ely Cathedral with Hatty, he comes across "a memorial tablet to a certain Mr Robinson, Gentleman of the City, who had exchanged Time for Eternity"¹⁰³. Taking the epitaph, as formerly the inscription on the clock's pendulum, literally, Tom aims at copying Mr Robinson and plans to "exchange ordinary Time, that would otherwise move on towards Saturday, for an endless Time – an Eternity – in the garden"¹⁰⁴. In other words, he attempts to achieve a permanent actualisation of his *W-world* by recentring to the FTAW,

97 Virginia Wolf. "Belief in *Tom's Midnight Garden*.", 145.

98 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 161.

99 Virginia Wolf. "Belief in *Tom's Midnight Garden*.", 145.

100 Angelika Zirker. "'Time No Longer'.", 274.

101 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 165.

102 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 167.

103 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 190.

104 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 191.

which, when taking the ontological status of that world into account, “is, for all intents and purposes, to enter death”¹⁰⁵. Even though hardly any time lapses in the TAW while Tom is in the FTAW, as the fingers on the kitchen clock always “pointed to only a few minutes past midnight”¹⁰⁶ upon his return, and Tom temporarily is in a realm where time works slightly differently, he cannot suspend the progress of time, neither in the TAW nor in the FTAW.

Given that the FTAW is a dream world and, moreover, subject to Mrs Bartholomew’s recollections, Tom is no longer eligible to return to the garden once she stops dreaming about her childhood days. In spite of his allegorical dream vision on one of the previous nights, in which Tom already foresaw that he will no longer be able to access the garden on his last night at the Kitsons’, he still hopes to find Hatty and their shared childhood space again, “[f]or Time in the garden can go back”¹⁰⁷ as his previous visits have shown. When Tom, however, goes down to the hall and opens the door that usually leads to the garden, he can see nothing but impenetrable blackness. Knowing his way around the garden by heart,

[h]e sprang forward and began running. His bare feet fell on to cold stone; he knocked against a tall metal thing, and its lid fell off and rang upon stone again. He shied away, and still ran on in the direction of the yews, but long before he reached trees, crashed into a wooden fence, and knew that the tang he smelt had been of creosote, and that this was the creosoted fence enclosing the back-yard where the ginger-bearded man kept his car and where the tenants kept their dustbins.¹⁰⁸

Even though he realised when opening the door that “there was no lingering summer perfume from shut flowers and from grass and leaves”¹⁰⁹, he refuses to accept that the garden is no longer accessible. Only after running into the fence, a border reflecting modern developments, and returning to the grandfather clock, which “ticked *coldly* on”¹¹⁰ and thus symbolises the inexorable passing of time, does it dawn on Tom that Hatty’s time – and by implication also his time – in the garden has run out and that “the garden is ‘no longer’”¹¹¹. Thus, “[i]n every possible way, Pearce has shown the reader that Tom cannot stay in the garden forever – that life does not stand still”¹¹². In this regard, *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, as many other post-WWII children’s stories, highlights that “[a]n Arcadia may be

105 Raymond E. Jones. “Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden*.”, 216.

106 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 43.

107 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 207.

108 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 209.

109 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 209.

110 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 209, my emphasis.

111 Angelika Zirker. “‘Time No Longer’.”, 278.

112 Virginia Wolf. “Belief in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*.”, 145.

visited by the child protagonists, but it does not offer a goal in itself¹¹³, no matter how much Tom wishes it to be.

The effect of his slips back in time becomes evident on the next day, when he has to offer his apologies to the old landlady for waking her screaming in the night and is able to – quite literally – embrace and accept growing up as a vital part of human life. After finding out that in his TAW Mrs Bartholomew is Hatty and having “exchanged tales and secrets”¹¹⁴ with her, he seems to make the relevant connections allowing him to understand his adventures and receives answers to the pressing questions he had before. As the time to depart approaches, Tom says his goodbyes to Mrs Bartholomew and

went slowly down the attic stairs. Then, at the bottom, he hesitated: he turned impulsively and ran up again – two at a time – to where *Hatty Bartholomew* still stood... Afterwards, Aunt Gwen tried to describe to her husband that second parting between them. ‘He ran up to her, and they hugged each other as if they had known each other for years and years, instead of only having met for the first time this morning. There was something else too, Alan, although I know you’ll say it sounds even more absurd... Of course, Mrs Bartholomew’s such a shrunken little old woman, she’s hardly bigger than Tom, anyway: but, you know, he put his arms right round her and he hugged her good-bye as if she were a little girl.’¹¹⁵

This hug between old and young suggests that Tom is “embracing both his childhood and his future at one and the same time”¹¹⁶. It also implies that he is embracing past and present, Hatty and Mrs Bartholomew, simultaneously, which is further stressed by mentioning her full name. As Carpenter observes, Tom eventually can accept “what Peter Pan can never accept: that Time must be allowed to pass, and growth and even old age must be accepted as necessary and even desirable facets of human existence”¹¹⁷. This hug and the way Tom embraces the aged Hatty are emblematic of his renewed understanding of (the passing of) time and the ephemerality of childhood. It suggests that he accepts past and present, coming of age in the future as well as the continuity between childhood and old age. Unlike Aunt Gwen, Tom can see that “The Child is Father of the [Wo]Man”¹¹⁸ and that part of the young Hatty he met in the garden still lives on in Mrs Bartholomew.¹¹⁹

113 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 218.

114 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 224.

115 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 226–227, my emphasis.

116 Eve Tal. “*Tony and the Wonderful Door*.”, 140.

117 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 220. In contrast to Peter, however, the Darling siblings and the Lost Boys likewise eventually accept growing up as an integral part of human life.

118 William Wordsworth. “‘My heart leaps up when I behold’.”, 246, l. 7.

119 In this respect, “Pearce’s account of memory metaphorizes its power in an interesting and profound way. Memory is the key to identity in the obvious sense that without it one simply cannot know who one is – cannot, indeed, undertake the most simple cognitive task. And it is

Tom's experiences in the past have an additional impact on his present in that he learns about the Victorians and extends his *K-world*, in terms of Ryan's operators progressing from 0 to +. In many time-slip novels, as Tess Cosslett argues, "there is [...] the excitement of discovering and entering *someone else's* history, across time and sometimes across culture, class and even race"¹²⁰, which the (child) protagonist attempts to explore and understand. Like James Harrison in Penelope Lively's *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*, Clare Elliot and Laurie Langridge in Weldrick's *Time Sweep*, or Zachary (Zach) Barlow, Alice Magnaye and Poppy Bell in Holly Black's *Doll Bones* (2013), Tom "involves himself in historical detective work"¹²¹, whereby the metahistorical thrust of Pearce's narrative is foregrounded.¹²² Attempting to acquire knowledge on Hatty's time, he consults a book on his aunt's kitchen shelf. Amidst "Mrs Beeton's and all the other cookery books", he finds "a volume invitingly called *Enquire Within Upon Everything*"¹²³, which was first published in 1856 and still in print during the 1950s, when Pearce wrote her novel. The fact that both *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* and *Enquire Within Upon Everything* can be found on his aunt's kitchen shelf suggests a certain proximity to the Victorian era and highlights the idea of lineage and descent from the Victorians. Following his discussion with Hatty about clothes and styles of the past, Tom uses clothing as a starting point for his inquiry.¹²⁴ Finding that the reference book does not offer sufficient information on the subject, he decides to close the volume and finds a list of the monarchs of England in this process. Knowing that Hatty "lived when a Queen, not a King, ruled in England"¹²⁵, Tom narrows down the period to the sixteenth or the nineteenth centuries. On the next occasion when he is alone in the flat, he looks

within memory that the individual grapples with experiences, relegating some to the ephemeral and laying down others within associative chains which will form the basis of a life". Valerie Krips. "Plotting the Past.", 112.

120 Tess Cosslett. "'History from Below'.", 247, original emphasis.

121 Carol Billman. "Young and Old Alike.", 31.

122 For more information on the metahistorical novel, see chapter 2: "Neo-Victorian Fiction: Features and Developments of a Distinctive Type of Historical Fiction".

123 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 109.

124 Clothing and styles of clothes are issues that are repeatedly revisited in *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Upon his first visit to the FTAW, Tom comes across a housemaid, whose clothes strike Tom as being slightly old-fashioned: "Tom had seen housemaids only in pictures, but he recognized the white apron, cap and cuffs, and the black stockings. (He was not expert [sic] in fashions, but the dress seemed to him to be rather long for her.) She was carrying paper, kindling wood and a box of matches". Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 21. Given that clothes are an important part of world building in historical fiction and provide information on social position, time and place, they become a visual indicator of difference. It is then hardly surprising that clothes are used as an argument in the ghost discussion, in which Tom and Hatty attempt to discern who the ghost is. In all likelihood, it was this discussion that prompted Tom to find out more about clothing styles of the past.

125 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 110.

for further reference books and comes across the more comprehensive *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Using the information gleaned from both books, Tom concludes that Hatty is “a ghost – a little Early Victorian ghost”¹²⁶. Despite the fact that Hatty was born in the late Victorian era, Tom’s occupation with history and the past has a twofold function: firstly, it resolves his quarrel about ghosts with Hatty for him, as she has to be the ghost and not him, and, secondly, it provides him with valuable information about the past for his future.

Through both his research and slips in time, Tom thus learns about the importance of maintaining connections with the past, the roots of his identity as well as the continuity between past and present. His time slips afford him first-hand experiences of the otherwise unrecorded childhood experiences of Hatty at the end of the nineteenth century and allow him to return with a deeper understanding of childhood, now and then. While his journeys into the past and his friendship with Hatty provide him with more mundane experiences and specific knowledge about one individual, his research in the present leaves him with a more profound understanding of larger, historical developments as well as his place in history and in the continuum of life.

6.2. Hatty: Late-Victorian Girlhood

Hatty Melbourne is a late-Victorian orphan child, who, like Jane Eyre, has been taken in by a merciless aunt due to a promise to her late husband. Even though she is one of the protagonists, she enters the narrative comparatively late and makes her first actual appearance in chapter 8, in which she is introduced in the context of the garden, *the* most important place during Hatty’s childhood. Marginalised and often excluded by her three male cousins, Hubert, James and Edgar, and widely ignored by her aunt, Hatty spends most of her time in the garden, which is, however, not a place of liberty, but first and foremost one of imprisonment and containment for the child. Since Hatty’s childhood experiences inform Mrs Bartholomew’s dreams, the reader receives only fragmentary information about her childhood, filtered through the memories of the old landlady. As a result, Hatty’s age, unlike Tom’s, is not fixed but in constant flux, because “‘it’s often months and months before [...] [Tom] come[s] again’”¹²⁷. The fragmentary nature of the childhood memories allows Tom to encounter Hatty in different stages of life as a young child, a very young child and as a child who is outgrowing him altogether. Once again Pearce refrains from specifying the child’s age during the individual instances, in all likelihood to offer the greatest

126 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 112.

127 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 150.

amount of identification potential for young readers. This subchapter analyses Hatty in the context of the childhood garden, suggesting that Tom's presence constitutes an actualisation of her *W-world*, before turning to the garden's more ambiguous meanings as a place of adult supervision, punishment and grief. It further suggests that the tree-house Tom and Hatty build can be read as an instance signalling Hatty's wish for freedom and autonomy she will not find in the garden and her turning to the world beyond the garden, where she can satisfy her longing for freedom eventually by growing up. In this context, various instances in which the outside world is described are analysed, including the skating trip on the frozen river to Ely, which can be regarded as the end of Hatty's childhood. Moreover, this subchapter claims that, even though *Tom's Midnight Garden* presents childhood as an ephemeral state, Mrs Bartholomew is able to relive her childhood through memories and dreams and permits Tom to access this dream-/memory-world to provide her with a playmate.

Similar to Finn Taverner in Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea*, Hatty is at first introduced indirectly through perceptible traces in the garden.¹²⁸ During his first proper visit to the garden, Tom already comes across these traces but cannot ascribe them to Hatty, of whose existence he is still unaware at this point. Not only does he find a letter addressed "To Oberon, King of Fairies"¹²⁹, which implicitly characterises Hatty as imaginative, he also comes across footprints on the dewy grass, which suggest that Hatty, as the only child able to see Tom in the FTAW, has been observing him and is perceptive of her environment, especially her childhood garden. Like Shadow in Dianne Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*, Hatty thus turns into a 'little spy' for a while, who is curious about Tom but refrains from making her presence known.¹³⁰ She watches him from the garden and her own room and makes Tom increasingly uneasy. At one point, he is overcome by "an uncomfortable feeling, out of which he tried to reason himself, again and again, of someone who had not gone: someone who, unobserved, observed him"¹³¹. Tom's inability to spot Hatty on these occasions points towards her skills at hiding in the garden and suggests that she – at least to a certain extent – is in control of the garden.

However, this latter assumption is revised instantly once Tom comes across Hatty and her cousins and observes the children's (lack of) interactions, which foreground her marginalisation. Seeing the three boys enter the garden, Tom notices that "[t]hey were followed by a little girl in a frilled blue pinafore and with

128 For an analysis of Finn Taverner, see chapter 7 "Competing Visions of Childhood in Ibbotson's Neo-Victorian Adventure Novel *Journey to the River Sea*".

129 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 40.

130 For an analysis of Shadow, see chapter 9 "Childhood Neglect and Pathological Relationships in Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*".

131 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 47.

hair worn long to her shoulders”, who “tagged along after them, and then circled them every so often – in what might well have become an exasperating way – in order to face them and to listen to what they were saying”¹³². From the start, Hatty is not a welcomed member of their group, keeping at a certain distance to assuage her curiosity, and is excluded from their conversations. Upon becoming aware of her presence, they even run away, initiating a game of ‘Catch’, which Hatty, “as if used to such treatment”¹³³, joins in and soon falls down, when Edgar drops a hazel branch in front of her in foul play to slow down her pursuit. Even though James returns and helps her up, he quickly leaves the sobbing girl behind to follow his brothers, resuming their game and ignoring Hatty’s worries about her stained pinafore. As Hatty confides to the gardener Abel, ‘Catch’ is “‘the only game they’ll ever play with me’”¹³⁴, not permitting a reversal in roles, so that Hatty is always the ‘catcher’ and her cousins the ones to run away, probably well aware of their physical superiority. On other occasions, they consciously exclude her from their play, making age the defining category: as Hatty “wistfully” explains to Tom, her cousins have claimed that she was too young to join them in their games of “forest outlaws, with bows and arrows made in the garden”¹³⁵, in the past and refrained doing so when she was old enough on the grounds that they have outgrown such games. Considering Hatty’s treatment by her cousins, it comes hardly as a surprise that Hatty’s *W-world* revolves around her longing for a friend and playmate in the garden she eventually finds in Tom.

It seems that only when Tom enters the midnight garden and becomes her companion is Hatty able to enjoy her childhood. After having made Tom’s acquaintance, Hatty immediately shows him her secret hiding places in the garden and several other places, excited about Tom’s company and the actualisation of her *W-world*. She even tells him “secrets and stories”, which “poured from her with haste and eagerness as though she were afraid that Tom’s company would not be hers for long”¹³⁶ – a behaviour suggesting that her childhood days must have been fairly lonely and devoid of friendship. Their communal play also provides a variation on the seemingly endless games of ‘Catch’ with her cousins, though they often contain a subversive element as well, as Hatty engages in a range of non-feminine activities and temporarily turns into an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD with Tom’s help. For instance, Tom instructs Hatty how to build a bow and shoot arrows, which entails the use of a kitchen-knife, how to swarm trees, including ‘Tricksy’, the most difficult tree in the garden, and directs her in building a tree-house, all of which Hatty enjoys

132 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 62.

133 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 63.

134 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 64.

135 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 83.

136 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 78.

tremendously, although these are not proper activities for a girl according to Victorian gender roles.¹³⁷ These scenes might be read as a hint that Victorian gender roles were not always as rigid as is usually assumed. They also play a range of new games, search for frogs in the strawberry beds and rescue animals that get trapped in the gardener's nets and traps and engage in other activities together.¹³⁸ Unlike Mary, Colin and Dickon in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, who become gardeners and nurture a neglected garden back to life, Tom and Hatty simply play and enjoy each other's company, which Pearce hence marks as universal childhood needs.

However, where the garden is a place of liberation for Tom, it turns out to be a more ambiguous place for Hatty and carries a plurality of meanings that go beyond those of a place of friendship and play. Following the events in the novel, the garden can be read as a male-dominated place of adult supervision, as a place of punishment and adult control and as a place of grief and loneliness. The various interpretations of the garden suggest that Pearce makes use of the garden topos in a complex and ambivalent way, and that an analysis of the walled space in the context of the representation of childhood requires going beyond claiming that "Pearce invokes an unfallen Eden"¹³⁹, which essentially considers only Tom's point of view.

The meaning of the garden as an implicitly patriarchal space of adult supervision is drawn upon multiple times and established relatively early in the narrative, as the garden is not only inhabited by Hatty but also her three male cousins and the gardener Abel. Her cousins, whom "Tom only rarely saw [...] in the garden"¹⁴⁰, are older than Hatty. It is striking that Hatty's eldest cousin Hubert already is on the brink of adulthood, as he has "dark, sparsely growing hairs" on

137 The chapter illustration by Susan Einzig depicts Hatty with her self-made bow and arrow and thus actually *shows* Hatty as an empowered child engaged in unfeminine pursuits – an image that is likely to stay in the reader's mind. In *The Art of the Swap*, in which Maggie Dunlap (a girl from an affluent family living in 1905) and Hannah Jordan (who lives in the twenty-first century) switch bodies after they touched an age spot on a mirror behind a painting, tree-climbing is likewise introduced as an unfeminine and improper activity for a girl from America's Gilded Age: "Climbing a tree would be firmly on the list of things a girl of my station should not do. But... maybe girls in this century are encouraged to climb trees? If what Hannah said is true about what girls can do, then I don't even have to feel guilty for breaking the rules. My heart gives a little thrill as I grip the tree and begin to climb. Higher and higher I go, hoping to reach a place where no one will find me". Kristine Asselin and Jen Malone. *The Art of the Swap*, 105. In this instance, climbing the tree is associated with freedom and agency and constitutes a revolt against the patriarchal order still in place in Maggie's TAW.

138 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 117–118.

139 Jane Suzanne Carroll. *Landscape in Children's Literature*, 54.

140 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 67.

his upper lip and, as Tom thinks, “look[s] stupidly grown-up”¹⁴¹, so that he may also be eligible to exercise adult supervision during their play. The garden, however, fully derives its double meaning as “lush and bountiful but cultivated and guarded”¹⁴² from the fact that Abel is presiding over and seemingly ever-present in the walled area, where everything is rationally ordered and in its place. While in many Edwardian texts “adults move to the margins” and “leav[e] children free to exist in their own worlds”¹⁴³, Pearce’s text firmly places an adult figure at the centre of a space that is connected with childhood play and thereby denies the children complete autonomy. As the only adult able to see Tom (but pretending not to see him), Abel exercises adult supervision by warning Hatty of getting into trouble and intervenes on more than one occasion.¹⁴⁴ The constant sense of surveillance in the garden may hence be read in analogy to the sense of imprisonment Tom experiences in the Kitsons’ flat and indicates that, for Hatty, the garden is also a place of restriction and containment.¹⁴⁵

The tree-house Tom and Hatty build in one of the trees in the garden draws attention to Hatty’s sense of imprisonment and her need for freedom. From the start, *Tom’s Midnight Garden* introduces “tree climbing and building tree-houses as masculine activities”¹⁴⁶, even though Tom and Peter could not realise their project as planned. Building the tree-house in the midnight garden therefore gains special significance, because Tom, who cannot move or lift objects in the garden, is unable to assist Hatty except for giving directions.¹⁴⁷ Effectively, Hatty is the one to build the tree-house – an intervention in the ordered space of the garden – and exercises a certain amount of female agency while doing so. For Hatty, who, similarly to Sophie Rackham in Michel Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), “feels imprisoned and uncertain rather than at home”¹⁴⁸ in her Aunt Melbourne’s house, the tree-house could eventually turn into the home her aunt’s house is not. Like Tom, Hatty experiences a sense of imprisonment and alienation in the grand house, which is articulated when she first meets Tom: “‘I am held here a prisoner. I am a Princess in disguise. There is someone here who

141 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 61, 65.

142 Roni Natov. *The Poetics of Childhood*, 96.

143 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 11.

144 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 130, 115.

145 Similar to Abel, Ben Weatherstaff in Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* also exerts adult supervision in the gardens surrounding the manor and eventually even in the titular garden itself. When he finds out that Mary, Dickon and Colin have been sneaking into the garden, he is at first vexed by their audacity but ultimately becomes part of the group and spends a considerable amount of time with the children in the walled garden. Unlike Abel, he is asked, even ordered by Colin to participate in child play; in other words, Colin subjects himself and the group *voluntarily* to a certain amount of adult supervision.

146 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 228.

147 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 105.

148 Marcin Sulmicki. “Women and Children Last.”, 54.

calls herself my aunt, but she isn't so: she is wicked and cruel to me. And those aren't my cousins, either, although I have to call them so'"¹⁴⁹. Her make-believe play implicitly suggests that the "connotations of love, protection, and security"¹⁵⁰ typically associated with homes are absent from her aunt's house, where she seems to be subjected to a regime of (emotional) cruelty, is "unwanted, excluded, and tormented"¹⁵¹. As an orphan at the mercy of her aunt and with no belongings of her own, Hatty is then "deeply excited about the tree-house", which "could be her own house and home, and she talked wildly of furnishing it with her doll's tea-set and even with objects filched from the spare bedrooms of the big house"¹⁵². The attempt of appropriating the space of the tree-house suggests that Hatty, like Mary in *The Secret Garden*, is in need of freedom and a space of her own and tries to actualise her *W-world* this way.

Hatty's attempts at replicating a domestic environment in the tree-house conveys her gendered perception of space while its failure simultaneously suggests that she is still a child, not yet ready to enter the grown-up world. Even though building tree-houses is considered a children's activity in Pearce's novel, Hatty's ambitions to copy the shape of the windows of her aunt's house after the tree-house is finished already highlights that her "future path is determined by her roles as a wife and mother"¹⁵³ and geared towards the female space of house and home.¹⁵⁴ Tom, by contrast, is not bothered by the "'accidental gaps in the walls'" and would much rather pretend that they "were portholes, and that this was the captain's cabin on a ship at sea"¹⁵⁵. This nod towards the many boy adventure stories published towards the end of the nineteenth century, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), suggests that Tom and Hatty perceive the space and the opportunities it affords according to Victorian notions

149 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 73. Sara Crewe in Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905) also uses a make-belief narrative of being held prisoner to ameliorate her dire situation after her father's death and finds consolation in her pretence. Unlike Hatty, she imagines herself to be "'a prisoner in the Bastille. I have been here for years and years – and years; and everybody has forgotten about me'" and is convinced that "'it will be a great comfort'" to her. Frances Hodgson Burnett. *A Little Princess*, 124. The fact that both children imagine themselves as prisoners in Aunt Melbourne's house and Miss Minchin's academy respectively points to the power relations governing adult-child relationships, in which both Hatty and Sara are inferior to and reliant on the adults in their lives.

150 Pauline Dewan. *The House as Setting, Symbol, and Structural Motif in Children's Literature*, 2.

151 Virginia Wolf. "Belief in *Tom's Midnight Garden*.", 144.

152 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 127.

153 Sandra Dinter. "Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.", 229.

154 Unlike Wendy Darling in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, who is assigned to the domestic sphere of house and home by Peter when he suggests "'Let us build a little house round her'", Hatty assigns herself to this sphere by making her house look similar to that of her aunt's. J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 127.

155 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 128, 129.

of gender. These were still pretty much alive in the 1950s, when women were, once more, assigned the roles of housewife and mother, as can be seen with Aunt Gwen, who cooks and fulfils other household duties at home while her husband is at work. In this context, it is then particularly striking that Tom (as a boy) refrains from helping Hatty (as a girl) when she tries to put the windows in shape and that Hatty, when she is “mov[ing] from one bough to another *outside* the wall of the tree-house”¹⁵⁶, steps on a cracked bough and falls, reinstating Victorian ideas about gender. Following a reading of the garden as “childhood itself”¹⁵⁷, Hatty’s attempt at replicating a domestic environment *in* the garden hints at the fact that she is not yet ready to leave the childhood space and that the garden, as the property of her aunt, may not be the place for Hatty to find a home and domestic bliss while her aunt is still alive.

Hatty’s childlike nature is reinforced by the fact that her endeavours at evading adult supervision and gaining autonomy remain equally unsuccessful. Considering the tree-house her secret venture, Hatty has made sure that Abel has “‘never seen me carrying stuff or climbing up or even coming in this direction’” and she has “‘been very careful to keep out of his sight’”¹⁵⁸. Her fall from the tree, however, promptly requires adult intervention, which is exercised by Abel, who must have been aware of the tree-house all along.¹⁵⁹ He carries the wounded child into the house, where she is under tight adult supervision again. The consequences of disregarding the gardener’s earlier warnings about getting into trouble become evident when reading Hatty’s literal fall from the tree through a biblical lens. In variation on the biblical story of the ‘Fall’, Hatty may not be evicted from the garden but is no longer encouraged to spend time there. When her aunt laments that Hatty “‘doesn’t want to grow up; she wants only her garden’”¹⁶⁰ – and thus equates childhood with the garden –, James promptly suggests initiating Hatty into the adolescent/grown-up world, which entails leaving the childhood garden behind and making friends beyond its confines.

The garden, as an extension of Aunt Melbourne’s house, also turns into a place of socialisation and punishment where adult control is exercised, as is evident during the ‘geese incident’. After the geese have entered the garden following Tom and Hatty through the secret hole in the hedge and wreaked havoc on the lawn and in the flower beds, Tom witnesses Hatty being rebuked and insulted by her aunt. During this episode, Hatty’s aunt, similar to Tom in the beginning, remains on the doorstep, a position on the threshold of the inside of the house and the garden, which implies her control over both spaces. Once Hatty has been

156 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 129, my emphasis.

157 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 219.

158 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 128.

159 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 128.

160 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 141.

identified as the culprit responsible for the hole in the first place, her aunt calls her with a voice “so loudly and harshly that the sound was not like a woman’s voice at all”¹⁶¹, evoking notions of patriarchal power and reinforcing masculine connotations. Even though she does not physically harm Hatty, she reprimands her in an emotionally hurtful way:

she called Hatty a charity-child, a thankless pauper that she had received into her home as a duty to her late husband, whose niece Hatty was; she said that only the claims of blood had induced her to take this mistaken pity upon Hatty; she had expected Hatty to be grateful and dutiful and obedient; and, instead, she was none of these things, but an expense and a shame to her aunt and her cousins – a liar, a criminal, a monster.¹⁶²

The allegations Hatty has to suffer highlight that she, “like Jane Eyre, is an orphan who is unwanted by, and maltreated by, her aunt”¹⁶³ and that the familial environment fails to protect all its members. Unlike late-Victorian and Edwardian children’s fiction, which “emphasizes the joys of childhood”¹⁶⁴ and often contains empowered child characters, Pearce’s narrative takes a more critical stance towards the experience of childhood at this point, which is characteristic of the revisionist engagement of neo-Victorian literature more generally.

The severity of Hatty’s mistreatment and the traumatic nature of the events are revealed in a sudden change of scene and time, which foregrounds the garden’s connection to grief and loneliness and emphasises the long-lasting repercussions of Hatty’s emotional pain. The significance of the event is implied by the transition to an earlier memory while Tom is still in the garden/the FTAW and merely wakes from sleep. He is immediately “aware of some difference in his surroundings – a difference in time”¹⁶⁵ and realises shortly afterwards that he has been transported back to the time when Hatty had just become an orphan. The change in time suggests that the FTAW is subject to Mrs Bartholomew’s memories and that her aunt’s treatment, even in retrospect, seems to trigger an affective response, evoking a different, more painful episode of her life. To stress Hatty’s forlornness and her vulnerability in this memory, Pearce draws on the “‘rhetoric of orphanhood’”¹⁶⁶, which characterises many Victorian texts. In this memory, Tom comes across “a *tiny little* figure, all in black: a *little* girl, half Hatty’s size”, who is “desolate[ly], ceaseless[ly] crying”¹⁶⁷ in the garden and only realises afterwards that she is Hatty’s younger self. Her appearance as a lonely, mourning child in the garden already foreshadows her deep attachment to the

161 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 94.

162 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 94.

163 Gavin, Adrienne E. “The Past Reimagined.”, 162.

164 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 11.

165 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 95.

166 Marion Gymnich. “The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.”, 26.

167 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 95, 96, my emphasis.

place, which is simultaneously indicative of her peripheral position in the Melbourne family. While Tom's own situation at his aunt and uncle's place makes him a quasi- or "virtual state orphan"¹⁶⁸, who is separated from his family only temporarily, Hatty's separation is permanent. As a result, Hatty's punishment and the encounter with her younger self leave Tom with a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of her situation.

On the whole and unlike Tom, Hatty actually belongs to the type of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. Despite the fact that Tom thinks Hatty "had made this garden a kind of kingdom"¹⁶⁹, she neither presides over the green space nor is she successful at altering her state. In fact, all her attempts at permanently changing her disempowerment (i. e., actualising her *W-world*) are thwarted and entail unpleasant consequences and/or punishment. In her "transnormative family"¹⁷⁰, she is subject to emotional suffering, marginalisation and isolation throughout her childhood. Even though she tries to escape her circumstances through make-believe play and seems to experience a temporary sense of empowerment when she is playing with Tom, she is never fully able to reach complete autonomy and freedom while she is still a child. Unlike the protagonists of many other neo-Victorian children's books, in which children often only temporarily experience this state and are able to bring about their own happy ending eventually, Hatty is denied these opportunities. She is more strongly aligned with children in both Victorian and neo-Victorian adult fiction than those of late-Victorian, Edwardian and neo-Victorian children's literature.

Given that Hatty encounters many restrictions in the garden, she cannot find the freedom she craves and turns to the river, which is inseparably intertwined with notions of independence, (personal) development and growth.¹⁷¹ Revisited multiple times in the story, this river, with its continuous onward motion, becomes a symbol of the relentless progression of time and of maturation, and is connected with the transgression of borders. This river can be read as a metaphor for Hatty's transition from childhood into adulthood, which becomes apparent most notably in three instances: the children's encounter with the geese, Tom's precarious walk on the garden wall, and Tom and Hatty's skating expedition on the frozen river to Ely. While scholarship almost exclusively focuses on Tom and Hatty's ice-skating expedition in this regard – beyond doubt, one of the key

168 Donna Cox. "Through a Door", 146.

169 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 81.

170 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

171 Pearce's symbolic use of the river can be traced back to Greek mythology and two rivers in particular: Lethe, the river of after-life and forgetting, and Mnemosyne, the river of memory. In an amalgamation of both, Pearce's river hence points to the 'death' or end of childhood as well as its possible retrieval in memory.

moments in the story – their other encounters with the river suggest that the world outside the garden is also a world beyond childhood and implicitly foreshadow the liberating effects of Hatty's skating trip.

The first time Hatty and Tom slip out of their garden and into the meadows, the river is introduced as a forbidden place that can only be reached by an act of border crossing. Immersed in childhood play and trying to avoid doing any more damage by shooting arrows in the garden, "Hatty started a practice of shooting over the garden-hedge into the meadow beyond"¹⁷², which also involves slipping through a small tunnel in the hedge to retrieve the arrow. The hedge hence becomes a permeable border, one that allows Hatty to temporarily escape the protective confines of her childhood garden into a more dangerous world and arguably also the public sphere.¹⁷³ In the meadow, the children not only see themselves confronted with a somewhat wilder natural environment, which signifies the transgression from one place to another, but also with a flock of geese, blocking their way to the water. In an attempt to protect his family from the intruders, the gander obstructs their passage and seemingly tries to keep Tom and Hatty away from the river, the object of their desire:

Every so often, he would slew round altogether and raise himself high to front them, and then suddenly drop his head and neck forward and down, almost level with the ground, and begin a *snake-like* run at Tom, *hissing*. It was always Tom he ran at, because by then Hatty would be well behind Tom and concealed by him as far as was possible.¹⁷⁴

Comparing the gander to a snake suggests that temptation and experience are lurking outside the garden's walls and simultaneously reinforces the river's symbolic and metaphoric function in the narrative's overall depiction of growing up.

When Tom and Hatty nonetheless reach the river shortly afterwards, it turns into a reminder of adult authority, suggesting that Hatty's true place is in the garden. While Tom, who already lives in a more mobile world in the 1950s, "had seen other, bigger rivers", "Hatty had not"¹⁷⁵ and is intrigued by it and the

172 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 85.

173 In Mary Downing Hahn's *The Doll in the Garden* (1989), the hedge separating Miss Cooper's property from the field next to it also becomes a permeable border and, in addition, turns into a portal to the past for Ashley Cummings and Kristi Smith (and later also Miss Cooper) when they follow Snowball, the mysterious white cat. Where there had just been a field in Ashley's present, there now is "a white frame house in the center of a green lawn", which "burned down about twenty years ago". Mary Downing Hahn. *The Doll in the Garden*, 53, 90. Similar to the door that leads to the defunct midnight garden where Tom enjoys his adventures with Hatty, the hedge allows the characters to slip back into the past and meet Louisa Perkins, just a few days before her untimely death in 1912.

174 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 86, my emphasis.

175 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 86.

spaciousness of the world beyond the horizon.¹⁷⁶ As it transpires, Hatty, as a prepubescent late-Victorian girl, has been firmly kept in the garden, an extension of the domestic sphere appropriate to both her age and gender. Accordingly, she only heard people talk about the world beyond its confines, which is symbolised by the river: “‘The boys bathe in it [the river] only a little farther downstream, where there are pools; and they fish. It gets bigger as it flows downstream. It flows down to Castleford, and then it flows to Ely, and then it flows down and down into the sea, at last. So they say’”¹⁷⁷. Not permitted to be in the meadows either, “because of the river running by it”, where “she might get her clothes muddied, or wet; or – most troublesome of all for everybody – she might even manage to get herself drowned”¹⁷⁸, Hatty is suddenly reminded of her aunt and returns to the garden. Given that “the social rules” constitutive of the *O-world* are “issued by an external authority”¹⁷⁹, the familial obligations arguably are determined by the head of the family. Accordingly, Hatty’s *O-world* consists of the regulations provided by her aunt. When Hatty hence “jump[s] up in a frightened flurry, and say[s] she must get back into the garden; and nothing that Tom could say would dissuade her”¹⁸⁰, her *O-world* prevails and makes her aware of the transgressive act. Thus, despite “tak[ing] advantage of the opportunity to leave the garden” and “deliberately cross[ing] these boundaries”¹⁸¹, Hatty, who is still a comparatively young child during this incident, is eventually restored to the ‘safe’ world of her garden.

The river’s connotations of freedom and the grown-up world are drawn upon once more when Tom walks on the garden wall towards the sundial, another marker for both the unfailing passage of linear time and the circularity of time.¹⁸² Similar to the hedge, the south wall serves as a physical border to keep the children in the confines of the garden and represents the fine line separating childhood from adulthood. Standing on the top of the wall, Tom is “taken by a sudden joy”, “pace[s] along the wall like a king” and feels that he is “far above her [Hatty] and the garden”¹⁸³. He seems to be experiencing a sense of freedom he has not experienced before. From the top of the wall, Tom, who “had known only the

176 Hatty’s longing for freedom is explicitly expressed in her steady look: “She gazed eagerly downstream as though she envied the waters [in] their endless journeying”. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 87.

177 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 87.

178 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 87.

179 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 116.

180 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 87–88.

181 Sandra Dinter. “Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.”, 228.

182 The circularity of time is implicitly also hinted at by the recurrence of events, as James had climbed this particular wall before Tom. Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 118.

183 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 120.

garden, and a very little beyond its limits”, now sees “what seemed to be the whole world”¹⁸⁴. Gazing beyond the garden’s walls, his eyes follow the river, which

flowed past the meadow, and reached the village, and passed that. It reached a white handrailed bridge and slipped under it; and then away, towards what pools and watermills and locks and ferries that Hatty and Tom knew nothing of? So the river slipped away into the distance, in the direction of Castleford and Ely and King’s Lynn, to the grandeur of the sea.¹⁸⁵

The broadening view, from the house and garden to the river and also imaginatively the world beyond, establishes the garden as a child’s world, which Tom can leave behind momentarily. His position on the top of the wall enables him to glimpse the wider, grown-up world from a safe distance, without yet becoming a part of it.

Unlike Tom, who is sure that “a fall” from the wall “even from such a height, could neither bruise nor break *him*”¹⁸⁶, his female companion does not climb the wall and remains in the garden.¹⁸⁷ However, after initially worrying about Tom’s safety, Hatty eventually is overcome by curiosity and begins to ask Tom what he can see beyond the garden’s walls.¹⁸⁸ It is particularly striking that as soon as Tom starts to describe the view, focussing on the river and where it leads, “Abel [comes] round the corner of the trees” and “rushe[s] straight at Hatty”¹⁸⁹, making her swear on his bible that she will not climb the wall. Thus, Hatty has to yield to the adult authority of the gardener, who worries about her and attempts to keep her safe. Even though Tom, from his position on the top of the wall, “‘thought he was going to beat you’”¹⁹⁰, Abel’s determination to prevent Hatty from glimpsing the outside world and hurting herself suggests that Hatty is still a child in his eyes, who belongs to the walled and ‘secure’ area of the garden and is in need of (adult) protection. Moreover, when taking into account that Abel, the only adult who can see Tom in the FTAW, considers him a diabolical tempter, he attempts to prevent her from succumbing to temptation.¹⁹¹ In this instance, Pearce thus rewrites the biblical Book of Genesis to a certain extent and inverts the gender roles in the ‘Fall’, which pre-empts the strong focus on gender politics characteristic of neo-Victorian literature.

184 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 121.

185 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 120–121.

186 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 118, original emphasis.

187 In Pearce’s story, climbing the wall is introduced as a male/boyish activity. Only after Hatty tells Tom that James had climbed the wall for a dare, he decides to do the same. Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 118.

188 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 121.

189 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 121.

190 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 122.

191 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 130.

According to the dream-internal chronology (as opposed to the chronology of events in the past), the skating expedition on the frozen river to Ely is the last Tom ever sees of Hatty.¹⁹² As “an extension of the earlier wanderings of the two children into the meadows beyond the garden”¹⁹³, the skating trip symbolises freedom and adventure and comes to signify the end of Hatty’s childhood. While the river, in its steady onward motion, “is inevitably a symbol of linear time”¹⁹⁴ and progression, its frozen surface suggests that it “is suspended in its usually onward motion”¹⁹⁵, so that linear time seems to stand still momentarily and is replaced by a mystic dream-/memory-time. Read as a symbol of maturation and growth, the frozen surface becomes an expression of Mrs Bartholomew’s longing for the ephemeral state of childhood she had to leave behind and possibly even constitutes the last attempt to recapture her childhood before she entered the adult world, and maybe also before she dies in real time.

In the context of the skating trip, *Tom’s Midnight Garden* implies that the change in the weather is linked with and indicative of Hatty’s coming of age. In this respect, Pearce novel picks up on a pattern that can be found in many children’s stories and novels of development, in which “[c]hanges in setting frequently precipitate, define, or reflect the maturation of character”¹⁹⁶. While “[t]he season”, as in many Arcadian children’s texts, “is usually summer, and the weather is always fine”¹⁹⁷, the time of year suddenly changes markedly during Tom’s last visits to the midnight garden, revealing a wintery landscape and a garden covered in snow. Despite the fact that during his first winter visit Hatty is still in the garden, learning to skate on the pond, and the weather is “as perfect as the summer weather had been”, she already outlines her plans of going “skating with the others – with Hubert and James and Edgar and Bertie Codling and the Chapman girls and young Barty and all the others”¹⁹⁸ and is drawn to the world beyond the garden.¹⁹⁹ When skating on the ice Hatty experiences a strong feeling

192 According to the chronology of the events in the past, Tom would have met Hatty for the first time when she grieved for her late parents and is once more in the garden when the fir tree is struck by lightning. The mixed-up chronology of events in Mrs Bartholomew’s memories reinforces that, “[i]n the continuity of the modernist novel, the neo-Victorian novel plays with the notion of time to defy the tyranny of linearity and chronology”. Nicole Terrien. “The Neo-Victorian Novel.”, 78.

193 Margaret Rustin and Michael Rustin. “Loneliness, Dreaming and Discovery.”, 208.

194 Neil Philip. “‘Tom’s Midnight Garden’ and the Vision of Eden.”, 23.

195 Donna Cox. “‘Through a Door.’”, 156.

196 Pauline Dewan. *The House as Setting, Symbol, and Structural Motif in Children’s Literature*, 10.

197 Maria Nikolajeva. “Growing Up.”, 115.

198 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 159, 160–161.

199 Her wish to see beyond the garden’s walls is reinforced by Tom’s thinning out, which suggests that “Hatty is less and less interested in him, her imaginary playmate, as she grows

of freedom: “‘Oh, Tom, skating! I feel as if I could go from here to the end of the world, if all the world were ice! I feel as free as a bird – as I’ve never felt before! I want to go so far – so far!’”²⁰⁰ The imagery of the (un)caged bird, which is also drawn upon in *Jane Eyre*, emphasises Hatty’s independence at this moment and reinforces that house *and* garden alike are places of imprisonment and confinement for her. Eventually, Hatty no longer needs the garden and avoids the walled area completely:

‘The river’s frozen from above here to below Castleford and below Ely. The river here is too near the source for the ice to be safe, but below Castleford and all through the Fens – Oh, Tom, do come with me!’ Tom was excited, and yet aghast. ‘Now? Without going into the garden at all? Without even going through it?’ ‘The garden will always be there,’ Hatty coaxed him[.]²⁰¹

While Tom, still a prepubescent child who has barely aged since he met Hatty for the first time, apparently needs the garden and its seclusion, Hatty has grown out of it, not least by having been introduced to people her age, and requires the freedom and vastness connected with the (frozen) river and its surroundings.

Upon arrival in Ely, Tom and Hatty climb the tower of the cathedral, which further substantiates their differences in age and maturity level. While both of them are keen on climbing the cathedral tower, the climb can be associated with a symbolic function for Hatty from a psychoanalytical point of view. Considering the phallic connotations of the cathedral tower, Hatty’s climb suggests that she usurps agency and points to her initiation into the patriarchal symbolic and sexual order, and hence experience, which eventually culminates in her marrying Barty, whom she meets on her way back home. As Raymond E. Jones argues, it is on the cathedral platform that Hatty can now see the world “of experience beyond childhood”²⁰² that formerly only Tom could glimpse on the garden wall. This is further reflected in their positions and movements on the platform: “The tower-keeper pointed to something far away that he declared were the spires of Castleford; then he drew his sightseeing party aside to peer in another direction, towards Peterborough. Hatty went with the others. Tom remained where he was, still staring towards Castleford”²⁰³. While Hatty is able to move on with the group and ready to fully take in the world beyond childhood, Tom longingly looks back to Castleford, the direction of Hatty’s home and the garden.

up and becomes more involved in substantial relationships”. Maria Nikolajeva. *The Rhetoric of Character in Children’s Literature*, 99.

200 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 173.

201 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 183.

202 Raymond E. Jones. “Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden*.”, 216.

203 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 194.

The skating expedition and arguably also Hatty's childhood end when the ice begins to thaw and Hatty meets young Barty on her way home. As Margaret and Michael Rustin maintain, this skating expedition on the frozen river constitutes her "last great experience of the freedom of childhood"²⁰⁴. While the river in its frozen state "suggests the spaciousness and safety of pre-pubertal childhood"²⁰⁵, its thawing, by contrast, signals danger and the continuation of its onward movement, hence the progress of linear time and Hatty's maturation. When Hatty is skating back to Castleford with Tom and coincidentally meets Barty, she is relieved to see him and accepts his offer to give her a lift in his gig.²⁰⁶ She is thus taken away from the still frozen but already thawing river, formerly a symbol of Hatty's freedom, to a different path that leads towards romance, marriage and sexuality and where there is no more space for Tom in Hatty's thoughts, who gradually begins to thin out and becomes insubstantial.²⁰⁷ In marrying Barty, Hatty thus fulfils Victorian expectations about gender. These were, however, as Pearce's text suggests, still widely accepted in the 1950s, when the novel was written, and it is therefore hardly surprising that the text does not offer a revisionist critique in this respect.

Even though Mrs Bartholomew's dream-internal chronology suggests that the day of the skating expedition marks the end of Hatty's childhood, the chronology of the actual events allows a different reading and implies that Hatty's childhood ended on the eve of her wedding to Barty.²⁰⁸ Because Mrs Bartholomew's dreams "are associative, not chronological"²⁰⁹, this incident occurs relatively early in the narrative and leaves Tom (and the first-time reader) unable to fully grasp the

204 Margaret Rustin and Michael Rustin. "Loneliness, Dreaming and Discovery.", 208.

205 Margaret Rustin and Michael Rustin. "Loneliness, Dreaming and Discovery.", 213.

206 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 200.

207 In this respect, Pearce's story strongly departs from Arcadian children's fiction, which "creates a myth of childhood by describing it as a myth of the Golden Age". Nikolajeva argues that in these stories, "two of the most important, and clearly interrelated motifs in adult literature, death and sexuality, [...] are totally absent [...]. The characters, whether they are humans or animals, are depicted at the pre-pubescent stage, the stage of innocence, where their sexual identity has not yet been discovered". Maria Nikolajeva. "Growing Up.", 115, 116. However, upon closer inspection, her statement needs relativizing; for instance, the ending of Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* suggests that sexuality is not completely absent in all texts, while *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* reinforce that death is also a topic addressed in these texts.

208 The story, in fact, suggests that both events can be regarded as the endpoints of Hatty's childhood. While sitting in the gig with Barty and Hatty, Tom becomes more and more insubstantial, so that "[s]everal times a gesture of her [Hatty's] hand actually passed through him. Once she leant her arm along the back of the gig-seat, as she turned the better to listen to young Barty, and then her wrist and hand rested in Tom's gullet and made his swallowing feel strange". Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 202. At this point, Hatty arguably no longer needs Tom and forgets that he, however faint, is still present.

209 Angelika Zirker. "'Time No Longer'.", 273.

significance of the events at this point. On this occasion, when Tom steps into the garden once more, he finds the garden at night with a storm brewing. In this case, the night-time setting, similar to the change of season later in the story, points to the meaningfulness of the events. When the thunderstorm rages above the garden, the old fir tree starts “swinging to and fro, its ivy-wreathed arms struggling wildly in the tempest *like the arms of a swaddling-child*”, before it is, all of a sudden, struck by lightning and falls “in darkness and the resumed rushing of wind and rain”²¹⁰. According to Angelika Zirker, the fall of the tree “in the night before Hatty’s married life begins has a symbolic quality: it marks the end of her childhood, the end of her stay at her aunt’s – and thus also the end to her playing in the garden”²¹¹ with Tom, as is reinforced by the metaphorical child death.²¹² The falling of a tree during the night can also be seen as a marker of the end of a child’s adventures in the past, which is a function that the tree in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* shares with the one in Janet Lunn’s *The Root Cellar* (1981). In the latter, the small hawthorn tree, whose shadow has to be in the exact middle of the cellar door to transform this place into a gateway to the nineteenth-century past, is hit by an old maple tree during a storm, uprooted in the process and destroys the root cellar.²¹³ Even though the fir tree in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* is part of the FTAW and not part of the gateway, the falling of both trees during a storm suggests a ‘natural’ end of Tom’s and Rose’s explorations of and recentrings to past.

210 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 52, 53, my emphasis.

211 Angelika Zirker. “‘Time No Longer’”, 279.; cf. Jane Suzanne Carroll. *Landscape in Children’s Literature*, 54.

212 The symbolic power of this imagery bears a faint echo of the chestnut tree in *Jane Eyre*, which is likewise used as an element of foreshadowing. This tree, similar to the fir tree in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, is struck by lightning at a crucial moment in Jane’s life, namely when she and Mr Rochester get engaged. Even though Jane, unlike Hatty, does not see the lightning strike, she later comes by the tree, which “stood up, black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gasped ghastly”. This charred and damaged tree symbolises her imminent separation from Rochester and simultaneously points to their reunion at the end of the narrative, as “[t]he cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below”. Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 274. In *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, the fall of the fir tree might likewise not only foreshadow the imminent end of Hatty’s childhood but also her future family life, insofar as it may be read as a symbol pointing to the death of her two boys, who both get killed in WWI. Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 222.

213 After the storm, the protagonist Rose Larkins finds “[t]he root cellar was completely washed out. [...] Its doors had been smashed by the falling tree. Rose stared down at the devastation in stunned silence. Then she raced downstairs and outside in her pajamas and bare feet. She slipped and slid and crawled over the huge icy trunk of the old maple to reach the little thorn tree. She knelt down beside it, and tenderly, as though it had been a person, she tried to lift it. It was impossible. It was lying with its branches across what had been the cellar, its roots sticking out in a tangle in all directions like the hair of some giant wild man. She felt as though a part of herself had been wrenched from her. ‘I can’t ever go back,’ she whispered”. Janet Lunn. *The Root Cellar*, 213.

The age difference between Hatty and Tom during this night is arguably also reflected in their positions in the house and garden respectively and seems to reiterate the age-related binary opposition characteristic of many Edwardian texts.²¹⁴ Hatty, a young woman about to be married the next day, is no longer found in the childhood space of the garden, but in the domestic sphere of the house, where she “‘stood at the window and looked over the garden’”²¹⁵ when the tree is struck by lightning. As Mrs Bartholomew explains retrospectively, she could see Tom, who “‘looked as thin through [*sic*] as a piece of moonshine’”²¹⁶ during this night, which implies that she has left her childhood days behind and was no longer in need of Tom as a playmate. Tom, by contrast, is still a child and roams the copious garden even during that night. He was just emerging from their mutual childhood space when the lightning struck, reinforcing the child’s proximity to natural environments prevalent in much Romantic poetry.

Despite presenting childhood as an ephemeral state, Pearce also foregrounds that it is not altogether beyond retrieval. In fact, the story suggests that “[t]hrough her dreams of her childhood, Hatty has attained a second childhood based on memories”²¹⁷. The idea of a return to childhood is carefully implemented at the beginning of the story, but only becomes fully apparent upon second reading. The fall of the fir tree, which has been read as an instance signifying the end of Hatty’s childhood before, can simultaneously be read in the context of experiencing a second childhood through memory. This tree, “the constant in the upset chronology of [the] episodic story-telling sequence”²¹⁸, falls during the night when it is struck by lightning but miraculously stands again during Tom’s subsequent visit to the garden. As it is repeatedly compared to a child, the metaphorical child death when the tree falls is reversed and Mrs Bartholomew is able to relive her childhood.²¹⁹ This idea is further reinforced by the fact that *after* Tom finds the tree standing again, he comes across Hatty and her cousins for the first time in the garden.

Moreover, from the very start of Tom’s visits, the garden bears associations with a new beginning, which is conveyed predominantly through the time of day. When Tom opens the backdoor for the first time to let in the moonlight he requires for deciphering the time on the grandfather clock, the light was “as bright as daylight – the white daylight that comes before the full rising of the

214 Cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time.”, 7.

215 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 220.

216 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 220.

217 Angelika Zirker. “‘Time No Longer’.”, 281. Arguably, while Hatty returns to her late-Victorian childhood, the reader in the twenty-first century similarly returns to a childhood in the 1950s through Tom’s perspective.

218 Donna Cox. “‘Through a Door’.”, 155.

219 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 39, 52.

sun”²²⁰. Upon his next visit, the associations with an early morning are drawn upon more distinctly: “There is a time, between night and day, when landscapes sleep. [...] This grey, still hour before morning was the time in which Tom walked into his garden”²²¹. Just like the start of a new day, Mrs Bartholomew seems to start remembering and reliving her childhood, which, when considering the chronology of both actual and memory-time events in the past, ends with a night-time setting, during a thunderstorm or on the evening when Barty takes Hatty home in his gig respectively.²²²

Throughout her dreams, Mrs Bartholomew (and by implication also Tom) is able to bridge the gap between past and present and at least temporarily defy the inscription on the clock. In her dreams, both of them “can exchange Time for Eternity not in death but by the deep magic of memory and the power of the imagination”²²³ that is initiated by Tom’s presence in the house and their mutual yearning for a companion and playmate. Fulfilling her desire and actualising her *W-world* in her dreams, Mrs Bartholomew, similar to Tom, is able to retrospectively experience the nurturing powers not just of the garden but of childhood more generally. This is implied by her smiling in her sleep while dreaming: “She was lying tranquilly in bed: her false teeth, in a glass of water by the bedside, grinned unpleasantly in the moonlight, but her indrawn mouth was curved in a smile of easy, sweet-dreaming sleep. She was dreaming of the scenes of her childhood”²²⁴. This temporary escape to her own past indicates a longing to recapture something that is lost in the face of ageing and death and that her childhood has had a formative influence on and still affects her in the present. It is particularly striking that Mrs Bartholomew smiles in her sleep when Tom enters the garden properly for the first time, as it reinforces the nostalgic qualities of Mrs Bartholomew’s dreams:

if what is brought to mind is pleasant and sweet, it acquires its emotional edge – its distinctive nostalgia signature, as it were – from the relatively sharp silhouette it casts upon certain present circumstances that invariably are felt to be – and often are reasoned to be – more bleak, grim, wretched, ugly, deprivational, unfulfilling, frightening, etc.²²⁵

220 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 19.

221 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 36–37.

222 Even when taking the chronology of events of the past into account, according to which Tom sees Hatty for the first time when she has just been orphaned, the connection to morning is established: “Yet the sunshine through the leaves of the trees was still coming from the east. It was still morning”. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 95.

223 Linda Hall. “‘Time no longer’”, 50.

224 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 34.

225 Fred Davis. “Nostalgia, Identity and the Current Nostalgia Wave.”, 418.

In this respect, “Pearce reveals a childhood and its memory as inextricably intertwined with adulthood”²²⁶. As a grown-up, Mrs Bartholomew is able to recapture and relive her childhood in memory and dream, which suggests that this period of her life is still vital to her identity, even as a very old woman. In fact, it seems that the idea of reliving the Victorian past through memory constitutes this novel’s specific neo-Victorian approach.

Despite the fact that the narrative unfolding in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* is initially geared towards the young, male protagonist – as is also suggested by the novel’s title – it is simultaneously, if not even more so, the story of Hatty Bartholomew. In this respect, Pearce’s narrative exhibits neo-Victorianism’s propensity for recovering the stories of those on the margins typically eclipsed from the historical record: it tells the story of Hatty as both girl (i. e., a child) and (old) woman, which contributes to making her story quintessentially neo-Victorian. The final two chapters in particular suggest a shift away from Tom, presenting Mrs Bartholomew, who is introduced as a peripheral character and sullen old woman occupying the attic flat, as the creator of the dreamscape the boy has been slipping into night after night. From the moment Tom steps into the FTAW, he becomes part of Hatty’s story, which is told through the landlady’s memory, and is presented with a physically immersive experience. Unlike the FTAW in Dianne Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale*, which is created through an act of storytelling and requires a mental act of recentring to the Victorian past, Hatty’s world in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* becomes part of Tom’s *lived* experience: “Through sharing the experience of the garden with Tom, she makes it available to him and hence to *his* memories”²²⁷. In 1958, the number of people who had still experienced the Victorian period was beginning to dwindle. The idea of witness accounts and the “communicative memory”, which describes “history in the frame of autobiographical memory”²²⁸, i. e., subjectively, is presented in a manner that is bound to be appealing to children and anticipates the concept of ‘living history’. In *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, Mrs Bartholomew thus “act[s] as [a] [conduit] to the past”²²⁹ and secures the transmission and persistence of her childhood memories in the future, as does Vida Winter in *The Thirteenth Tale*, when she employs a biographer to record the story of the Angelfield family.²³⁰

226 Valerie Krips. *The Presence of the Past*, 64.

227 Angelika Zirker. “‘Time No Longer’.”, 285, original emphasis.

228 Jan Assmann. “Communicative and Cultural Memory.”, 117.

229 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Past Reimagined.”, 163.

230 The 1999 feature film adaptation strongly draws on this idea and frames Tom’s childhood experiences by contemporary events. The story opens in the 1990s with a vertical panning shot of a city and introduces Tom as a middle-aged barrister and family father. On this day, the deceased Mrs Bartholomew’s house is about to be torn down, and Tom arrives shortly before the wrecking ball hits the house. Hearing Hatty’s voice amidst those of the construction workers and seeing the demolition ball swinging, ready for its first blow, his

Considering the events taking place in the FTAW from this perspective inevitably raises the question of Tom's agency and autonomy. Despite the fact that Tom perceives the garden as a place that affords him with various possibilities and freedoms, his overall movements in the dreamscape are determined by the dreamer. The limits imposed upon his agency become apparent when he, for instance, attempts to follow the three boys from the garden into the house, hoping that, "perhaps, this time he would succeed in penetrating the interior of the night-time house, and explore it"²³¹. However, even though he hastened to go in, he is unable to follow them upstairs:

although he moved quickly, the furniture of the hall was dissolving and vanishing away before him even more quickly. Even before he reached the middle of the hall, everything had gone from it but the grandfather clock; and when he reached the middle, and could look sideways towards the stairs, he saw them uncarpeted [...]. These were not the stairs that could ever lead him anywhere now but to bed. 'Bother!' said Tom. He turned back the way he had come, towards the garden door: through it the garden lay unchanged. As he stepped out over the threshold, he glanced back over his shoulder into the house: sure enough, the hall was re-filling behind him.²³²

Despite inviting Tom to share her dreams and play with her former childhood self, Mrs Bartholomew remains in control over this world and defines Tom's position in the FTAW.²³³ He can still return to the garden where Hatty remained, but he can neither follow the boys nor explore the house when she is not inside herself. Her control over the FTAW is further suggested by Tom's invisibility to almost all characters in this world, which simultaneously evokes the notion of the 'imaginary friend'. Despite the fact that Tom is able to evade adult supervision this way, his invisibility also keeps him from moving around freely in the garden,

childhood memories surface and transport Tom and the viewer back to the day when Tom has to temporarily leave his family because of his brother's illness. The film thus introduces a double time slip initiated through memory and emphasises that Tom remembers Hatty Bartholomew when he has grown up. Cf. Willard Carroll (dir.). *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 01:57–05:28. For an analysis of childhood in Setterfield's novel, see chapter 9 "Childhood Neglect and Pathological Relationships in Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*".

231 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 65–66.

232 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 66.

233 Moreover, she also seems to determine the duration of Tom's visits to the FTAW and, at one point, even attempts to keep him in her past: "He left the clock and went out into the garden, and then very deliberately came in again and – shutting his eyes – closed the door and bolted it. But when he opened his eyes again, the hall was still the Melbournes' hall. He went along it and upstairs, hoping desperately that, even as he went, the stair-carpet and rods would dissolve away beneath him, and he would find himself on the way to the Kitsons' flat and his own bedroom there and his own bed". Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 150. It is only when both Tom and Hatty are fast asleep that Tom is transported back in time to his present. This instance suggests, as Nikolajeva asserts, that "[t]he focus is [...] transferred from a child's experience of a remote epoch to an adult's fear of ageing and death". Maria Nikolajeva. *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*, 45.

because he is unable to open any of the garden doors. Neither can he turn the key of the old grandfather clock to find out about the inscription on his own, realising that even though “[h]e longed to be able to turn it, [...] Hatty must do that for him”²³⁴. In making herself an indispensable part of Tom’s visits to the garden, Hatty ensures that she is included in his adventures and is able to satisfy her *W-world*: her “longing for someone to play with and for somewhere to play”²³⁵, which appears to inform, at least temporarily, both of their childhood experiences.

6.3. Concluding Remarks

In *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, Pearce presents childhood as an ephemeral state and elaborates on friendship and play as universal childhood needs, indicating that the garden and the provision of a playmate actualise both Hatty and Tom’s *W-worlds* simultaneously. Yet, where Tom, for whom the garden is part of an alternative realm, associates this place with freedom and liberation, because he is placed outside of adult-child relationships, it turns out to be a place of restrictions and imprisonment for Hatty, which can only be overcome by growing up and leaving the garden. In this respect, Pearce, like many of her contemporaries, draws upon and “seem[s] to be continuing the themes and preoccupations of the Arcadian writers”, but eschews their conclusions by “actually encouraging children to grow up”²³⁶, as is reflected in Hatty’s rite of passage and maturation.

Despite the fact that Pearce at times expresses a nostalgic longing for a greener and more holistic world, her depiction of childhood in the late Victorian era does not elicit a nostalgic yearning. Even though Mrs Bartholomew gains a second childhood through memory, her childhood recollections are not invariably pleasant and enjoyable; in fact, as Pearce maintains, “there is very much unpleasantness in childhood that we adults forget – and much that some simply dare not remember”²³⁷. The inclusion of Hatty’s emotional pain as well as her exclusion from and marginalisation in the Melbourne family highlight that her

234 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 150. As a character able to interact with Hatty (talk to, play with or influence her) but unable to affect the dreamscape in any significant ways (he cannot help Hatty build a tree-house or open doors), Tom, in fact, collapses the distinction between ‘spectator’ and ‘participant’, as conceptualised by Doreen Maitre: Tom is not merely a spectator and yet not a full participant either because of his special position in the FTAW. Cf. Doreen Maitre. *Literature and Possible Worlds*, 45–46.

235 Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 223.

236 Humphrey Carpenter. *Secret Gardens*, 216.

237 Philippa Pearce “The Writer’s View of Childhood.”, 76.

girlhood, for the most part, did not correspond to Romantic conceptions of a carefree and happy childhood. Thus, Hatty's childhood, "the only model of Victorian childhood available to the reader", "ultimately fails to offer a desirable counter-narrative to the 1950s"²³⁸, disclosing the novel's revisionist engagement with the past. In fact, Pearce constructs Victorian girlhood as a time that is not wholly to be enjoyed and implies that growing up and being able to leave childhood confines sometimes is the only solace for the child character. Tom and Hatty's different positions on the childhood scale as 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD and DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD respectively can be used to underscore this point. Throughout Pearce's text, Hatty's childhood, and by extension childhood in the Victorian era, is presented as being excruciating and much stricter than Tom's childhood in the 1950s. Even though several laws to protect children had already been passed by the end of the nineteenth century, several others, such as the extensive Children's Act of 1908, were yet to come.²³⁹ Tom's treatment by and his interactions with his relatives arguably reflect these developments and suggest that Tom, unlike Hatty, does by no means belong to the group of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, except at times in his own perception.

The 2015 graphic-novel adaptation *Le jardin de minuit* (Tom's *Midnight Garden*) by Edith provides an interesting rendition of Pearce's original story in two respects, which impact Tom and Hatty's positions on the childhood scale – however slightly.²⁴⁰ Firstly, it makes explicit the sense of imprisonment Tom feels in his aunt and uncle's flat by drawing on the image of a prisoner behind bars. For instance, when Tom enters the guest room for the first time, his sense of imprisonment is implemented on the visual as well as the discourse level. Standing in the room and facing the barred window, Tom looks sorrowfully and dismayed at the bars, which cast a shadow on his face and make him appear a prisoner in the room.²⁴¹ The pattern of the wallpaper, bluish-green vertical stripes on a yellowish-green ground, replicates the shadows cast on Tom's face and amplifies the sense of entrapment, evoking the faint image of a prison cell.²⁴² It suggests that Tom is trapped in this room and, by extension, the Kitsons' flat and cannot even escape adult supervision, which is hinted at by Aunt Gwen standing in the door frame,

238 Sandra Dinter. "Spatial Inscriptions of Childhood.", 226.

239 For a more detailed account of legal actions to protect children during this time, see chapter 3 "Children and Childhood: Historical Developments and Literary Representations in Victorian Literature".

240 The adaptations referenced and analysed in this chapter not only comment in hindsight on the Victorian era, but also on the 1950s, as the temporal distance between contemporary adaptations of Pearce's text and its date of publication inevitably increases.

241 Cf. Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 7 (3).

242 Cf. Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 7 (3).

speaking to and looking at him.²⁴³ In this instance, Tom, “[a]s many [other] child protagonists”, comes to realise that “to be enclosed in a house is to be protected as well as imprisoned”²⁴⁴, of which the latter meaning strongly and unmistakably surfaces on the visual level depicting the former nursery.²⁴⁵ Thus, readers are inclined to share Tom’s perception and perceive his room as a place of imprisonment and disempowerment even more than in Pearce’s novel. Accordingly, even grown-up readers would more readily place him in the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, whereby the contrast between his position in the TAW and in the FTAW is amplified.

The image of the prison cell is further used to address the ephemerality of childhood in that the visual layer of the graphic novel already foreshadows the garden’s ambivalent function in the story as a place of temptation. This impression is evoked multiple times in the graphic novel and realised by projecting the shadow cast by the bars across the window onto Tom’s floral-patterned bedclothes, whereby the flowers on the bedclothes stand in symbolically for the midnight garden.²⁴⁶ It is drawn upon even more strongly when Tom thinks about extending his visits to the childhood garden indefinitely. For this particular idea and to reinforce the significance of the moment, Edith uses a full-page panel to show Tom wide-eyed and hugging his knees on his bed in the shadows cast by the bars, implying that he plans to subject himself to a double imprisonment in the Victorian garden and in the past.²⁴⁷ At this point, the graphic novel suggests that Tom attempts to replace one ‘prison’ for another, by showing part of the striped wallpaper, which formerly contributed to evoking the image of the prison cell.²⁴⁸ In considering that the garden and childhood are conflated in this novel, an idea that has only been introduced six pages before, the visual layer foreshadows that Tom is attempting to imprison himself in forever childhood in the garden.²⁴⁹

243 Cf. Edith. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 7 (3).

244 Pauline Dewan. *The House as Setting, Symbol, and Structural Motif in Children’s Literature*, 6.

245 Throughout the story, Pearce repeatedly refers to something or someone having been imprisoned in the old house. For instance, when Tom explores the narrow concrete backyard behind the house, he sees a newspaper that has been “blown in from outside and *imprisoned* here”. The position of this newspaper can be read in analogy to Tom’s feeling of imprisonment in the Kitsons’ flat, in which he in turn is “*imprisoned* in wakefulness” at night. Philippa Pearce. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 30, 14, my emphasis.

246 Cf. e.g., Edith. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 8 (5).

247 Cf. Edith. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 77 (1).

248 Cf. Edith. *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, 77 (1).

249 This idea is brought further across in Edith’s depiction of the door leading to the midnight garden. At the top of the door, the idea of bars has been picked up again, so that it, too, evokes notions of imprisonment when the sun/moon shines through the door and the bars

Secondly, the graphic-novel adaptation implies through graphic narrative that Hatty's punishments might have bordered on physical abuse and that she might hence be classified differently within the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. This is suggested in the context of Hatty's punishment for leading the geese into the garden through the hole in the hedge when her aunt, an austere-looking matriarch, is in the garden, blaming Hatty and scolding her for her misdeeds.²⁵⁰ Six of the nine panels on the page feature a lush, green garden background and foreground the place's connotations with disciplining and socialisation. Hatty, contrite and crying, remains completely voiceless during the encounter with her aunt, which reinforces her inferior position as a child in the context of adult-child power relations. The last three panels differ greatly from the ones before in that they show a slightly different scenery, focusing on the sky rather than the garden, and include Tom's reaction as well. Unlike Pearce's story, in which "the weather in the garden had always been perfect"²⁵¹, the graphic novel adaptation generally provides a more diverse depiction of the sky. In spite of this variation, the incorporation of ominous, purple-black clouds is significant in this particular instance. They not only contrast with the greenery in the panels before but also signify the unpleasantness of the situation, as becomes apparent when taking the one-word speech bubbles ("‘Liar!’", "‘Criminal!’" and "‘Monster!’"²⁵²) in each of the panels into account. In two of these panels, Hatty's aunt is shown to take the girl by the wrist, hoisting her almost off the ground.²⁵³ The rigour involved in this situation is also captured in Tom's shocked face and suggests that Hatty might be assigned a position close to or even in the most intense manifestation within the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD.²⁵⁴

This latter example in particular suggests that Edith's rendition might even be more neo-Victorian than Pearce's novel – at least in some respects. While Pearce's source text draws on and reworks several elements characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction, its revisionist potential is minimal by comparison to later neo-Victorian novels. Even though Edith's graphic novel adaptation does not offer a radical departure in terms of revisionism from Pearce's text – after all, it is still written for a child audience and quotes from Pearce's text in speech bubbles and captions –, the visual layer allows for a graphic implementation of a revisionist

cast shadows. Every time Tom enters the garden, he thus seems to imprison himself. Cf. Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 28 (4–5).

250 Cf. Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 51 (1–9).

251 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 222.

252 Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 51 (7–9).

253 Cf. Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 51 (7, 9).

254 Cf. Edith. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 51 (7–9).

critique, as the depiction of Hatty's punishment exemplifies. However, this is not to suggest that all adaptations offer such a critique: Willard Carroll's audio-visual adaptation, for instance, makes some significant alterations to the scene analysed above and in fact tones down Hatty's punishment considerably. Instead of geese invading the garden through the secret tunnel in the hedge, Hatty just forgot to close the gate and a cow enters the garden, apparently without inflicting damage to the garden or the flowerbeds.²⁵⁵ Reprimanded by her aunt, Hatty is merely sent to her room and is not subjected to emotional mistreatment of any kind; her aunt merely reminds her of her position as a charity child and her duties of gratitude and obedience.²⁵⁶ Sending the child as punishment to his/her/their room seems to be a comparatively 'modern' form of punishment many younger viewers can relate to. It probably derives from the film's content rating as 'universal', which means that it is suitable for children from the age of four onwards, who might not fully comprehend that Hatty belongs to a time when different attitudes towards childhood were at work. As creative reinterpretations of source material, adaptations thus have a considerable range of possibilities in how to implement certain aspects (with due regard for their target audience), and, in the particular case of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, tease out the text's revisionist potential even more or forgo this potential altogether.

255 Cf. Willard Carroll (dir.). *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 35:37–36–09.

256 Cf. Willard Carroll (dir.). *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 36:09–36–56.

7. Competing Visions of Childhood in Ibbotson's Neo-Victorian Adventure Novel *Journey to the River Sea*

Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* (2001), a historical adventure novel for children mainly set in Brazil in 1910, is widely considered "her most acclaimed work"¹. It marked a turning point in Ibbotson's writing career, who had hitherto written "uproarious, ghoulish fantasies"² such as *Which Witch?* (1979) or *Dial a Ghost* (1996).³ Only three years after its publication, *Journey to the River Sea* "ha[d] sold more than 200,000 copies"⁴ and, as Michelle Pauli observes in 2010, "enjoyed both critical and commercial success"⁵. It is the winner of the 2001 Nestlé Smarties Book Prize (for the age group 9–11) and was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Whitbread and the Blue Peter Book Awards. The enduring appeal of Ibbotson's text is, for instance, reflected in Emma Carroll's sequel to *Journey to the River Sea*, entitled *Escape to the River Sea*, which was published in 2022 and is set after WWII. Yet, despite the apparent success of Ibbotson's story and the fact that "[s]he ranks alongside such talents as Joan Aiken, Nina Bawden, and Philippa Pearce as one of Britain's great children's writers of the last fifty years"⁶, her novel has eluded scholarly attention so far.

In *Journey to the River Sea*, childhood experiences of various characters are explored and juxtaposed in a fairly uncommon setting for a British children's novel, the Amazon rainforest.⁷ The story arc follows Maia Fielding, initially an orphan at the Mayfair Academy for Young Ladies in London, who is sent to the

1 Daniel Hahn. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, 299.

2 Lorna Bradbury. "Before JK Rowling, there was Eva Ibbotson.", n.p.

3 When her husband died in 1998, Ibbotson did not want to continue writing what has been referred to as "'rompy' children's books" and wrote *Journey to the River Sea*. Nicholas Tucker. "Eva Ibbotson.", n.p.

4 Nicholas Tucker. "Eva Ibbotson.", n.p.

5 Michelle Pauli. "Children's Author Eva Ibbotson Dies Aged 85.", n.p.

6 Daniel Hahn. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, 299.

7 *Journey to the River Sea* is not the first of Ibbotson's novels that is set in the Amazon. Her YA novel *A Company of Swans* (1985) is also mostly set in Manaus, albeit two years later than *Journey to the River Sea*, in 1912.

Amazon to live with her highly indebted relatives, the Carters, and hopes to find the home she has been longing for since the death of her parents. In what seems to be an inversion of Mary Lennox's journey in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), in which the child is transplanted from an exoticised country (India) to the English countryside, Ibbotson's text takes the child from the capital of the UK to the verdant, 'exotic' space of the Amazon rainforest.⁸ Accompanied by the Carters' new governess, Miss Minton, Maia sets out to Manaus and befriends the child actor Clovis King on the sea voyage. Clovis, whose real name (Jimmy Bates) has been changed upon adoption by the Goodleys, the owners of a travelling acting company, is to star as seven-year-old Cedric Errol in a stage adaptation of Burnett's highly successful first children's novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) in Manaus.⁹ On the brink of adolescence and homesick for England, Clovis lives a precarious life as a child actor and is sure that if his voice " 'cracks in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* they'll throw me out' " ¹⁰. When Maia arrives at the Carters', two further child characters are introduced: Beatrice and Gwendolyn, the Carters' complacent twin daughters, who do not hide their contempt for Maia. They have adopted their mother's attitude towards the natural environment, hardly ever leave their bungalow and abuse Maia both physically and emotionally. Unlike the twins, Finn Taverner, who lost his father recently, enjoys the stunning beauty, the lush flora and rich biodiversity of the rainforest, where he lives with his dog. As heir to Westwood, a stately mansion near York, where his father Bernard had harrowing childhood experiences, Finn is to be brought to England but manages to hide successfully in the rainforest before making his way to the Xanti, the Indigenous tribe his mother belonged to.

This chapter elaborates on the various childhoods presented in *Journey to the River Sea*, focussing in particular on notions of home and belonging and Ibbotson's engagement with Romantic ideas about childhood. Due to the considerable number of very different childhoods explored in Ibbotson's novel, this chapter is divided into five subchapters, which focus on Maia while she is still in London, her foster parents Mr and Mrs Carter, the twins Beatrice and Gwendolyn as well as Finn and Clovis respectively. The first subchapter analyses the beginning of Ibbotson's novel and is predominantly concerned with Maia's expectations and her *wish-world* (or *W-world*) regarding what life in the Amazon

8 Similarly, in Sam Angus' *The House on Hummingbird Island* (2016), twelve-year-old orphan Idie Grace is sent away from England to a more 'exotic' place, in her case a Caribbean island in the West Indies, where she has inherited a house and is surrounded by hummingbirds, parakeets, cockatoos and monkeys.

9 Burnett also wrote a theatrical adaptation of her novel, which premiered in London in 1888. Yet, Ibbotson does not specify whether the group of actors is performing their own interpretation of the novel or Burnett's theatrical version.

10 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 15.

rainforest and with her relatives will be like. The second subchapter looks more closely at the 'home' Mr and Mrs Carter provide Maia with before positioning her on the childhood scale and discussing her transgressive acts. The analysis of the Carter twins takes their family background and twin existence into account and focuses on instances in which they contradict the Romantic/Western concepts of children and childhood they at first sight seem to evoke in their physical appearance. The subchapter on Finn looks more closely at his connection to the natural world, his attitudes towards Westwood, the journey to the Xanti and the ending of Ibbotson's novel. The final subchapter on Clovis explores the discrepancy between his lived and performed childhoods and highlights to what extent the stage performance of Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as an explicit intertext for Ibbotson's novel adds another, genuinely Victorian vision of childhood.

In addition to the fairly large group of children juxtaposed in *Journey to the River Sea*, the setting in the Brazilian rainforest is a further outstanding feature of this novel and requires some remarks in the context of neo-Victorian studies. While the setting in Brazil is in line with the broad usage of the term 'neo-Victorian' advocated by the *Neo-Victorian Studies* journal, which understands "'neo-Victorian' [...] in the widest possible sense, so as not to be restricted to geographical British contexts or those of the British Empire and its one-time colonies"¹¹, it should be situated in the context of recent debates about a global perspective on neo-Victorianism as well.¹² Several scholars have commented on what has been termed 'global neo-Victorianism' and highlight the relevance of such an angle. Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann, for instance, consider "the importance of extending beyond the relation of external empire and (post)colonial contexts into a wider panorama of the multiplex encounters with a Victorian tradition in a nineteenth-century perspective within a global environment [...] paramount"¹³. Likewise, the guest editors of the *Neo-Victorian Studies* 2015 special issue "Neo-Victorianism and Globalisation: Transnational Dissemination of Nineteenth-Century Cultural Texts" aimed to "open up the debate on the role of neo-Victorianism as a global, adaptive and adaptational phenomenon"¹⁴. Their issue seeks "to go beyond the current postcolonial frontier in the study of neo-Victorianism and test the reach and relevance of neo-Victorianism beyond the borders of the British Empire and the English lan-

11 Anon. "Aims and Scope.", n.p.

12 The *Neo-Victorian Studies Journal* invites "essays and creative pieces dealing with nineteenth-century Asian, African, North and South American contexts, among others", which includes Brazil. Anon. "Aims and Scope.", n.p., my emphasis.

13 Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann. "The Victorians Now.", 28.

14 Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger. "Introduction: What is Global Neo-Victorianism?", 1.

guage”¹⁵. A Britain-centric perspective may even exclude certain texts, as Jessica Cox warns: “To limit neo-Victorianism to a focus solely on those texts set in Victorian Britain (and possibly its colonies) would be unnecessarily and distortedly restrictive”, because the “setting is not the only means through which a text can engage with the Victorian past”¹⁶, implying that a text, irrespective of its setting, can be considered neo-Victorian as long as other parameters are met.

Yet, a global view on neo-Victorianism is far from unproblematic and even runs the risk of replicating imperialist and colonialist practices. While, as Llewellyn and Heilmann asserted in 2013, “[n]eo-Victorian criticism risks an implied imperialism in its response to [...] Anglocentricity” by focusing “largely on Anglophone engagements with Anglophone histories, stories and adaptations”, “the replacement – or displacement – of the term ‘neo-Victorianism’ into international and global contexts is not without its own perils”¹⁷. They see the problems of such an approach in the establishment of “an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenisation of heritage” by “imposing collective memory over cultural specificity as part of a memorial imperialism”¹⁸. In a similar vein, Cox considers the discussion of “[w]orks set within and without Victorian Britain’s colonies” as “a problematic act of literary colonization with potential ethical implications”¹⁹. She argues that “the problem with global neo-Victorianism [...] is precisely the ‘Victorian’”, which “has long had problematic associations”²⁰. However, the proposed, broader alternative term “neo-nineteenth century”²¹ does not solve this conundrum but eschews the specific temporal, cultural and historical focus designated by the label ‘Victorian’.²²

In light of these problems, Cox suggests delimiting the corpus of texts to be scrutinised under the label ‘global neo-Victorian’. She proposes that “[g]lobal neo-Victorian narratives should, by definition, retain the Victorian association – whether via the translation of Victorian cultural texts, lives, and moments, or through links to empire and the experiences of the Victorians themselves on the

15 Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger. “Introduction: What is Global Neo-Victorianism?”, 1.

16 Jessica Cox. “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism.”, 116.

17 Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann. “The Victorians Now.”, 26.

18 Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann. “The Victorians Now.”, 26, 37.

19 Jessica Cox. “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism.”, 117.

20 Jessica Cox. “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism.”, 120.

21 Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss. “Introduction: Fashioning the Neo-Victorian – Neo-Victorian Fashions.”, 16 n.9. See also: Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger. “Introduction: What is Global Neo-Victorianism?”, 7–8.

22 Cf. Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger. “Introduction: What is Global Neo-Victorianism?”, 7–8.

global stage”²³. This also means that “[t]hose works which deal exclusively with the history of countries and cultures beyond the Victorian must remain outside the neo-Victorian genre”, yet “not in order to preserve the Anglocentricity of neo-Victorianism, but precisely the opposite: to acknowledge the existence of global and cultural traditions *beyond* the Victorian, and to avoid neo-imperialistic claims of belonging”²⁴. Her understanding of a ‘global neo-Victorianism’ reinforces a reading of *Journey to the River Sea* as a neo-Victorian text: not only does Ibbotson’s novel open in London, but her story also explores the lives of British citizens abroad and beyond the Empire’s colonies, or, to put it in Cox’s words, “on the global stage”²⁵, while representing and contesting Victorian ideologies.

Moreover, the intertextual references to Victorian and first Golden Age children’s texts, most notably works by Burnett, stress the novel’s neo-Victorian engagement with the Victorian/Edwardian literary legacy. In interviews, Eva Ibbotson professed that she was influenced by Victorian texts, admitting “‘I get most of my ideas from Victorian literature, which I love’”, and that “‘orphan plots’”, which can be found in and inform a number of Victorian and Golden Age children’s narratives, “‘always work with children’”²⁶. Whether her fondness of Burnett’s fiction, especially *The Secret Garden*, derives from her fascination with orphan tales cannot be discerned.²⁷ At any rate, Burnett’s fiction had a lasting impact on Ibbotson’s children’s books:

‘When I came to England I read myself into the English language. I went to Hampstead public library and took down whatever I saw. The things that stuck with me were the American homespun things with clapboard houses, and, most of all, Frances Hodgson Burnett, an absolute genius. Perhaps when I began to write the novels for children I was harking back to how much pleasure I got from books like *The Secret Garden*’.²⁸

23 Jessica Cox. “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism.”, 122–123.

24 Jessica Cox. “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism.”, 123, original emphasis.

25 Jessica Cox. “Canonization, Colonization, and the Rise of Neo-Victorianism.”, 123.

26 Nicholas Tucker. “Eva Ibbotson.”, n.p.

27 In *The Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox is turned into an orphan when her parents die in India and, due to being neglected by her parents, “is effectively an orphan before the cholera epidemic makes her one”. Danielle E. Price. “Cultivating Mary.”, 7.

28 Michelle Pauli. “Eva Ibbotson.”, n.p. In her article on Ibbotson’s *The Haunting of Granite Falls* (1987, original title *The Haunting of Hiram C. Hopgood*), Rebecca A. Brown also sees distinct intertextual connections to Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, which suggests that Ibbotson repeatedly returned to this particular text in her own writing for children. Cf. Rebecca A. Brown. “Ghosts, Health, and Nation in Eva Ibbotson’s *The Haunting of Granite Falls*.”, 123–126.

Even though *The Secret Garden* – in contrast to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* – is only implicitly referred to in *Journey to the River Sea*, it is still one of the story's most apparent intertexts.

Ibbotson's use of Victorian intertexts is a feature that is typical of neo-Victorian literature in general. As Louisa Hadley observes, “[a]lmost all neo-Victorian texts incorporate either direct or indirect references to Victorian texts, and thus implicitly encourage readers to identify them”²⁹. While this ‘game of recognition’ may be particularly appealing to young readers, especially since Ibbotson alludes to first Golden Age children's texts, “the engagement with Victorian literary narratives in neo-Victorian fiction extends beyond mere playful references and allusions”³⁰. Through intertextual references to earlier texts, these narratives gain an additional level of meaning for those able to identify these references and evoke a new context, which inevitably influences the interpretation of the text, as is apparent in Ibbotson's story.³¹ It seems that the more Golden Age/Victorian children's fiction and (Victorian) texts about childhood a reader knows, the more multi-layered the image of childhood in *Journey to the River Sea* becomes.

7.1. Maia: An Orphan's (Real and Imagined) Journey to the Amazon

As many other protagonists in (neo-Victorian) children's fiction, Maia is an orphan. Her parents, who were archaeologists, died in a train crash in Egypt two years prior to the events described in Ibbotson's narrative, when Maia was already attending the Mayfair Academy for Young Ladies in London. Grieving for her late parents, “Maia had wept night after night under her pillow, trying not to wake her friends”, and “fought hard to overcome the devastating blow”³² of being bereft of both parents at once. Since her parents' fatal accident, which is not further elaborated on in the text, she has been under the tutelage of Mr Murray, a

29 Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 143. Contemporary children's fiction is likewise full of intertextual references: “Among the most prominent features in contemporary children's books may be noted such as irony, parody, literary allusions, direct quotations or indirect references to previous texts – everything which in recent years has been included in the notion of *intertextuality*”. Maria Nikolajeva. *Children's Literature Comes of Age*, 153, original emphasis.

30 Louisa Hadley. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 143.

31 Focusing on children's texts, Maria Nikolajeva argues that (intertextual) allusions may be directed at both child and adult readers: “The extensive use of both literary and extraliterary allusions enriches children's texts and also allows writers to operate on both the child and adult code levels”. Maria Nikolajeva. *Children's Literature Comes of Age*, 186.

32 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 3.

lawyer and her appointed guardian, who manages Maia's finances until she reaches majority. Unlike Sara Crewe in Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905), who is temporarily treated as a pauper because her father was presumed to have lost all his fortune shortly before he died and who has no guardian to care for her, Maia is "left [...] well-provided for"³³ by her father and is able to continue attending the academy as a pupil. In this respect, Maia's situation corresponds to that of many Victorian upper-class orphans, who were "likely to lead a financially secure and relatively comfortable life, even if they were deprived of affection"³⁴. Maia's financial security is reflected in the fact that she "was rich now, and would be richer when she was twenty-one" and "did not have to worry about having enough [money]"³⁵, even if she and the reader are unaware of the exact amount of her inheritance.

Yet, for all its comforts, the academy cannot replace a proper home, which is what Maia seems to long for most. According to Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis, "'[h]ome' to a child is not merely a dwelling place but also an attitude [...], it is a place of comfort, security, and acceptance [...] which meets both physical and emotional needs"³⁶ of the child. In the opening pages of the novel, Maia is provided with the prospect of a loving and caring home when Mr Murray pays a visit to the academy. In a conversation with Maia, he proclaims his success in finally tracking down a second cousin of Maia's father's, whose family is willing to take her in. The full scope of Maia's yearning for and the significance she attributes to a home are revealed by the extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator, who describes her reaction to the good news she has just received: "Maia took a deep breath. A *home*. She had spent her holidays for the past two years in the school. Everyone was friendly and kind but a *home*..."³⁷. The ellipsis at the end emphasises the meaningfulness of the place for Maia and points to the wealth of associations she might have with a home without stating them explicitly. It also hints at the extent to which her *W-world* is shaped by her longing and reinforces that the teachers, staff and pupils at the academy cannot replace a nurturing family or satisfy all of Maia's needs. Neither the idealisation of the home nor the overall premise of the narrative with regard to Maia's situation would be out of place in a Victorian novel.

Despite the fact that Maia's *W-world* seems to be brought closer to its actualisation at this moment, her delight and the anticipation kindled by the news receive a minor setback when she is informed that her only remaining relatives,

33 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 4.

34 Marion Gymnich. "The Orphan in the Victorian Novel.", 15.

35 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 39.

36 Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis. "'Home' and 'Not Home' in Children's Stories.", 223.

37 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 3, original emphasis.

Mr and Mrs Carter and their twin daughters Beatrice and Gwendolyn, have emigrated to Brazil six years ago and are now living in the Amazon rainforest. Upon hearing about her future living arrangements and the imminent journey to the Amazon, certain expectations about the place and, to a minor degree, the Carters' twin daughters and her new home are raised in Maia's mind. Before she arrives at the Carters' bungalow near Manaus, her *knowledge-world* (or *K-world*) regarding the Amazon and her *W-world* regarding the twins, whom she has neither met nor heard of before, are constantly subject to revision and/or expansion, as is shown below. They reflect Maia's attitude towards foreign places and cultures and are crucial in providing a first assessment of Maia's relationship with the natural environment and her image of childhood, the latter of which is continuously renegotiated in Ibbotson's story.

When Maia first hears that the Carters are living in the Amazon rainforest, she replicates colonial attitudes towards 'exotic' places, notwithstanding that Brazil was never part of the British Empire and had already been independent since 1822. Her assumption that living on the Amazon means being "'[i]n the jungle'"³⁸ reinforces that her initial conception of the area seems to be predicated on what Meg Furniss Weisberg refers to as "the symbolic lexicon"³⁹. Following Weisberg, this term refers to "the constellation of images, words, and associations that came to [...] represent [...] [the jungle] in the Western imagination" and "to stand in for [...] [it] to the point where those terms had less to do with a set of geographical or topological elements than with a set of psychological and emotional reactions"⁴⁰. With Rudyard Kipling's infamous poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899) and other imperialist fictional and non-fictional texts published in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries as well as the extensive expansion of the British Empire, colonial attitudes shaped and informed public discourse to a considerable extent.⁴¹ These were quite often also reflected in literature for children, as in Robert Louis Stevenson's poem collection *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885): in his poems, "forests are inevitably primitive, threatening and wild – the colonizer's version of the wildness of the

38 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 4.

39 Meg Furniss Weisberg. "Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts.", 173.

40 Meg Furniss Weisberg. "Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts.", 173. Analysing post-colonial representations of the African jungle, she claims that "the symbolic lexicon of the jungle included the image of luxuriant growth, of course, but 'jungle' also signified entanglement, disorientation, overwhelm [*sic*], sexuality, and lack of restraint". Ibid.

41 In his seminal work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward W. Said highlights the role of literary texts in disseminating imperialist ideas. He argues that the novel was "immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences" and suggests that "[b]y the end of the nineteenth century the empire is no longer merely a shadowy presence, [...] but, in the works of writers like Conrad, Kipling, Gide, and Loti, a central area of concern". Edward W. Said. *Culture and Imperialism*, xii, xvi–xvii.

Americas and Africa"⁴², so that even young readers were familiar with the symbolic lexicon of the (exotic) jungle in Western thought.⁴³ Against the prevalence of imperialist ideas of foreign lands and territories as well as their original inhabitants, it seems hardly surprising that Maia's images of the Amazon and the Indigenous population are similarly connoted. For Maia, the Amazon is first and foremost a perilous and disagreeable place with "rivers full of leeches, [...] dark forests with hostile Indians with blowpipes, and nameless insects which burrowed into flesh"⁴⁴, and hence a life-threatening environment. As part of her *K-world*, her immediate associations imply that Ibbotson's story seeks to replicate the mind-set of the time when it is set.

Maia's stereotypical image of and initially hostile stance towards the Amazon and its Indigenous population are revised on the very same day, however, and her *K-world* is adjusted and expanded. This process is initiated by Miss Carlisle, her geography teacher, who asks the pupils to do research on the Amazon. Encouraged to find out more about her new home, Maia is given permission to go to the library in the evening, where "she read and she read and she read"⁴⁵. The books she consults, in all likelihood written by European explorers, provide her with a refined understanding of and the capacity to appreciate the flora and fauna of the area:

She read about the great broad-leaved trees of the rainforest pierced by sudden rays of sun. She read about the travellers who had explored the maze of rivers and found a thousand plants and animals that had never been seen before. She read about brilliantly coloured birds flashing between the laden branches – macaws and humming birds and parakeets – and butterflies the size of saucers, and curtains of sweetly scented orchids trailing from the trees. She read about the wisdom of the Indians who could cure sickness and wounds that no one in Europe understood. '*Those who think of the Amazon as a Green Hell,*' she read in an old book with a tattered spine, '*bring only their own fears and prejudices to this amazing land. For whether a place is a hell or a heaven rests in yourself, and those who go with courage and an open mind may find themselves in Paradise.*'⁴⁶

Even though the rivers form a maze where Maia could easily get lost, they also signify adventure, exploration and discovery – concepts that are very popular in children's literature as well as in colonial adventure novels, such as H. Rider

42 Lissa Paul. "Multicultural Agendas.", 94.

43 In Stevenson's poem "Travel", for instance, the lyrical I would like to go to "forests, hot as fire, / Wide as England, tall as a spire" and maintains that "in jungles near and far, / Mandevouring tigers are", which reinforces colonial stereotypes. Robert Louis Stevenson. "Travel.", 28, ll. 17–18, 25–26.

44 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 4.

45 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 6.

46 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 6–7, original emphasis.

Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). The "dark forests"⁴⁷ of Maia's initial assessment become a source of biodiversity, and their flora and fauna are rich and colourful. On the whole, the forest is described as a source of wonder and dazzling beauty, and its Indigenous inhabitants as possessing medical expertise that exceeds that of Europeans. Maia's altered perception of the rainforest and her adventurous spirit are evident when she, after having read the passage in the old book, vows resolutely "I can do it [...]. I can make it a heaven and I will!"⁴⁸, which is a decision that characterises her as a curious, determined and liberal-minded girl, willing to accept change and start a new life in Brazil.⁴⁹

Reading up on the Amazon in the library, Maia not only extends her *K-world* but also seems to have temporarily entered a *fantasy-universe* (or *F-universe*), which reflects the intensity of her occupation with and her genuine interest in the place. Long past her bedtime and after having spent an entire evening in the library, Maia is found by Matron. She is not scolded for being out of bed, for the matron saw that "there was a strange look on the girl's face as though she was already in another country"⁵⁰. Similar to Peter Long in *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), whose changing facial expressions during sleep are indicative of his attempts to join Tom in Hatty's garden by dreaming himself away, Maia's look suggests that she is immersed in the information provided by the books and seems to have momentarily recentred to the Amazon, or at least her imagined version of the place.⁵¹ Considering that "F-universes [...]" may fulfill meta-

47 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 4.

48 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 7.

49 In the nineteenth century, travel narratives in general and accounts of exploration in particular often played an important role in the construction of dichotomies between the European self and the foreign 'other', contributing to a legitimisation of imperialism. This use of travel narratives is not picked up in *Journey to the River Sea*, however, because Maia does not adopt an imperialist attitude and demeanour in the course of the narrative. For more information on Victorian travel narratives, see, for instance, Jessica Howell's *Exploring Victorian Travel Literature: Disease, Race and Climate* (2014), which places a special emphasis on illness and climate.

50 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 7.

51 Cf. Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 127. In Judith Rossell's neo-Victorian children's novel *Withering-by-Sea* (2014), Stella Montgomery likewise seems to imagine herself to be in the Amazon. When the story opens, she is immersed in her atlas where she is "tracing a path through the Amazon jungle [...] and continued upriver". Lying hidden in the conservatory of the hotel where she is staying with her aunts, Stella's imagination starts to blend the sounds in the conservatory with those of the rainforest: "The drip and trickle of water and the hiss of steam under the grating in the floor seemed to mingle with the swish of jungle trees in the wind and the screams of parrots". Judith Rossell. *Withering-by-Sea*, 1. In both Rossell's and Ibbotson's texts, the female protagonists are introduced as highly imaginative and perceptive. Yet, in contrast to Maia, Stella is not going to journey to the Amazon but stays in the titular town. In A.S. Byatt's novella "Morpho Eugenia" (1992), William Adamson has returned from his travels on the Amazon and seems to have entered an *F-universe* when he thinks about the place. It is striking that he, similar to Maia, "'looked far away'" while thinking, amongst

phorically the function of K-worlds or W-worlds with respect to the primary narrative system”⁵², Maia can even be said to have constructed an idealised version, a *W-world*, of what the Amazon will be like in her mind after expanding her *K-world*. This becomes apparent at a later point in the story when the narrator elaborates on what Maia was imagining when she was sitting on the ladder in the library:

To wake at dawn and cook breakfast over a Primus and watch the herons and cormorants dive for fish... to feed logs into the firebox [of a ship] and smell the wood smoke as they caught... And then to chug up the still, dark rivers with the trees leaning over to give shade, or across the sudden white-water lagoons where the water was milky in the sunlight.⁵³

In her daydream, which might have been inspired by Victorian women travellers such as Isabella L. Bird and Mary Kingsley, Maia sees herself – slightly anachronistically for her age – as an adventurous, self-sufficient and autonomous girl in tune with the natural world, marvelling at her almost paradisiacal surroundings.⁵⁴ Her momentary recentring to the *F-universe* provides her with a space to stir her imaginative capabilities and imagine a life free of constraints, adult supervision and societal expectations. Also, and more importantly, it reflects Maia's renegotiation of her expectations regarding the Amazon and hints at her disposition and proximity to the natural environment.

Maia's revised image of the Amazon region becomes apparent in the geography lesson on the next day when the pupils are asked to share their findings. Putting her newly acquired knowledge into words, Maia explains to her fellow students that she will “‘travel a thousand miles along the river between trees that lean over the water, and there will be scarlet birds and sandbanks and creatures like big guinea pigs called capa... capybaras which you can tame’” and will eventually reach “‘Manaus, which is a beautiful place with a theatre with a green and golden roof’”⁵⁵. By contrast, none of the other children provide facts in

other things, “‘of the palms towering in the jungle, and all the beautiful silky butterflies sailing amongst them, high up and quite out of reach’”. A.S. Byatt. “Morpho Eugenia.”, 7.

52 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, 119.

53 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 197.

54 Isabella L. Bird was a highly prolific and renowned female explorer who toured around the world, visiting countries such as America, Australia, Hawaii, Japan, China and India, and published several books and articles on her travels, including her famous travel book *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879). Mary Kingsley explored West Africa during two journeys between 1893 and 1895 and wrote two books about her travels, *Travels in West Africa* (1897) and *West Africa Studies* (1899). As Elizabeth Steere argues, Bird and Kingsley can also be considered forebears of and inspiration for Amelia Peabody in Barbara Mertz's neo-Victorian *Amelia Peabody* mystery series. Cf. Elizabeth Steere. “Fictionalised History and Fabricated Artefacts.”, 16–20.

55 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 8.

favour of the Amazon. In addition to emphasising the heat, they elaborate on the “‘huge crocodiles [‘called alligators’] in the rivers that can snap your head off in one bite’”, “‘piranhas that strip all the flesh off your bones’”, “‘a mosquito which bit you and gave you yellow fever’”, “‘[j]aguars, silent as shadows’”, and “‘Indians, covered in terrifying swirls of paint, who shot you with poisoned arrows which paralysed you and made you mad’”⁵⁶. In other words, they exclusively focus on those aspects that contribute to constructing the Amazon as an exotic and dangerous place. Like Maia prior to her library research, they seem to be unaware of the Amazon’s more exceptional qualities and replicate the popular opinion prevalent at the time.⁵⁷

On her actual journey along the Amazon, Maia’s new *K-world* is actualised and, to her great pleasure, proves to be in accordance with the textual actual world (or TAW). From the boat, she spots “a litter of capybaras” with “their funny snouts and sandy fur” she mentioned to her classmates during the geography lesson, and sees a leafless tree whose “branches were full of scarlet and blue parakeets”⁵⁸ she read about in the library books. She even comes across an alligator in the guise of “a grey log lying in the shallows which suddenly came to life”⁵⁹ and is bid welcome by waving Indigenous children on the shores. As the narrative voice remarks, Maia “was becoming more and more excited. The colour, the friendly waving Indians, the flashing birds, all delighted her, and she was

56 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 7, 8. In Angus’ *The House in Hummingbird Island*, Myles Grace, one of Idie’s Pomeroy relatives, likewise pictures the West Indies as a place of danger: he writes in “the Idie Book” that “[w]e won’t be allowed to visit her because the Indies are hellish hot and only pirates live there” and considers the “South Seas” a place “awash with brigands and bandits and pirates and primates”. Sam Angus. *The House on Hummingbird Island*, 7, 8, 74, original emphasis. As Idie comes to realise, she has not “melted, nor [...] seen a single pirate” on Hummingbird Island, suggesting that a similar pattern of thought about foreign places is at work in this text as in *Journey to the River Sea* and is meant to reflect the general attitude of the time. Ibid., 75, original emphasis.

57 In England, as the narrative suggests at a later point, the dominant opinion on the Amazon is that of a perilous place. The newspaper article reporting Maia, Miss Minton and Professor Glastonberry missing is beset by colonial stereotypes regarding the Indigenous population as well as the local fauna: “*The part of the country in which they were last seen is still inhabited by savage tribes, some of them cannibals, not to mention jaguars, pit vipers, caymans and other dangerous predators. It is feared that some serious harm may have befallen the party*”. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 270–271, original emphasis. In *A Company of Swans* (1985), Ibbotson imagines a similar attitude towards the rainforest for the significantly older girls in the Sonia Lavarre Academy of Dance in Cambridge. After having listened to the account of the Amazon by Sasha Dubrov, who is recruiting dancers for his *corps de ballet* for performances at the Teatro Amazonas, Phyllis remarks that she “‘wouldn’t fancy going out there, would you? Not with all those creepy-crawlies!’ ‘And the Indians having a gobble at you, I shouldn’t wonder,’ added Lily”. Eva Ibbotson. *A Company of Swans*, 20.

58 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 22.

59 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 22.

not troubled by the heat”⁶⁰. This assessment of her emotional state suggests that, upon actualisation of her *K-world* and before reaching the Carters, Maia starts to develop a topophilia, a term human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines as “the affective bond between people and place or setting”⁶¹. This bond intensifies in the course of the story, especially after she met Finn, who shares her love for the Amazon. In the opening chapters, *Journey to the River Sea* thus picks up the travel motif, which was frequently linked with propagating imperialist expansion in Victorian literature. However, Maia’s attempts to expand her *K-world* prior to her journey and her open-mindedness towards other countries and cultures, provide an alternative to imperialist reasoning and assuming a white cultural supremacy. In this way, the revisionist agenda of the text becomes apparent; its focus on appreciation and respect demonstrate what cultural contact and exploration/ journeying could also (have) look(ed) like.

In drawing attention to the prejudices against the Amazon as well as the exceptional features of the place, Ibbotson’s novel manifests its neo-Victorian potential. Whereas in Victorian adventure stories for young readers the natural world tends to be presented as an unforgiving, hostile and extremely dangerous environment that needs to be conquered and subjected to (human) control, such as in Kipling’s *The Jungle Books* (1894–1895), neo-Victorian children’s literature simultaneously presents the natural sphere, in this case the rainforest, as something that needs to be preserved and protected.⁶² This idea is in part conveyed through the descriptions of flora and fauna in *Journey to the River Sea* and becomes even more strongly evident in Charmian Hussey’s neo-Victorian children’s novel *The Valley of Secrets* (2003), in which the young protagonist Stephen Lansbury reads about the Amazon rainforest in the journals of his great uncle Theodore Lansbury. The temporal gap between his great uncle’s travels to the rainforest (1911–1915) and Stephen’s contemporary position allows bringing across this novel’s neo-Victorian and ecocritical agenda more blatantly. For instance, after reading an entry in Theodore’s journal about his great uncle’s sublime experiences and the “*wonderfully timeless feeling*” he had while walking through the rainforest, “*thank[ing] God for such vast, wild places – too big for Man to spoil or destroy*”, Stephen “sat back in the chair with a very sad smile on his face”⁶³. He is well aware that “[h]is great uncle’s journal had been written long before the development of the powerful modern machinery that was now being

60 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23.

61 Yi-Fu Tuan. *Topophilia*, 4.

62 For a discussion of the imperialist implications of Victorian boys’ adventure stories (set in Africa), see Patrick Brantlinger’s chapter on “Imperial Boys: Romancing Africa” in *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, 134–147. Adventure stories were apt to have an impact on children’s *K-worlds* with respect to foreign countries.

63 Charmian Hussey. *The Valley of Secrets*, 193, original emphasis.

used to wreck the forests”⁶⁴, reducing their size markedly and robbing many animals of their natural habitat.⁶⁵ As revisionist and metahistorical neo-Victorian novels respectively, *Journey to the River Sea* and *The Valley of Secrets* present the natural environment, and especially the Amazon rainforest, as something that is worth saving from exploitative, human intervention and take a critical stance towards imperialist stereotypes regarding both the forest and its Indigenous population, which were frequently propagated by Victorian adventure novels.⁶⁶

Besides being told about her new place of residence, Maia is also provided with information on her new family, which initially takes a less prominent role in her thoughts than the natural surroundings. As a child, Maia – quite naturally – displays a special interest in the Carters’ twin daughters, who increasingly begin to occupy her mind and shape her expectations (and hence also her *W-world*) of what life with the Carters will be like. Even though what she hears about the twins in her conversation with Mr Murray is essentially limited to their names and the fact that their age roughly corresponds with her own, Maia begins to imagine what Beatrice and Gwendolyn might look like on the basis of a nondescript, two-sentence note they have written for her: “*Dear Maia, [...] We hope you will come*

64 Charmian Hussey. *The Valley of Secrets*, 193.

65 The novel repeatedly draws attention to the contemporary situation in the Amazon and does so most poignantly towards the end of the narrative. When Stephen returns to Lansbury Hall from a visit to London, he reads a bulletin on the train and cannot “avoid the dreadful statistics” about the current situation of the Indigenous population, who, “since the European conquest of the Brazilian Amazon, [...] had fallen by more than ninety percent”, and the rainforest of which “nearly two million hectares [...] [are] disappearing every year”. Charmian Hussey. *The Valley of Secrets*, 366, 367–368.

66 Though not a Victorian adventure novel, Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) introduces Brazil as a land of delusion that is framed in exclusively negative terms. When Angel Clare first sees the advertisement for land in Brazil, he is captivated by “the great advantages of the Empire of Brazil as a field for the emigrating agriculturist” and finds that the “[l]and was offered there on exceptionally advantageous terms”. Despite “the discouraging reports of some farm-labourers who had emigrated thither and returned home within the twelve months”, he decides to go. In Brazil, he encounters various hardships and finds himself ill with a fever: “At this moment he was lying ill of fever in the clay lands near Curitiba in Brazil, having been drenched with thunder-storms and persecuted by other hardships, in common with all the English farmers and farm-labourers who, just at this time, were deluded into going thither by the promises of the Brazilian Government, and by the baseless assumption that those frames which, ploughing and sowing on English uplands, had resisted all the weathers to whose moods they had been born, could resist equally well all the weathers by which they were surprised on Brazilian plains”. Thomas Hardy. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 332, 339, 350. By contrast, A.S. Byatt’s “Morpho Eugenia” presents – similar to *Journey to the River Sea* and *The Valley of Secrets* – a more ambivalent image of the Amazon. Even though the etymologist William Adamson often remembers hardships and negative aspects of life in the rainforest, such as “the clouds of midges and mosquitoes – the struggling mass of creepers and undergrowth”, he still wants to return to and yearns for the Amazon. A.S. Byatt. “Morpho Eugenia.”, 21.; cf. *ibid.*, 79, 92.

and live with us. We think it would be nice"⁶⁷. Despite the fact that the twins neither introduce themselves nor provide any relevant information about their lives in their letter, which in all likelihood was written at the request of their parents, Maia pictures them as "fair and curly-haired and pretty"⁶⁸. The image of childhood that begins to emerge at this moment is an idealised, almost proto-typical one and anticipates the text's most explicit intertext, Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, in which Cedric Errol's light, curly hair is mentioned repeatedly, caters to his charming looks and becomes a symbol of his steadfast innocence.⁶⁹ This idealised, nearly angelic image is drawn upon more extensively when Maia's *K-world* is actualised during her journey and begins to intersect with her *W-world* regarding her life with the Carters.

On the boat to Manaus, when Maia realises that her immediate surroundings correspond with the contents of the library books (i.e., her *K-world* with the TAW), she begins to envision and invent a life for the twins and idealises them along Romantic concepts of childhood. "The Romantic child", Jean Webb argues, "would be expected to have a quality of innocence; to be imaginative and playful, and also to display an intuitive relationship with nature"⁷⁰. She further suggests that "[t]he embodiment of these abstract aspects would be symbolised by an attractive personality and the physical beauty associated with childhood"⁷¹ Maia likewise imagines for the twins. She envisages them as "laughing and welcoming and friendly" and pictures them "lying in a hammock with a basket full of kittens on their laps, or picking flowers for the house"⁷². The instinctive, neo-Romantic bonding with nature attributed to the girls by Maia not only finds expression in the number of tamed pets they presumably have already acquired and their ability to identify the local fauna, but permeates various aspects of their daily lives.⁷³ These include, for instance, their lessons, which Maia hopes could take place outside, "looking over the river", and their leisure time, when the twins paddle "their boat between giant water lilies" or trek "fearlessly through the jungle"⁷⁴ – exciting activities in which Maia might henceforth participate. Maia's

67 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 5, original emphasis.

68 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 5.

69 This image can already be found in Romantic poetry. In William Blake's "The Chimney-Sweeper" (1789), for instance, the connection between innocence and curled, fair hair is also evident. In Blake's poem young Tom Dacre starts to cry when the light hair on his head, which "curled like a lamb's back", is shaved and he is initiated into the adult world and thus, by implication, loses his innocence. William Blake. "The Chimney-Sweeper.", 44, l. 6.

70 Jean Webb. "Romanticism vs. Empire in *The Secret Garden*.", 91. For more information on Romantic notions about childhood, see chapter 3: "Children and Childhood: Historical Developments and Literary Representations in Victorian Literature".

71 Jean Webb. "Romanticism vs. Empire in *The Secret Garden*.", 91–92.

72 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23.

73 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23–24.

74 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23.

conception of childhood thus reinforces the prevalence and durability of the Romantic ideal as the dominant image of childhood in Ibbotson's text and indicates that she has grown up with and already exhibits certain features of this ideal, which she readily projects onto the twins.

Once the boat reaches Brazil, Maia becomes more inquisitive and begins to think about the Carters' home. Up until this point, she has already found out that the Carters' house is called *Tapherini*, which translates as "'A Place of Rest'", and infers that "'it's sure to be beautiful'"⁷⁵ bearing such a name. Most of her expectations of what life at the Carters' will be like derive from what she can observe on her journey. Once the boat passes by the houses of sugar planters and coffee exporters, Maia can see "verandas with the families taking tea, [...] dogs stretched out in the shade, and hanging baskets of scarlet flowers"⁷⁶, and repeatedly questions Miss Minton "'Will it be like that?' [...] 'They're sure to have a veranda, aren't they [...]?'"⁷⁷ She further surmises that "'[t]hey'll have a big garden going down to the river [...] and a boat with a striped awning'"⁷⁸, hoping that the Carters, and by implication Maia herself, will spend a large part of their time outside in the garden or on the rivers. In projecting what she can see from the boat onto her new family and their home, Maia arrives with fairly distinct expectations about her new life at the Carters.

Her overall optimism with respect to the place that is supposed to be her home is in accordance with the impression that, in the first two chapters, Maia is presented as an almost 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD. Even though she has to leave her friends and the academy behind to travel several thousand miles to Brazil into the unknown, she always retains a positive attitude and stays optimistic throughout her voyage. On her journey along the Amazon in particular, she seems happy and content, ready to enjoy an exciting life in the rainforest, and demonstrates that she, unlike Miss Minton's former charges, is well-behaved and gracious. Despite the fact that Maia's childhood largely seems to correspond with that of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD, especially when she is on the boat to Manaus, the lack of a proper family and home do not permit to fully assign her to this category. In the academy, Maia was only one pupil among many and, even though she does not appear to have experienced serious forms of neglect, the staff and teachers are bound to be unable to provide her with parental love and affection, which is reinforced by her longing for a home. Accordingly, Maia's initial position on the childhood scale is close to that of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD while being slightly oriented towards the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR

75 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 21.

76 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 22–23.

77 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23.

78 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23.

NEGLECTED CHILD. In this respect, the text initially seems to suggest that the closer Maia is coming to the Carters and becoming a member of their family, the closer she is getting to the actualisation of her *W-world* and to leading an 'ideal' childhood.

7.2. Mr and Mrs Carter: Negligent Foster Parents

When Maia eventually arrives at the Carters', her expectations about life in the rainforest and life with her relatives are subverted repeatedly and her *W-world* is not actualised. The Carters, Maia's only traceable relatives, have been living in Brazil for almost six years and only take Maia in to ameliorate their dire, yet self-inflicted, financial situation with the money they receive for her keep. They neither provide her with a proper home nor with a loving, nurturing environment. In this dysfunctional family, Maia's position on the childhood scale changes significantly due to the actions of some and the lack of intervention of other members of the family. To elaborate on Maia's transition from one category of my childhood scale to the next, this subchapter explores Maia's first impressions of and her position in the Carter household and looks at Mr and Mrs Carter's relationship with Maia before scrutinising her (lack of) agency.

Already prior to her arrival, Maia is provided with various hints that the Carters are different from the other rubber planters and people in the vicinity. In refraining from meeting Miss Minton and her charge upon arrival in Manaus, the Carters establish power relations and simultaneously express their utter disinterest in both the new member of their family and their governess. Their boat, the boatman and the topographical surroundings of their bungalow likewise hint at the Carters' 'otherness'. Unlike the other boats in Manaus, featuring "names like *Firefly* and *Swallow*, and trim launches with gaily striped awnings and gleaming paint", the Carters' boat "was painted a serious dark green, like spinach; the awning was dark green too and there was no name painted on the side, only the word CARTER to show who owned it"⁷⁹. The "serious" green colour of the boat, which is likely to strike children as unpleasant due to its comparison to spinach, and the lack of a more fanciful name indirectly characterise its owners as disagreeable, grave and unimaginative. The Carters' boatman Furo reinforces and extends this impression in that he is not "smiling and waving",⁸⁰ unlike the people Maia has seen on her way. He is indifferent towards Maia and Miss Minton, which foreshadows his strained relationship with the Carters, and is merely performing his duty as boatman. Even the surroundings of the Carters'

⁷⁹ Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 27, 28, original emphasis and capitalisation.

⁸⁰ Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 28.

bungalow are different from what Maia has seen so far and are explicitly designated as such in the text. The part of the River Negro on which the Carters live is “*oddly different* [...] straight and silent with no sandbanks or islands and no animals to be seen, and the Indians working the rubber trees who looked up as the boat passed, and turned away...”⁸¹. The otherness and seeming lifelessness of the place create an eeriness and hostility felt by Maia, who, “[w]ithout realizing it, [...] had edged closer to Miss Minton”⁸². Ibbotson’s text thus provides various elements foreshadowing that Maia’s life at the Carters’ will turn out quite different from what she had hoped and imagined, implying already that her *W-world* will not be actualised.

Upon arrival at her new home and meeting her relatives, Maia comes to realise that the Carters hold very idiosyncratic attitudes towards life in Brazil that conflict with her *W-world*. Their views are mostly championed by Mrs Carter and affect various aspects of daily life, curtailing Maia’s childhood experiences to an unforeseen extent. They surface most radically in the Carters’ relationship with the natural environment, Mrs Carter’s attitudes towards local food and her selection of teaching materials for the children’s lessons.

The Carters’ attitude towards the natural environment is among the first things Maia notices about them, as they seem to have constructed a rigid (ideologically charged) boundary that separates their bungalow from the local flora and fauna. As an extension of the house and yet neither properly belonging to the inside nor the outside, the Carters’ veranda exemplifies their hostile stance towards the rainforest and its creatures:

The veranda was a narrow, wooden structure which faced the river but was completely sealed off from it by wire netting and glass. No breath of wind came from outside, no scent of growing things. Two fly-papers hung down on either side, on which dying insects buzzed frantically, trying to free their wings. On low tables were set bowls of methylated spirit in which a number of mosquitoes had drowned, or were still drowning. The wooden walls were painted the same dark clinical green as the house and the boat. It was like being in the corridor of a hospital; Maia would not have been surprised to see people lying about on stretchers waiting for their operations.⁸³

The combination of wire netting and glass suggests that the Carters are subject to a self-imposed quarantine and have fenced and sealed themselves in accordingly. The mesh wire in particular is evocative of a cage that protects its occupants from the potential dangers lurking outside, while at the same time rendering it impossible to fully take in the view of the river. Their attitude towards insects appears to confirm Maia’s initial assessment that the Amazon is full of “nameless

81 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 28, my emphasis.

82 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 28.

83 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 30–31.

insects which burrowed into flesh”⁸⁴ and indicates that the Carters replicate imperialist mentalities and, after *six* years, still perceive the natural surroundings as a threat. Accordingly, they slowly kill those insects that, in spite of their preventive measures, have found their way inside and bar them from making further forays into their bungalow. Moreover, the “dark clinical green” colour of their house and the walls of their veranda further the impression of sterility, which is reaffirmed by the comparison to a hospital, a place typically associated with illness and invalids.⁸⁵ In various respects, their veranda, and by extension their house, are thus associated with stagnation, sterility and death, reinforcing the idea that the Carters have developed a topophobia, a fear of the place they live in.

The Carters’ aversion to the rainforest becomes even more evident in descriptions of the interior of their bungalow. Professing that “‘if one is to survive out here, *the jungle must be kept at bay*’”⁸⁶, Mrs Carter does not permit any local plants to be brought into her house; hence “none of the lovely orchids and crimson flame flowers that had been on the balconies of the houses they [Maia and Miss Minton] had passed along the shore”⁸⁷ can be found on the windowsills nor anywhere else in the house. The local fauna has likewise been banished from the Carters’ bungalow. Instead of finding any pets, which, as Beatrice and Gwendolyn remark, would “‘bring in fleas and lice and jiggers [...] [a]nd horrible worms’”, Maia merely sees “a large flit gun full of fly spray”⁸⁸, which is not meant to sustain life. She comes to realise that “[a]ll the windows were covered in *layers* of mosquito netting and the shutters were kept partly closed so that the rooms were not only hot but dark”⁸⁹. The Carters thus maintain and reinforce their self-imposed quarantine inside their bungalow and attempt to excise the natural environment from their view whenever possible.

The family’s attitude towards the outside can predominantly be ascribed to the entomophobic Mrs Carter, who is readily associated with disinfectants and in-

84 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 4.

85 The reference to the colour of their house is another instance through which the “the contrast between the parochial Carters and their more adaptable neighbors is clearly made”. Janice M. Del Negro. “Journey to the River Sea (Review).”, 283. The mansions Maia, Miss Minton, Mrs Carter and the twins can see from the boat on their way to Manaus are “painted in every colour: pink and ochre and blue, with flowers tumbling from window boxes” and inevitably appear much more welcoming than the drab bungalow of the Carters. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 54.

86 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31, original emphasis.

87 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31.

88 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 32.

89 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33, my emphasis.

secticides.⁹⁰ Every morning, she engages in a comic-absurd cleaning routine, which she does not entrust to the servants. On her first morning, Maia wakes to peculiar sounds and figures out that they originate from the corridor, where Mrs Carter “was carefully squirting every nook and cranny with insect-killer” and “began to thump and bang on the ceiling to get rid of *possible* spiders” with a broom before using “a bucket full of disinfectant and a mop with which she squelched across the tiled floor – and all the time she muttered, ‘Out!’ or ‘That will settle you!’ to the insects that she *thought* might be there”⁹¹. Mrs Carter’s entomophobia borders on the ludicrous; she neurotically attempts to get rid of insects that presumably do not even exist. While her use of disinfectants helps accounting for Maia’s impression of the sterility and cleanliness of the place, the excessive use of toxic insecticide also implies that she is poisoning her home and subjects herself and her family to a considerable health risk on a daily basis.⁹² In this respect, Mrs Carter neither sets an example for her children nor propagates a healthy attitude towards the natural environment and its creatures. The interior of the Carters’ house overall not only fosters a sense of isolation and feeling cut off from the immediate surroundings, but also does not appear to be a safe or healthy environment for children.

The absence of a conventional garden seems to express the Carters’ stance towards the natural world most poignantly. Their ‘garden’, which is referred to as such but is hardly elaborated on in the text, merely consists of “a square of raked gravel”⁹³ and can either be considered a very barren rock garden or simply an extension of the gravel path leading to their house.⁹⁴ This raked square can be

90 The connection with the former is already established during Maia’s first meeting with Mrs Carter. As the narrator remarks, “[s]he looked like the sort of person who would smell of violets or lavender” and hence of flowers, “but to Maia’s surprise she smelled strongly of Lysol. It was a smell Maia knew well because it was what the maids had used at school to disinfect the lavatories”. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 29.

91 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 40, my emphasis.

92 Mrs Carter must have been aware of the dangers of an exposure to pesticides. In her “‘larder’”, the term she uses to refer to a cupboard in the hall that is paradoxically not used for food but for insecticide storage, she keeps “flasks labelled POISON, and masks for protecting the face, and rubber gloves”, the latter of which she must be wearing to avoid inhaling fumes and getting in contact with the toxic substances in the flasks. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 211, original capitalisation.

93 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31.

94 In *A Company of Swans* (1985), Ibbotson describes one of the gardens near Manaus in more detail. In its opulence and colourfulness, this garden, which the owner Romain Paul Verney Brandon considers his “‘folly’”, stands in stark contrast to the Carters’ square of gravel: “On the terrace below him [Romain], orchids and hibiscus and the dizzying scarlet flame-flowers which the humming birds loved to visit rioted in flamboyant exuberance from their urns, but elsewhere he had maintained a savage discipline on the fast-growing plants. In the avenue of jacarandas, shiveringly blue, which stretched to the distant river, each tree grew distinct and unimpeded. Beneath the catalpas in his arboretum he had planted only the white, star-

read as an instance exemplifying the Carters' attempt to further increase the spatial distance between themselves and the natural environment and serves as a means of keeping "‘the jungle [...] at bay’"⁹⁵. This idea is reinforced by the fact that their gardener is spraying the gravel with an unknown substance, in all likelihood a pesticide or herbicide to prevent the local flora from intruding on their premises.⁹⁶ The Carters' fear of the natural environment is especially evident in this particular space, which usually "represents a compromise of sorts" as it is "at once domestic and wild"⁹⁷. Gardens are "highly constructed, artificial spaces"⁹⁸ where nature can be tamed and cultivated, and hence controlled by human beings. In refraining from doing so and filling the space with rock fragments instead of grass and flowers, the Carters distance themselves from their natural surroundings and turn out to be relatively un-Victorian in that they do not share the Victorians' abiding interest in gardens and their enthusiasm for gardening.⁹⁹

The stance towards the natural world and the immediate natural environment displayed by her relatives inevitably affects Maia's childhood experiences. For most of the time, she has to stay inside the house, which, according to Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew Humphreys, is considered an adult sphere in Edwardian fiction, often "symboliz[ing] adult power and degeneration"¹⁰⁰. The garden, as domain of children and a space one tends to readily associate with childhood, is almost non-existent and devoid of children (the twins "‘never go out into the garden’" because they could "‘get stung’"¹⁰¹). Deprived of a garden and having

petalled clerodendron, so that the trees seemed to grow from a drift of scented snow". Eva Ibbotson. *A Company of Swans*, 146, 91–92.

95 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31, original emphasis.

96 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

97 Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd. "Introduction: Into the Wild.", 6.

98 Fiona McCulloch. *Children's Literature in Context*, 83.

99 Throughout the Victorian period, a substantial number of books on and periodicals dedicated to gardening and horticulture were published, reflecting the Victorians' interest in gardens and gardening. Books on the subject matter include, for instance, Eleanor Vere Boyle's *Days and Hours in a Garden* (1884), George Glenny's *The Culture of Flowers and Plants* (1860), S. Reynold Hole's *A Book about the Garden and the Gardener* (1892), Jane W. Loudon's *The Ladies' Companion to the Flower-Garden* (1841), William Robinson's *The Wild Garden* (1870) and David Thomson's *Handy Book of the Flower-Garden, Being Practical Directions for the Propagation, Culture, and Arrangement of Plants in Flower-Gardens All the Year Round* (1868). Periodicals include but are not limited to the *British Flower Garden* (1823–1838), *Floricultural Cabinet and Florist's Magazine* (1833–1916), *The Florist* (1848–1884), *Floral World and Garden Guide* (1858–1880), *Floral Magazine* (1860–1881), *Cottage Gardener* (1848–1915) and *The Garden* (1871–1927). For a more detailed account on Victorian periodicals on gardening and horticulture, see Ray Desmond. "Victorian Gardening Magazines.", 47–66. For information on the Victorian's fascination with flowers and gardens, see Danielle E. Price "Cultivating Mary.", 4–5.

100 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time.", 7.

101 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43, my emphasis.

to bide her time inside the hot bungalow, Maia thus is exposed to the degenerating influences in the house and unable to fully enjoy her childhood or engage in the exciting activities she imagined for the twins. After only one week in her new home, she feels “as if she had been in prison”¹⁰², implying that her freedom has been curtailed significantly and that she has been subject to a substantial amount of adult control and supervision. Altogether, the Carters’ premises and their attitude towards the natural environment preclude a Rousseauian/Romantic childhood and prevent Maia from enjoying an ‘ideal’ childhood in the rainforest.

Maia’s childhood experience is also considerably affected by the Carters’ rejection of locally grown and produced food. Shortly after Maia and Miss Minton arrive and have afternoon tea with the family, Mrs Carter establishes her stance towards local food by informing them that they “‘will never find Native Food served at my table’”¹⁰³, because she regards it as unclean and infested with germs, and therefore unsuitable for consumption – even when washed or boiled. Accordingly, the family subscribes to an expensive lifestyle and has every item of food shipped from England in tins and jars. During tea, Mrs Carter hence merely offers “a plate of small, dry biscuits with little holes in them and nothing else”, making Maia wonder “why they had taken so much trouble” to import the biscuits, as she “had never tasted anything so dull”¹⁰⁴. Maia’s astonishment that nothing is provided for tea except the biscuits seems all the more reasonable when considering that she already saw what the land has to offer. On the market Maia visited with Miss Minton prior to her arrival, she noticed “watermelons bigger than babies, and green bananas and yellow ones and some that were almost orange” as well as “piles of nuts heaped on barrows, and pineapples and peppers and freshly caught fish and fish that had been dried”¹⁰⁵. The detailed descriptions, colourful display and wide variety of fruit, vegetables and fish on offer make the imported, dry biscuits seem even more bland and out of place.¹⁰⁶ The enumeration of fruit that needs to be peeled before being eaten or whose rind/peel is generally considered unfit for human consumption (watermelons, bananas and pineapples) implicitly also undermines Mrs Carter’s germaphobia and suggests that she is merely using germs as a pretence and excuse to ban local food from the house.

Mrs Carter’s insistence on having only imported food served at her table can also be read as an expression of her sense of national belonging. As Ann Alston

102 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 54.

103 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31.

104 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31.

105 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 25.

106 By comparison to what Maia is offered at a later point by the native servants in their huts (“coffee and nuts; fruit [...], and little cakes”), the biscuits are not a particularly welcoming treat. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 91.

maintains, “associations of food and nationality emphasise the cultural investment in food and its importance to perceptions of belonging, on both national and familial terms”¹⁰⁷, which Mrs Carter enforces rigidly. Despite the fact that the servants attempted to please her initially by “cook[ing] all the best dishes that were eaten in Brazil” and “pick[ing] fresh fruit for the Carters”, Mrs Carter’s orders to exclusively serve “‘British food’”¹⁰⁸ reinforce her status as English-woman and imply a presumed cultural superiority that is furthered by the reiteration of colonial stereotypes of the Indigenous population as “‘filthy’”¹⁰⁹. In the Carter household, food thus functions as a cultural signifier of belonging and must have contributed to Maia’s impression that “[i]t looked as though the Carters were pretending they were still in England”¹¹⁰. In this respect, the Carters seem to echo a notion of home found “[i]n postcolonial societies”, where “home often refers to or seeks to replicate an absent or distant place”¹¹¹. By not permitting any members of the family to eat local food, and even reminding Miss Minton that she is not allowed to take Maia to “‘any place where they serve Native Food’”¹¹² when they are in Manaus, Mrs Carter renders a cultural integration also in this respect largely impossible. She appears to be an exceptionally xenophobic character, who prevents her children from establishing a sense of belonging to the land in which they currently reside. Exposing Mrs Carter’s attitude, which was presumably widespread among Victorian imperialists, as nonsensical and prejudiced implies a neo-Victorian critique.

107 Ann Alston. *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, 106.

108 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 34–35, original emphasis.

109 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 31. Harmful stereotypes about the Indigenous Brazilian population seem to have been ingrained in the Western cultural imagination. Historian Ana Lucia Araujo, who analyses the depiction of the Amazon in François-Auguste Biard’s travelogue and art, suggests that from the sixteenth century onwards, “visual and written representations of Brazilian Indigenous groups populated the French imagination. These renderings contributed to the cultural stereotyping of Brazilian Natives as naked, ferocious, lazy, and wily cannibals” and are reinforced by various woodcuts in Biard’s travelogue *Deux années au Brésil* (1862, *Two Years in Brazil*). Ana Lucia Araujo. *Brazil Through French Eyes*, 141. In fact, the Carters seem to have adopted colonialist and imperialist attitudes towards the Indigenous population and can be considered ‘colonisers’ themselves. Not only have the Carters taken the land on which they build their bungalow from the Tapuri tribe without paying the agreed upon amount of money, but have also – expressly against the wishes of the Indigenous population – torn down the longhouse and other buildings to build their bungalow. Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 155–156. In doing so, the Carters reflect ‘colonizers’ attempts to take possession of land”, which “usually involve rituals of mapping, naming (or-renaming), and re-purposing”. Ruth Feingold. “Mapping the Interior.”, 141.

110 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 34.

111 Clare Bradford. *Unsettling Narratives*, 145.

112 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 61.

Rejecting the local food has also far-reaching consequences for the relationship with the Indigenous servants and the quality of food served at Mrs Carter's table. The efforts of the Carters' servants, who had picked "mangoes and guavas and pomegranates, and had gone out at night to search for turtle eggs"¹¹³ when the family first came to Brazil, apparently did not please Mrs Carter, who announced only shortly afterwards that she will not tolerate local food in her house. Flouting the servants' endeavours, her decision inevitably resulted in their resentment: "So the servants had given up. They opened the tins that came from England; they poured boiling water onto whatever pudding powder Mrs Carter had put out for them, not caring if it was rock hard or running off the plate – and went back to their huts to make themselves decent food at night"¹¹⁴. Their indifference implies that they consider Mrs Carter's decision an offence and are no longer willing to put any efforts into the preparation of the Carters' food.

In the Carter household, Maia too must put up with Mrs Carter's strict food politics, especially during dinner. Throughout her stay, she endures several "unspeakable meals"¹¹⁵, which, despite being very expensive, are neither nurturing nor particularly appetising. Amongst other things, she is expected to eat "tinned fish in a bluish sauce, endless beetroot, and a cornflour 'shape' that seemed to quiver with fear as Tapi brought it to the table"¹¹⁶. Although children tend to like very colourful and even blue-coloured sweets, they would, in all likelihood, reject the bluish sauce on the grounds that it looks unnatural. The fact that tinned beetroot seems to be available in unlimited supply and seemingly constitutes the core ingredient of every meal points to the lack of variation of what is served on a daily basis, while the inverted commas used to refer to the cornflour shape indicate that it is just another failed attempt to produce a proper dish from Mrs Carter's imported ingredients. The food Maia is provided with by her relatives is thus, unlike the food described in many other texts for children, neither "associated with pleasure, comfort and nurturing"¹¹⁷, nor is it "a sign of cosiness, plenty and cheer"¹¹⁸. It does not foster a sense of belonging nor feeling at home with the Carters.¹¹⁹

113 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 35.

114 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 35.

115 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 45.

116 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 45. The text points to the food's unusual textures on multiple occasions, rendering it unappealing to the readers. Notable instances include the green jelly served at Maia's first evening, which "had not set and had to be chased over the plate with a spoon", the "dollop of macaroni cheese so solid that she [Mrs Carter] was cutting it with a knife" and "the pink 'shape', which had [...] sunk into a watery mush". *Ibid.*, 34, 86, 109.

117 Marion Gymnich. "Porridge or Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans?", 141.

118 Wendy R. Katz. "Some Uses of Food in Children's Literature.", 193–194.

In caricaturing and undermining the Carters' presumed cultural supremacy by drawing on their obsessive insistence on consuming imported and preserved British food, *Journey to the River Sea* positions itself as a text advocating local and 'exotic' food. As Alston remarks, "children's literature is often very conservative about the type of food which it promotes" and frequently propagates "very traditional British food, the type of food that is considered wholesome"¹²⁰. Yet, the local food the Indigenous servants cooked for the Carters – "freshly caught fish served in a saffron sauce, sweet peppers stuffed with raisins and rice, roasted sweetcorn and chunky soups"¹²¹ – invariably appears much more nourishing and palatable than the canned, imported food from England.¹²² The details provided in the description and the fact that the dishes are freshly cooked reinforce the wholesome qualities of the local cuisine, even though the contrast between fresh and tinned food is likely to resonate more strongly with a contemporary readership than it would have with a Victorian one. In this respect, *Journey to the River Sea* indicates a neo-Victorian impetus and departs from many classic children's stories by displaying foreign food not as dangerous or unappetising but encouraging an "embrac[ing] [of] the unknown other"¹²³, even if Mrs Carter does not.

Mrs Carter's reluctance to allow the children to establish a sense of belonging in Brazil is further apparent in the teaching materials she provides for them. When she instructs Miss Minton in how to educate the children, she informs her that "[t]he girls work from a set of books by Dr Bullman", which "cover all the

119 Tom in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, who also has to live with his relatives, albeit only temporarily, and feels imprisoned in their flat, is spoilt with food by his relatives. On a postcard to his sick brother Peter, he emphasises that "[t]he food is good" by underlining this sentence, which points to the centrality food plays in establishing a sense of belonging, even if Tom eventually suffers from indigestion. Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 7. This idea is also present in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, in which food very much contributes to the process of establishing a sense of feeling at home in Yorkshire. The food Mary is provided with in England is linked with nurture and care: "While the unsuitable food consumed by Mary in India correlates with a lack of nurturing she experienced there, Mary is offered appetising and wholesome food by those characters who are also ready to provide nurturing" in Yorkshire. At Misselthwaite Manor, she is presented with "relatively simple and, more often than not, quintessentially 'English' food: porridge, crumpets, buttered toast, raspberry jam and clotted cream", which she begins to consume with great pleasure after having spent a considerable amount of time outside and in the company of Dickon Sowerby. Marion Gymnich. "Porridge or Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans?", 145, 146.

120 Ann Alston. *The Family in English Children's Literature*, 119.

121 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 35.

122 The text does, however, not condemn the use of tinned food altogether and highlights that it can be used to create 'hybrid food': "The professor, who turned out to be an enthusiastic cook, had opened a tin of corned beef and made a splendid hash with wild onions and peppers". Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 262.

123 Ann Alston. *The Family in English Children's Literature*, 106.

subjects they will need’” and are to be strictly adhered to so that “‘when a governess leaves, the next one knows exactly where to take over’”¹²⁴. Dr Bullman’s books are unmistakably geared towards a life in England, so that, to Maia’s dismay and disappointment, “[t]here was not one lesson which touched the lives of the twins in Brazil”¹²⁵. Their geography lesson, for instance, is all “about coach building in Birmingham”, a place several thousand miles across the Atlantic, while their history lesson merely covers “the History of England and nowhere else” and is about “the repeal of the Corn Laws”¹²⁶. Dr Bullman’s books propagate an implicit cultural supremacy, tie in with Mrs Carter’s colonialist stance and appear, just like the imported biscuits, out of place. They do not prepare the children for or enrich the life they are currently leading in the Amazon, keeping their *K-worlds* limited in this regard.

Moreover, the contents of Dr Bullman’s books follow a highly conservative trajectory, drawing on educational principles characteristic of the nineteenth century. The history textbook contains “a list of pointless dates”¹²⁷ and seems to be bent on fostering learning facts by rote. English Composition does not allow expressions of the imagination, a trend linked with the “Romantic revision of children’s literature”¹²⁸ and the rise of the fairy tale, and instead provides the children with “subjects, examples of how to begin, how to end, and the number of words they were to use”¹²⁹ in their essays. Religious Instruction is “about a girl who would not read her bible and was struck down by a terrible disease”¹³⁰ – a tale that is reminiscent of the many moral and instructive books for children, which were particularly popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. For Maia, who has had a good education at the academy, where the teachers catered to the individual needs of their pupils, as does Miss Carlisle in her geography lessons before Maia is about to set off for the Amazon, the lessons following Dr Bullman’s instructions and his educational principles are tedious, sometimes even “deadly”¹³¹. This effect is enhanced by the fact that, although the twins are older than Maia, they are hardly literate, for when Beatrice reads, she only does so “slowly and with difficulty”¹³². The lessons, like the food, are not enjoyed by Maia; they neither nurture nor challenge her intellectual capacities. Even if education was in the process of changing at the beginning of the twentieth century, the dull

124 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 40, 41.

125 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

126 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

127 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

128 M.O. Grenby. “Children’s Literature.”, 183.

129 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 42.

130 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

131 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

132 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 41.

teaching materials and methods may also be seen as part of the neo-Victorian critique in the novel.

Maia's impression of and first experiences in the Carter household, exemplified in their attitudes towards the natural surroundings and food as well as lesson contents, widely contradict her expectations (and *W-world*) of what life in Brazil would be like and are a bitter disappointment for the girl. Despite significantly limiting Maia's childhood experiences, the Carters' idiosyncrasies would have been endurable if Maia had been provided with a loving, though eccentric surrogate family. Yet, Mr and Mrs Carter's relationship and interactions with Maia are geared towards exclusion and neglect, so that their bungalow promptly turns into what Stott and Doyle Francis have termed a "'not home'", "a place where [Maia's] needs are not met"¹³³ and where she cannot feel at home. In the Carters' household, Maia quickly turns into a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD.

From the start and similar to Victorian orphan characters such as Jane Eyre, Maia occupies a marginal and precarious position in the Carter family, as is reflected in the room that is assigned to her. Her room is located at the end of one of the two extensions running back from the front of the house and Maia is thus physically and spatially relegated to the margins of the bungalow.¹³⁴ The room itself is described as "a *small* bare room with a *narrow* bed, a chest of drawers, a wooden table"¹³⁵, devoid of plants or pictures and smelling strongly of disinfectant. The references to the scope of the room and the width of the bed indicate that Maia is not given much space, neither in the house nor in the family. The smallness and position of the room in conjunction with Beatrice's statement that "'[i]t used to be a storeroom'"¹³⁶ prior to Maia's occupancy reinforces the idea that "the construction of space within the home is a process that is actually heavily invested with issues of power and control"¹³⁷ and foreshadows that Maia will be subject to marginalisation and exclusion.¹³⁸ As a former storeroom, Maia's

133 Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis. "'Home' and 'Not Home' in Children's Stories.", 223.

134 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33.

135 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33, my emphasis.

136 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33.

137 Ann Alston. "Your Room or Mine?", 15.

138 The position of the room invites a comparison to Laura Amy Schlitz' *A Drowned Maiden's Hair* (2006), in which Maud Flynn's room is likewise "'at the back of the house'" to keep her hidden from the Hawthorne sisters' gullible séance customers. The window of her room in the attic has been draped with "'curtains [that] are sewn together down the middle and tacked to the window frame'", which not only "'helps keep out mosquitoes'", as Hyacinth explains, but also keeps the child hidden from view and prevents her from looking out. Laura Amy Schlitz. *A Drowned Maiden's Hair*, 156, 157–158. As in *Journey to the River Sea*, Maud's disempowerment and her peripheral position find expression in spatiality and, more precisely, in the distribution of rooms. Another child character living with his relatives and

room has “only one window, very high”¹³⁹, whose position prevents her from letting out the heat and from relishing the view of the forest without using a chair. By contrast, the two doors, “one which led out into the corridor, and one which was bolted”¹⁴⁰, are more easily accessible to the child. Yet the latter, leading “‘[o]ut to the compound where the servants live’”¹⁴¹ and connecting the inside and the outside, is not meant to be opened and even locked to restrict and control Maia’s movements.

In addition, Mrs Carter attempts to systematically exclude Maia from everything she might enjoy. She does this on a daily basis, for instance, when she does not give Maia a chance to practice the piano, at which the girl “look[ed] *longingly*”, for “whenever it was Maia’s turn at the piano, Mrs Carter had a headache”¹⁴². She also excludes Maia from coming to Manaus to see the debut performance of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* at the local opera house, even though she could easily have bought another ticket for the child.¹⁴³ She further tries to prevent Maia from having dancing and music lessons and would have succeeded if it had not been for Miss Minton, who reminds Mrs Carter that “‘Maia is to have dancing lessons and music lessons also’”¹⁴⁴. She thus exerts a considerable amount of adult/surrogate parent control and authority, placing Maia in an inferior, disempowered position. Her actions suggest that Maia, unlike many fictional orphan girls in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who “acquire loving surrogate families” – as Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), the story that “typified”¹⁴⁵ this pattern –, becomes part of a negligent dysfunctional family and is not welcomed there. Mrs Carter, who “owed money everywhere”¹⁴⁶ in Manaus, has ulterior motives for taking Maia in and does not attempt to establish a working surrogate parent-child relationship.

being excluded from their family life is Harry Potter in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels (1997–2007), which, despite not being regarded as prototypical neo-Victorian fiction, are likely to be recognised as intertexts by young readers due to their enormous popular appeal. Harry’s dark and tiny cupboard under the stairs, whose original function would have been that of a storeroom of some kind, also reflects his marginal position in the Dursley family while simultaneously drawing on the peripheral position of Victorian servants living *below* stairs. It should be noted that Susan Reynolds provides a reading of *Harry Potter* highlighting its neo-Victorian qualities in her 2009 article “Dumbledore in the Watchtower: Harry Potter as a Neo-Victorian Narrative”, 271–292.

139 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33.

140 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33.

141 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33.

142 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 44, 45, my emphasis.

143 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 80.

144 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 54.

145 Kimberley Reynolds. “Changing Families in Children’s Fiction.”, 194.

146 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 56.

Mr Carter likewise refrains from establishing such a relationship. He is mostly in his study, an adult male space, and only sees the family on a regular basis during meals before he returns to his room. Yet, instead of being preoccupied with matters of work in his study, which “often seems entirely impenetrable” to other members of the family and “remains a space to which he [the father] can retreat”¹⁴⁷, as might be expected, Mr Carter sorts his expensive collection of human glass eyes. The extent of his preoccupation with his collection becomes evident when Maia enters his study to ask for a map of the house’s surroundings: he “sigh[s]” audibly and is obviously annoyed by Maia’s request before “he [gets] up and [begins] to rummage in a number of drawers”¹⁴⁸ to provide her with the object she came to borrow. For a Victorian man and father, whose duty is “[t]o establish a home, to protect it, to provide for it, [and] to control it”¹⁴⁹, Mr Carter displays little concern for his home and his family and extends this lack of concern towards Maia. From the start, he “did not seem very interested in the arrival either of Maia or her governess”¹⁵⁰ and does not take an interest in either of the two later in the story, neglecting his role as surrogate father for Maia.¹⁵¹

The lack of concern of Maia’s surrogate parents, and especially of Mr Carter, eventually results in a deterioration of her position and moves her closer to the group of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD of the childhood typology. When the bungalow is accidentally set on fire as a result of a quarrel between the twins and the inattentiveness of their mother, Maia is almost turned into a MURDERED CHILD. Mrs Carter, who is in the room when the fire starts, is preoccupied with ushering Beatrice and Gwendolyn outside, while Mr Carter claims to “‘go back for Maia’”¹⁵². Completely self-absorbed and more concerned about his collection of glass eyes, Mr Carter “groped his way in to his study and began to tear open his cabinets”¹⁵³, hoping to save his valuable collection. As the narrative voice assesses, “he did not go to Maia’s room. He did not even try to”¹⁵⁴,

147 Ann Alston. “Your Room or Mine?”, 23.

148 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 51.

149 John Tosh. *A Man’s Place*, 4.

150 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 29.

151 John Tosh highlights the pivotal role of the man as father and husband in the Victorian era: “In an age when, in the estimation of the Victorians, economic and social advance reached unprecedented levels, the men credited with these achievements were expected to be dutiful husbands and attentive fathers, devotees of hearth and family”. Even though “[t]here was a tendency – though this must not be overstated – for fatherhood to be reduced to the providing role” towards the end of the nineteenth century, “since the relational nurturing aspects of parenting were deemed to be ‘feminine’”, Mr Carter would nevertheless have been expected to at least care for Maia’s well-being within his home and family. John Tosh. *A Man’s Place*, 1, 7.

152 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 238.

153 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 238.

154 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 238.

which points to an implied hierarchy of importance that subordinates Maia's life to his material assets.¹⁵⁵ His negligence reaches an almost fatal apex at this moment for Maia, who was, unbeknownst to the Carters, able to rescue herself at the last moment. Although Mr Carter does not deny Maia's existence afterwards, as do the Hawthorne sisters with Maud in Laura Amy Schlitz' *A Drowned Maiden's Hair* (2006) when their house is set on fire by accident, he concocts a blatant lie, claiming that he "went right to her door, but it was impossible" to rescue her because there was "[a]n inferno"¹⁵⁶. Throughout the story, he displays a highly materialistic and egocentric stance, which any child reader is likely to recognise as morally deplorable, and puts his own needs before those of the child, even if this might cost Maia's life. It seems that the longer Maia stays with the Carters, the more neglectful Mr and Mrs Carter become and the more precarious her position in the family (and by implication on the childhood scale) turns out to be.

Yet, despite her disempowered position in the Carter family, Maia is not entirely powerless and transgresses the Carters' rules and regulations from the first day of her stay to varying degrees. In other words, she refuses to accept the *obligation-world* (or *O-world*) that the Carters try to impose on her. One such transgression, albeit a minor one, occurs when she compromises the family's self-imposed quarantine on her first evening and disregards the carefully constructed boundary that separates the interior of the house from the world outside. She does so by "pull[ing] a chair up to the window" and "lift[ing] a corner of the mosquito net"¹⁵⁷, which rewards her with both an audible and visual experience. Suddenly, she can see "fireflies – a hundred points of dancing light – and [hear] the croaking of frogs" while she realises "[h]ow alive it was out there, and how dead inside the house!"¹⁵⁸ The view unfolding in front of Maia's eyes reconfirms the actualisation of her updated *K-world* regarding the natural environment and subverts the inside/outside binary established by Mrs Carter. The liveliness outside also contributes to her feeling of being imprisoned inside the Carters' bungalow, which is a recurring feature in many children's adventure stories where being inside means being restricted and confined.¹⁵⁹ In creating an inside/outside dichotomy, the novel seems to follow *The Secret Garden's* use of symbolic spaces in that the bungalow, just like Misselthwaite Manor, "represents re-

155 This course of events has already been foreshadowed during the conversation between Maia and Mr Carter, in which the latter admits: "if this house went up in flames, it's my collection I'd save". Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 51.

156 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 244.

157 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 37.

158 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 37.

159 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 44.; cf. Maria Nikolajeva. *From Mythic to Linear*, 16.

gression” and the rainforest, in an amalgamation of both the garden and the moor, “growth” and “freedom”¹⁶⁰. Even though the high window might add to her feeling of imprisonment during the day by its position and by letting only a reduced amount of natural light into the room, it repeatedly turns into a permeable border not subject to (adult) supervision and control. In lifting the mosquito net, Maia thus attempts to enhance her childhood experience and dissociates herself from the Carters’ antagonistic attitude towards the natural world.

Maia’s more significant acts of violating and subverting the Carters’ rules and regulations occur in tandem with Miss Minton’s actions to ameliorate her situation, reinforcing that Maia – as a child – is reliant on adult intervention on her behalf. Quickly recognising that the twins’ level of knowledge is not as advanced as Maia’s and strongly England-centric due to the teaching materials selected by Mrs Carter, Miss Minton comes up with a secret plan to set Maia to work by herself:

‘I am going to see Mrs Carter tomorrow. I shall tell her that you are not able to keep up with the twins in lessons. [...] I shall tell her that I will set you to work separately because you are holding the twins back. That means I am trusting you to work on your own. I shall of course help you whenever I can but you must keep up the deception.’¹⁶¹

Miss Minton thus attempts to provide Maia with an education tailored to her individual needs and catered to her interests by providing her with books on the history of Brazil as well as travel reports by “Bates, the explorer who first described this part of the Amazon [...] [and] another by Humboldt – a very great scientist”¹⁶². The governess thereby resorts to educational principles akin to the child-centred Montessori education, according to which children work on their own and teachers become guides rather than instructors.¹⁶³ Following Miss Minton’s conversation with Mrs Carter, Maia’s lessons henceforth take place on the veranda, a liminal space connecting the inside and the outside, where Maia is given exercises by Miss Minton. During her lessons, Maia “mostly [...] worked on her own and she loved it”¹⁶⁴. The books Miss Minton provides her with even seem to “[g]ive her back the mysterious country she had longed to see, and which the

160 Peter Hunt. “Unstable Metaphors.”, 26.

161 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 46.

162 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 46.

163 This seems particularly apt given the novel’s temporal setting at the beginning of the twentieth century when Maria Montessori also developed her innovative educational principles: she opened a *Casa dei Bambini* (Children’s House) in Rome in 1907 and published her teaching methods in *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicato all’educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini* (*The Method of Scientific Pedagogy Applied to the Education of Children in the Children’s Houses*) in 1909.

164 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 48.

Carters had shut out”¹⁶⁵. They rekindle Maia’s interest in the land and the local flora and fauna, and by implication her *W-world*, providing her with *useful* knowledge for her life in the Brazilian rainforest.

During one of these lessons, Miss Minton encourages Maia to find out more about the vicinity and ask Mr Carter for a map, an object associated with adventure (and perhaps a nod towards Victorian adventure novels) and the public sphere that enables her to transgress Mrs Carter’s orders.¹⁶⁶ After having borrowed a map from Mr Carter during their first proper and awkward encounter, Maia ascertains that “the map was interesting”¹⁶⁷, even if it is difficult to copy. She finds out that there are “‘many little rivers and streams and channels behind the house’”, of which she was not aware before, and that “‘[i]t looks as though one could go to Manaus the back way – not down the main river, if one had a canoe’”¹⁶⁸. The map thus helps Maia to familiarise herself with the topographical surroundings and the location of the Carters’ bungalow and draws her attention to the hidden pathways that lead to Manaus, of which she will make use before long.

Upon hearing that she is not to join Mrs Carter and the twins for the opening performance of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Maia deliberately defies Mrs Carter’s orders to stay behind to resolve the conflicting positions of her *O-world*. Her *O-world* is, to a considerable extent, governed by Mrs Carter’s regulations and decisions, who does not permit Maia to join her and the twins for the performance, nor “‘to hang about the theatre like a common beggar’”¹⁶⁹ to wait for Clovis. Yet, it also contains the promise she made to the young actor on the boat to Manaus to come and see him in the play. Her transgressive act of venturing into the rainforest and making her way to Manaus to meet Clovis is thus initiated by a moral conflict and constitutes not merely an arbitrary defiance of orders; Maia claims agency due to a prior commitment. This also becomes evident in the fact that “[s]he had managed to push back the heavy bolt on the door to the compound at the back *several days ago*”¹⁷⁰ and merely crosses the threshold to make her way to Manaus when the unrelenting Mrs Carter excludes her from the trip.¹⁷¹ Moreover, she only does so when Miss Minton, who told Maia that they

165 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 48.

166 The distinction between the public and the private spheres becomes particularly evident in this instance. While Maia is supposed to learn how “to draw proper maps”, the twins are “drawing a teapot according to the instructions of Dr Bullman”, which is an object connected with the private sphere and femininity. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 49.

167 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 52.

168 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 52.

169 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 69.

170 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 70, my emphasis.

171 According to John O. Jordan, thresholds are linked with transgression. He argues that the threshold is “[b]oth a barrier and a point of access” and “in effect defines the home by what it

will “‘have a good day exploring’”¹⁷² while the Carters are in Manaus, is struck down with a migraine, suggesting that Maia’s agency is also subject to external circumstances and a lack of adult supervision. The map borrowed from Mr Carter is crucial in her venture, as it provides Maia with an alternative route to Manaus, one that follows “a path running from the back of the house along the water channels which eventually came out behind the docks in Manaus”¹⁷³, and is studied before departure.

Maia’s transgression of Mrs Carter’s orders in this instance has an important function in the overall narrative, as it re-actualises Maia’s *W-world* and allows her to interact with the environment she has only seen from afar until now. It constitutes her first direct contact with the natural surroundings in Brazil and triggers a renegotiation and re-evaluation of her attitudes towards the rainforest. While the text picks up on the Amazon’s sublime beauty Maia has read about in the library books in London, for instance by referring to “a scarlet orchid [...] [that] glowed like a jewel in a shaft of sun”, it simultaneously cautions not “to be so rapt about the beauty of nature”¹⁷⁴. In *Journey to the River Sea*, the forest is first and foremost a *wild* place, which seems to resist human intervention (“the path made by the rubber-gatherers was overgrown”¹⁷⁵) and, much like the streets of London in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838), possesses labyrinthine qualities. Unaware of the conditions in the forest, Maia quickly becomes lost on her way and begins to panic. In a moment of doubt and desperation, she resorts to and mentally confirms the Carters’ view: “They’re right, the beastly Carters; the jungle is our enemy, she thought. Why didn’t I listen?”¹⁷⁶ This view seems to be further validated when Maia’s foot is caught in a liana and she falls: “It was a heavy fall; her foot was trapped – and in putting out her hand to save herself she had clutched a branch of thorns. Furious with herself, hurt, lost, she lay for a few moments helpless”¹⁷⁷. Her experiences in the rainforest so far largely construct

keeps out; yet at the same time, as the point of contact and transition between the separate spheres, it allows and perhaps even invites transgression”. John. O. Jordan. “Domestic Servants and the Victorian Home”, 80. Ruth Feingold, by contrast, emphasises the threshold’s link to transformation: “Thresholds traditionally denote change: across cultures, they serve as a physical manifestation of inner transformation”. Ruth Feingold. “Mapping the Interior.”, 135. Crossing the threshold of the bolted door thus not only constitutes an act of transgression (as Maia is not supposed to open this door to go outside) and transition (from the inside of the Carters’ bungalow to the outside, from the private to the public sphere), it also already foreshadows Maia’s renegotiation of attitudes regarding the natural environment when she enters the forest.

172 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 69.

173 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 70.

174 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 71.

175 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 71.

176 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 72.

177 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 72.

the forest as an extremely dangerous environment, where wilderness, as in many other children's texts, appears to be "antithetical to home and safety"¹⁷⁸. This seems to confirm the validity of the Carters' hostile stance towards the local flora and fauna, which Maia now readily accepts – if only temporarily.

A more favourable view of the natural environment is reinstated when Maia gets into the canoe of the mysterious Indigenous boy, who journeyed down the river where she fell, and once more beholds the vibrant beauty of the surroundings. She can see various birds and "gigantic leaves from which piebald frogs flopped into the water" and feels "as though she was taking the journey she had imagined on top of the library ladder the day she heard about her new life"¹⁷⁹. On the boat, her *W-world* is actualised and the Carters' position towards the forest weakened. Yet, despite the moments where Maia can relish the Amazon's beauty, the canoe ride is not without hazards. When the boat passes "a wicked-looking branch with spikes the size of knives", the Indigenous boy has to intervene and push Maia down with force, to prevent her from being "knocked unconscious or even blinded"¹⁸⁰. After this incident, Maia became "very careful [...], keeping a proper lookout"¹⁸¹, while taking in the views unfolding in front of her. Ibbotson's text thus introduces the rainforest as a place that demands respect and constant vigilance and one that rewards those willing to do so with its extraordinary beauty. The renegotiation and re-evaluation of Maia's attitude during her transgression is crucial for effectively establishing a sense of belonging to the country and for further dissociating her from the Carters' narrow-minded views.

Overall, Ibbotson's text endorses Maia's first attempt at claiming autonomy and agency. Instead of being punished for disregarding Mrs Carter's orders, Maia is merely in disgrace for two days and has "to put up with Mrs Carter's threats to send her back to England"¹⁸². This fairly lenient 'punishment' that follows Maia's transgression reflects the story's *neo*-Victorian potential with regard to childhood experiences, as her freedom is not limited in any significant way and no physical punishment follows this incident, which is likely to have followed such a transgression and disregard of orders in a Victorian novel. The lack of even a scolding is especially remarkable when considering the Carters' concern for respectability, which was used to prevent Maia from waiting for Clovis after the performance in the first place and is drawn upon again when Mrs Carter describes her initial reaction: "'I couldn't believe my eyes' [...]. 'A girl in my care

178 Jane Suzanne Carroll. *Landscape in Children's Literature*, 76.

179 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 74, 75.

180 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 75.

181 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 75.

182 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 86.

creeping out secretly, going backstage and looking like a ragamuffin’ ”¹⁸³. Aware of the fact that Maia’s appearance and behaviour might reflect negatively on her, Mrs Carter is comparatively indulgent and does not revert to any measures that will prevent Maia from similar actions in the future.

Since there is no actual punishment, Maia seems to feel encouraged to engage in a further transgressive action when she is provided with such an opportunity by Miss Minton. Her governess, who has realised that Maia needs “ ‘to go out and breathe fresh air’ ”, enables her to do so by inventing “ ‘pulmonary spasms’ ”¹⁸⁴, which, as she will explain to Mrs Carter, are triggered by the disinfectant-filled air inside the bungalow.¹⁸⁵ In this instance, as in the previous one, Miss Minton, like many of her counterparts in Victorian governess novels, is “endowed with strong maternal characteristics”¹⁸⁶ in that she repeatedly responds to and attempts to satisfy Maia’s needs. Even though she is not able to turn the Carters’ bungalow into a home for Maia, she makes her life more tolerable by extending spatial boundaries. For Maia, as an orphan who has to put up with the unmotherly Mrs Carter and who is unable to establish any emotional family ties with the Carters, Miss Minton turns into a surrogate mother, whose views and attitudes become more relatable than those of the reserved Mrs Carter.¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, it comes hardly as a surprise that when Miss Minton, who does not demonise the natural environment, enables Maia’s outdoor visits, the girl goes outside when she is not supposed to and may even have constructed Miss Minton’s actions on her behalf as permission to do so.

From the start, the invention of a disease by Miss Minton bears transgressive potential. This becomes apparent in the fact that, while listening to Miss Minton’s plans, Maia immediately hopes “to make friends with the Indians in the huts”¹⁸⁸ during her time outside. In doing so, she would indeed be honouring her promise to Miss Minton to stay in close proximity to the bungalow but simultaneously also undermine the master-servant relationship the Carters try to firmly keep in

183 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 86.

184 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 88.

185 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 88.

186 Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros. *The Victorian Governess Novel*, 194.

187 A similar relationship pattern, in which a teacher turns into a more capable surrogate mother than, in this case, the negligent biological mother of the child, can be found in Roald Dahl’s *Matilda* (1988). The titular protagonist, Matilda Wormwood, is aware that her mother rather plays bingo every afternoon than caring properly for her and confides in Mrs Phelps, the librarian: “ ‘She doesn’t really care what I do,’ Matilda said a little sadly”. Accordingly, the young girl is overjoyed when her teacher, Miss Honey, explains to her parents that she “ ‘would love to have Matilda, [...] I would look after her with loving care’ ”, which Matilda has not experienced so far, at the end of the narrative when she is adopted by Miss Honey. Roald Dahl. *Matilda*, 10, 232.

188 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 88.

place.¹⁸⁹ Maia eventually does so when she extends Mrs Carter's permission to go out during lunch break and afternoon tea in the evenings: "She was not allowed to go out in the evening but she went. Once she had pushed back the heavy bolt on her door, she left it open"¹⁹⁰. Similar to Tom in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, who is supposed to stay in bed in his room at night but gets up to go into the titular garden, Maia ventures outside. Not only does she unbolt the door to go outside when she is supposed to stay in her room, she also deliberately leaves the door open, compromising the Carters' self-quarantine and allowing wildlife to enter the bungalow. The open door thus signifies that she actively resists the Carters and does not just sneak out. During her evening strolls, Maia is able to re-establish her neo-Romantic bond with the natural world, for instance, when she "walk[s] along the river beside a grove of dyewood trees"¹⁹¹ on one of these occasions, and repeatedly consorts with people the Carters deem beneath them.

In displaying a certain amount of agency and empowerment, Maia seems to reclaim aspects of her *W-world* that have not been actualised in the Carters' bungalow. Yet, in making Miss Minton's actions the prerequisite for Maia's transgressions, the narrative reinforces an adult-child relationship that draws attention to the disempowered position of the child as an individual reliant on adult intervention. Given the story's historical setting and genre, this is not remarkable in and of itself, as Kim Wilson observes: "Historical fiction poses a particular problem for authors who wish to provide their stories with compelling female leads, in that women – and girls especially – of preceding centuries have enjoyed considerably less independence of mind and body than their equivalent in the modern age"¹⁹². Thus, while many contemporary children's books equip their female child heroines with a significant amount of agency, their counterparts in neo-Victorian children's fiction, especially in those texts that are exclusively set in the Victorian era, are often significantly restricted by their specific socio-cultural environment, at least as long as their authors seek to avoid anachronistic characters and situations. The fact that Maia's more substantial transgressions are preceded by Miss Minton's endeavours to ease Maia's situation thus reinforce the girl's innocence, as does her seeming reluctance to unbolt the door and go outside prior to her moral dilemma. It seems that only

189 Their attitude towards servants surfaces in their general distrust, in the allegedly superior position of the Carters (even the twins order the servants around: "to comb their hair, pick up their handkerchiefs, iron their hair ribbons...") as well as in the 'huts' provided by the Carters. They are "not cool, native huts with thatched roofs, but wooden shacks built to house servants", which the Carters seem to have specifically built after pulling down the thatched huts left by the Tapuri when they sold the land. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 53, 37.; cf. *ibid.*, 155–156.

190 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 90.

191 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 90.

192 Kim Wilson. *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Readers*, 63.

with the assistance of her governess is Maia able to change her position on the childhood scale temporarily, though not consistently as her first venture into the forest has shown. She often turns into an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD only for a short amount of time before she is firmly subsumed under adult authority and control again, returning to her position as a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD in the Carter household.

7.3. Beatrice and Gwendolyn: Unchildlike and Cruel Twins

In her new home, Maia also finally meets the Carters' twin daughters Beatrice and Gwendolyn. Since Maia had received hardly any information on the twins prior to her arrival, she "was free to make up their lives" on the boat to Manaus "and she did this endlessly"¹⁹³. Yet, none of her versions anticipates or even comes close to Maia's actual experiences with the twins, who lead "strange lives inside the dark and stuffy house"¹⁹⁴ and are far from welcoming towards her. To scrutinise the twins' childhood experience, this subchapter glimpses at the implications of living and growing up in the Carter household with respect to the natural environment and analyses Beatrice and Gwendolyn *as* twins, an aspect that is particularly prominent in Ibbotson's narrative. In addition, it argues that the two girls, in their actions, attitudes and behaviour, are not particularly childlike and undermine Romantic conceptions of childhood repeatedly. Their interactions with Maia reinforce that the children's positions on the childhood scale are mutually dependent and that the twins, *as children*, are able to initiate and advance a deterioration of Maia's situation in the Carter household.

Among the immediate and arguably also most striking consequences of their upbringing is the fact that Beatrice and Gwendolyn have imbibed and replicate their mother's attitude towards the rainforest and – fairly untypically for children – avoid the natural world completely. Even though the twins' outer appearance initially suggests an actualisation of Maia's *W-world* by corresponding to Romantic conceptions of childhood as is shown below, their attitude towards the natural environment contradicts the Romantic idea of a child's instinctive bond with nature.¹⁹⁵ This becomes apparent on a smaller scale inside the Carters'

193 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 23.

194 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 53.

195 Many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literary texts for children celebrate this connection between child and natural environments, among them Lucy M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* (orig. 1880–1881), various novels by Edith Nesbit and most prominently Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. For further examples and in-

bungalow: contrary to her expectation that the twins may possess several domesticated animals, Maia finds that Beatrice and Gwendolyn “‘certainly don’t have any pets’” and even display disgust when she mentions that she “‘wanted to bring some baby chicks’”¹⁹⁶ from the market as presents. Likewise, when they show Maia to her room, they urge her to keep the second door in her bedroom, which leads to the compound, “‘locked *always*’” and make unambiguously clear that they “‘*never* go out there’”, “‘because it’s too hot and full of horrible animals’”¹⁹⁷. Thus, even after having lived surrounded by the rainforest for a considerable amount of time, the twins continue to replicate imperialist stereotypes, drawing on the same semantic fields as Maia’s classmates in London, and seem to have failed to make any serious attempts to question this view or adjust to the natural environment.

Even though the twins appear to refuse leaving the house, their hostile stance is solely directed at the natural environment, not the outside *per se*. This is evident in their statement that when they go out, “‘we go in the boat to Manaus’”¹⁹⁸. Their repeated visits to one of Brazil’s largest cities suggest that the twins prefer the urban environment. As a result of their aversion to the more immediate surroundings of the bungalow, their mobility is limited to a considerable extent, though, as the twins do not travel to Manaus on their own and are hence reliant on their mother. In addition, Beatrice and Gwendolyn are predominantly associated with interior spaces. Not only do they stay inside the bungalow, a place “‘essentially controlled by adults’”¹⁹⁹, for most of the time; they also confine themselves to the cabin of the boat, keeping “the doors and windows shut”²⁰⁰, while travelling to Manaus. This implies that, even when having the chance to engage with the natural environment from a safe distance, the twins reject having *any* experiences in or with the rainforest. As in other children’s texts, Beatrice

formation on the link between child and the natural world, see Karin Lesnik-Oberstein. “Children’s Literature and the Environment,” 208–217.

196 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 32.

197 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33, my emphasis. The beneficial effects of being out of doors abroad were well established in the late Victorian era. Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner’s *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1888), a guide for missionaries of the British Empire sent to India, for instance, stresses the importance of outdoor activities. Despite the hot climate, missionaries are encouraged to “[b]e in the open air as much as possible; even plants shut up in the dark get sickly and lose their colour”. Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, 159. In her depiction of the Carters, Ibbotson hence might have reproduced stereotypes and clichés about the Victorians.

198 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 33.

199 Ann Alston. “Your Room or Mine? Spatial Politics in Children’s Literature,” 15.; cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. “Worlds Enough and Time,” 7.

200 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 54.

and Gwendolyn's "[l]ack of engagement with the natural world creates a poor sense of belonging to the environment"²⁰¹ and the country they live in.

It seems that the twins' aversion is also specifically directed towards the *local* flora and fauna, as is evidenced by a needlework session when the twins are embroidering table mats with flowers common in Europe/Britain. Upon explaining that Maia plans on embroidering hers with "'those big red lilies that grow everywhere here'", i.e., plants endemic to Brazil, Beatrice attempts to prevent her from doing so on the grounds that "'[t]hey're native flowers and they're nasty'"²⁰², making their local origin part of her reasoning.²⁰³ The extent to which the twins' attitudes are based on their mother's becomes apparent when Beatrice attempts to further explain her position: "'Mother says they're a Breeding Ground [sic]'" for "'[h]orrid things. Things that bite you and make you ill'"²⁰⁴. The recourse to Mrs Carter's opinions and Beatrice's apparent inability to offer a convincing explanation with respect to Maia's question what they are a breeding ground for imply that she is merely repeating someone else's view without fully understanding or being more critical of this position. Clearly, their mother's attitudes have fostered the twins' sense of alienation and prevent them from making important experiences in and with the natural world.

Despite the fact that Mrs Carter's opinions influence the children to a considerable extent, their childhood experience is even more strongly shaped by the fact that they are twins, which is Beatrice and Gwendolyn's most striking feature. The motif of twins has a long literary history and was part of various discourses of the nineteenth century, in which fraternal, identical and conjoined twins were widely discussed.²⁰⁵ As Emily A. Bernhard Jackson notes, "twins were a common topic and trope in the Victorian period"²⁰⁶. Their prevalence in the Victorian popular imagination can, on the one hand, be ascribed to Victorian freak shows,

201 Janet Grafton. "Girls and Green Space.", 113.

202 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43.

203 This form of privileging Europe as the lens for perceiving one's environment was also a common practice in *The Royal Readers*, which were, according to Helen Tiffin, among "the most influential teaching texts" for primary education of the British Empire. Drawing on postcolonial critics and writers, Tiffin maintains that in these readers "the total environment – social, climatic, economic – of the colonial child was [...] seen at best as a degenerate rendition and at worst as a shameful aberration of [...] [the] imperial norm". Helen Tiffin. "Plato's Cave.", 147. For more information on *The Royal Readers*, see *ibid.*, 147–148.

204 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 43, 44, my emphasis.

205 Juliana de Nooy highlights the prevalence of the twin motif in literature and especially in the Victorian period: "Tales of twins and doubles are noticeably abundant in myth and legend, in the theatre of antiquity, and at two periods during modern times in Western literature: the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries". Juliana de Nooy. *Twins in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, 11.

206 Emily A. Bernhard-Jackson. "'Like Two Pigeons in One Nest.'", 452.

which frequently exhibited conjoined twins for sensational purposes.²⁰⁷ On the other hand, there was also an increasing medical interest in fraternal and identical twins. In fact, “discussions of twins were widely available in medical and obstetrics texts that informed nineteenth-century British cultural understanding of the gestation, parturition, and meanings of multiple births”²⁰⁸. An abiding interest in twins has also been evinced in fictional texts from the Victorian period, and “mid-nineteenth-century English literature, both high and low, was filled with representations of twins”²⁰⁹. Even though the more memorable literary twins in children’s literature tend to be found in later periods, most famously Pat and Isabel O’Sullivan in Enid Blyton’s *St Clare’s* series (1941–1945) and the mischievous twins Fred and George Weasley in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007), they also make appearances in Victorian children’s literature, such as the fraternal twins Alice and Noël Bastable in Edith Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899). However, as in children’s literature more generally, twins in Victorian children’s texts are often only “peripheral characters, used for comic purposes”, as the identical ‘twins’ Tweedledum and Tweedledee in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) suggest, or their “appearance [...] is not crucial”²¹⁰ for the plot.²¹¹ Ibbotson’s use of the twin motif thus echoes the Victorians’ interest in twins both literary and non-literary. Yet, in contrast to many Victorian fictional twins, who often feature as uncanny doubles or merely as minor characters, Ibbotson first and foremost employs them as vile antago-

207 The famous Siamese-American conjoined brothers Chang and Eng Bunker, for instance, appeared in freak shows when they toured Great Britain and Ireland in the nineteenth century. For further information on conjoined twins in Victorian freak shows, see Emily A. Bernhard Jackson. “Twins, Twinship, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*,” 71–72.

208 Emily A. Bernhard Jackson. “Twins, Twinship, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*,” 73.

209 Emily A. Bernhard-Jackson. “‘Like Two Pigeons in One Nest.’”, 452. Amongst others, she lists Wilkie Collins’ “The Twin Sisters” (1851), Eliza Lee’s *Walt and Vult, or, The Twins* (1846) and Alexandre Dumas’ *The Twin Captains* (1861) as examples of the mid-nineteenth-century interest in twins. Cf. *ibid.*, 453. According to Wieland Schwanebeck, “the most well-known twin novel of the nineteenth century” was published in the late Victorian era and is Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). Wieland Schwanebeck. *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning*, 12.

210 Maria Nikolajeva. *The Rhetoric of Character in Children’s Literature*, 278.

211 Since Carroll’s text merely describes them as “two fat little men” and brothers, it must have been Sir John Tenniel’s illustration that contributed to inscribing them as identical twins in the cultural imagination, so much so that various audio-visual adaptations continue to depict them in this way. Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass*, 59.

nists, exacerbating Maia's life and multiplying the amount of cruelty she experiences at the Carters.²¹²

The children's first meeting on the Carters' jetty is constitutive of Maia's initial impression of the twins and suggests that Beatrice and Gwendolyn's childhood corresponds to Romantic idea(l)s. Maia, whose image of childhood complies with Romantic conceptions, as was pointed out above, initially assumes that "[s]he had imagined them well"²¹³, and it seems as if the twins will bring about an actualisation of her *W-world*:

They were fair, they were pretty and they were dressed in white. They wore straw hats, each with a different coloured ribbon round the rim, one pink, one blue, and the sashes round their flounced dresses matched their hats. Their fair ringlets, a little limp in the heat, touched their collars, their round cheeks were flushed, their light blue eyes were framed by pale, almost colourless lashes.²¹⁴

Their white dresses, which appear to signify purity and innocence, and their fair curls mark them as angelic and invariably situate the twins within Romantic discourses about childhood that were prevalent throughout the Victorian period.²¹⁵ The power of the image projected by the twins becomes apparent on the next day and after the first minor incident, when seeing the twins fresh and in their white dresses again makes Maia feel "ashamed of her thoughts the night before" and renews her hopes that "[t]hey would be friends in the end, she was sure of it"²¹⁶. In dressing alike, except for ribbons and sashes, which function as visual markers of difference, Beatrice and Gwendolyn reinforce their twin existence by exhibiting one of the stereotypical features associated with identical twins, namely bearing an eerie resemblance that is enhanced by almost identical dresses. One of the immediate effects of seeing both twins at once is that Maia is confronted with two children seemingly corresponding to the Romantic ideal, which inevitably turns into the dominant image of childhood during the first meeting of the three girls, regardless of the image of childhood Maia embodies.

Even though the twins appear mostly in unison and seem to be the spitting image of each other, there is an explicit hierarchy between Beatrice and Gwen-

212 In *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006), Diane Setterfield also employs the twin motif. For an analysis of the complementary twins Emmeline and Adeline March, see chapter 9 "Childhood Neglect and Pathological Relationships in Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*".

213 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 29.

214 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 29.

215 The idea of displaying children as cherub-like/angelic beings can, for example, also be found in Franz Xaver Winterhalter's famous portrait of the royal family (1848). Even though Queen Victoria's children were brunette, their curly hair and white dresses contribute to their angelic appearance. The painting in question can be found on the website of the Royal Collection Trust: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/405413/the-royal-family-in-1846>. Last access: 15 February 2020.

216 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 41.

dolyn, which is among the first features Maia notices about them. This hierarchy, according to which Beatrice is the dominant twin, is even reflected in physical features, as Beatrice looks livelier than her twin sister. She “was [...] a little plumper and taller; her eyes had a little more colour, [and] her scanty ringlets had more body than Gwendolyn’s”, evoking the impression that “Beatrice was the mould from which Gwendolyn had been taken”²¹⁷. Their hierarchical relationship is further consolidated by the fact that Beatrice always speaks first and that Gwendolyn, when asked a question, “turn[s] to Beatrice”²¹⁸ and waits for her reply before adding a thought of her own. Gwendolyn thereby maintains the hierarchy and implicitly acknowledges her inferior position. This hierarchy already undermines the idea of a Romantic childhood that is triggered by the twins’ outer appearance, as they deviate from the state of innocence associated with childhood. As a result of the twins’ intricate relationship, Gwendolyn conceives of Maia as a potential threat in this hierarchy and digs her fingernail into Maia’s palm while introducing herself.²¹⁹ In doing so, Gwendolyn defends her intermediate position even before Maia makes any advances and draws the girl’s attention to the existing power relations among the children, making her aware of her position as newcomer to the family. This positioning of Maia at the bottom of the hierarchy can be read as an instance foreshadowing the cruel treatment and physical abuse she is to experience at the hands of the twins.

Throughout Ibbotson’s narrative, Beatrice and Gwendolyn carry the idea of identical twins to the extreme by imitating and copying each other. They live up to “[t]he cultural fantasy of twinship [that] imagines twins as physically and behaviourally identical, even impossible to tell apart, as clones who speak and act in unison, who share an eerie closeness”²²⁰. Their closeness is reflected in the fact that “[t]hey never went anywhere alone” and were “following each other even to the bathroom”²²¹, a habit that is referred to twice in the text. Since Beatrice is the dominant twin, it is mostly Gwendolyn who copies her sister and does not manifest an individual identity apart from Beatrice’s. This is particularly evident when Beatrice and Gwendolyn think about what they might buy with the reward for Finn’s capture and Gwendolyn borrows Beatrice’s decisions: “If Beatrice decided to order a flounced party dress in pink organdie, Gwendolyn decided to order one in blue. When Beatrice thought she would buy some proper scent, Gwendolyn said she was sick of boring lavender water and said she would have some too”²²². Realising that her twin sister is copying her, Beatrice makes

217 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 30.

218 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 32.

219 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 30, 53.

220 Karen Dillon. *The Spectacle of Twins in American Literature and Popular Culture*, 19.

221 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 53; cf. also *ibid.*, 109.

222 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 218.

Gwendolyn aware of this fact and leaves her speechless, because *as twins* they “had always copied each other”²²³. Gwendolyn’s identity thus appears to be subsumed by her sister’s, which reinforces the twin effect and points to the “disturbing oneness”²²⁴ that is often attributed to twins.

The oneness displayed by Beatrice and Gwendolyn as identical twins also bestows uncanny qualities upon them. In his essay “The Uncanny” (1919), Sigmund Freud defines the ‘uncanny’ as “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar”²²⁵. Even though “Freud does *not* include twins in his list of examples of the uncanny, but related phenomena like doubles, automata, and waxwork figures”²²⁶, identical twins seem to have a particular propensity for uncanniness by appearing as natural doubles.²²⁷ In *Journey to the River Sea*, an especially uncanny effect is created through the twins’ identical appearance and movements: not only do they dress and look alike, but “when they shook their heads or nodded they moved absolutely together as though they were puppets pulled by the same string”²²⁸. The comparison to puppets, which readily evokes Carlo Collodi’s famous and by now iconic marionette Pinocchio from his *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1881, *Adventures of Pinocchio*, 1892), who wants to become ‘a real boy’, contests – at least to a certain degree – their status as children and reinforces their uncanny potential.

The puppet discourse imposed upon the twins further suggests that Beatrice and Gwendolyn lack the agility commonly associated with childhood and undermines the notion of the twins being ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILDREN in the Romantic sense. Instead, they almost appear to be the ‘other’ of nature. Their movements frequently appear highly mechanical, unnatural and somewhat rehearsed. Their nodding, for example, which consists of a single movement, “once down, once up”²²⁹, lacks both intensity and liveliness in addition to harbouring an uncanny potential. Likewise, during their dancing lessons, the twins exhibit a certain

223 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 218. Another instance where Gwendolyn’s attempt to copy her sister leads to a dispute is when Beatrice suggests that the twins “‘need some proper jewellery’” for their theatre outing and suggests that “‘Maia could lend me her mother’s pearls’”, an item that, due to its singularity, cannot be shared by the twins. Gwendolyn immediately protests, complaining “‘And what about me? [...] I’m not going to sit there while you wear Maia’s pearls and not me’”. *Ibid.*, 68.

224 Karen Dillon. *The Spectacle of Twins in American Literature and Popular Culture*, 20.

225 Sigmund Freud. “The Uncanny.”, 124.

226 Wieland Schwanebeck. *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning*, 1, original emphasis.

227 Celestino Deleyto comes to a similar conclusion in his article on Angela Carter’s *Wise Children* (1991), arguing that “[t]he ‘uncanny’ is the repetition of the familiar, the doubling of experience, and in this sense, twins may be experienced by themselves and by other people as ‘living examples’ of ‘the uncanny’”. Celestino Deleyto. “‘We Are Not Angels’”, 174.

228 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 53.

229 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 32.

sluggishness and stiffness when they move and are “revolving as relentlessly as metronomes to the music”²³⁰, unable to dance more naturally or gracefully. In their rigid movements during the dancing lessons, Beatrice and Gwendolyn evoke another intertext in which the boundary between human being and animated doll/machine is contested, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short story “Der Sandmann” (1816, “The Sandman”, 1817). In Hoffmann’s story, Olimpia, whose “pace and posture had about them something deliberate and stiff” and who displays a “singular exactitude of rhythm”²³¹ while dancing, is, as Nathaniel finds out, a clockwork automaton in the guise of a human being. Read in this light, the twins’ fairly mechanical movements, which are doubled by their twin existence and hence especially unsettling, not only question their status as children, but even as human beings.

Moreover, as twins, Beatrice and Gwendolyn prefer each other’s company to that of other children and exaggerate the special bond that allegedly exists between (identical) twins.²³² It seems that they have been unable or unwilling to make any friends, even though their dancing lessons, where there is a mix of children from different nationalities and of different ages, provided them with ample opportunities to do so. Instead of choosing two of the other children as dance partners, the twins “‘always dance together’” and convey the impression that they “‘don’t [...] like other children’”²³³, as Maia’s dance partner Sergei Keminsky explains.²³⁴ Thus, Beatrice and Gwendolyn are neither seeking any interpersonal relations nor initiating friendships with their peers. On the contrary, through their eccentric and off-putting behaviour, the twins have ostracised themselves and incurred the dislike of the other children. Their disinterest in friendship is also constitutive of their relationship with Maia, whom they

230 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 58.

231 E.T.A. Hoffmann. “The Sandman.”, 113, 114.

232 Valerie Weldrick’s neo-Victorian children’s novel *The Blakeley Ghost* (1980) likewise employs the twin motif and explores the deep, special connection between twins. Frederick (Fred) Allmann, who died in an accident in the Blakeley theatre at the age of fourteen in 1908, continued a ghostly life in the playhouse. Only after he has seen his twin sister Martha, now aged eighty-four, again and knows that she is well he realises that “‘something feels different’” and is able to pass on. For Martha, losing her twin is “‘what made it so hard’” for her, because she knows that “‘he died for me’” when he should have lived. Valerie Weldrick. *The Blakeley Ghost*, 98, 59, original emphasis.

233 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 58.

234 For Maia, the dancing lessons turn into an opportunity to meet new children and make friends while dancing itself becomes a liberating activity that makes her forget life at the Carters’. It is only in the company of “all these ordinary, welcoming children” that Maia reflects on her relationship with the twins: “She had not realized that every word she spoke to the twins had to be thought about and weighed”. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 57. During the dancing lessons, the reader is presented with a host of ‘ordinary’ children against which the twins’ idiosyncrasies and their rudeness towards Maia stand out even more.

consider an unwelcome intruder rather than a genuine playmate and family member, and express their aversion openly (“‘We don’t like Maia, Mummy’”, “‘We *hate* her’”²³⁵). It seems that Ibbotson’s narrative repeatedly explains the twins’ attitude towards friendship and Maia by their twin existence (“‘twins are used to living in their own world’”²³⁶), promoting an understanding of twins that naturalises their presumed “eerie closeness”²³⁷.

The twins’ inherent, extraordinary bond also suggests that Maia is at the mercy of and has to put up with the twins’ whims, as they always face Maia as a pair. Clovis King, the young actor Maia met on the boat to Manaus, considered this possibility and warned her that “‘[i]f they’re nice it’ll be all right, [...] [b]ut if they’re nasty you’ll have a double dose’”²³⁸. In his statement, he applies a binary logic, suggesting that, as a pair, the twins are either for or against Maia. As it turns out, Clovis’ premonition that Maia may experience “‘a double dose’” of nastiness comes all too true and Maia is not only outnumbered but also has to acquiesce in the twins’ bullying and physical assaults.

In their unchildlike behaviour, Beatrice and Gwendolyn further subvert the very image of childhood they evoke via visual signifiers, suggesting that they merely offer a shallow *performance* of a Romantic childhood. References to the twins’ white dresses, which appear too white and clean for children (Gwendolyn “smooth[es] down her *spotless* white dress”), as well as their locks, which are hanging “a little limp in the heat”²³⁹, might be read in this context.²⁴⁰ In fact, the text suggests that the twins live exceedingly frustrating childhoods and, even before they physically assault Maia, do not live up to the image they project: every evening when “[t]he twins, who always looked so clean and fresh in the morning, were flushed and grumpy”²⁴¹, their true natures are revealed and their outward appearance is much more in line with their actions, especially those against Maia.

235 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 145, 146, original emphasis.

236 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 36; cf. also *ibid.*, 196.

237 Karen Dillon. *The Spectacle of Twins in American Literature and Popular Culture*, 19. The sentiment that twins live in a world of their own arguably also underlies Miss Minton’s observation that “‘it is difficult for them [the twins]’”, who “‘have not been used to having other children’” and the narrator’s assertion that “the twins had never welcomed anybody in their lives”. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 58, 39.

238 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 21.

239 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 32, 29, my emphasis.

240 In a conversation with Miss Minton during the children’s dancing lesson, the governess of the Keminskys, Mademoiselle Lille, reinforces the twins’ lack of childish attributes in a comparison with Maia. While considering the latter as “‘charming’” and “‘graceful’”, Beatrice and Gwendolyn are merely regarded as being “‘always so tidy... so clean...’”, features usually not connected with children, at least from today’s perspective. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 58.

241 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 45.

The twins' cruel actions start shortly after Maia's arrival. As bullies, they join the ranks of Noah Claypole in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, John Reed in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Tom Bloomfield in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Harry Flashman in Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and become part of a literary tradition frequently associated with male (child) characters.²⁴² The Victorian bully is "characterized as psychologically deviant and morally depraved"²⁴³ and often "represented as a sadistic figure"²⁴⁴, who enjoys and delights in tormenting others, both physically and emotionally.²⁴⁵ Likewise, the Carter twins repeatedly bully Maia and hurt her in both physical and emotional ways: they "never lost a chance of snubbing her or making her feel unwanted. Mostly it was just words, but sometimes, when no one was there, they pushed her against the roughcast wall of the corridor, or dug their elbows into her"²⁴⁶. Whenever adult control and supervision are absent, the twins seem to change their tactics from assaulting Maia emotionally by making her feel unwelcome and unwanted to actually laying hands on her. Moreover, like their mother, the twins do not want Maia to enjoy her life in Brazil, so that "if Maia forgot to put on a gloomy face [after her piano lesson] when she saw the twins sitting with their legs stuck out in the [dancing class] locker room, waiting to have their shoes put on, she was in trouble"²⁴⁷ – even if what being "in trouble" means is not further detailed in the text. While Maia silently endures the twins' torments, she is on the receiving end of cruelty, which serves to re-establish and maintain the power relations among the children, putting her in line with other bullied Victorian orphan children, such as Oliver Twist and Jane Eyre.

An instance that explicitly undermines the idealised, Romantic image of childhood Beatrice and Gwendolyn project and that lifts the boundary between (childish) innocence and (adult) experience revolves around their attempt to claim the reward money set out for Finn's capture. Unlike Cedric Errol in Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, who "proves incapable of being 'bought' by his grandfather" and "asks mainly for gifts for others"²⁴⁸, the twins cannot resist and are intrigued by the possibilities the doubled reward of forty thousand *milreis* affords. Taking a purely materialistic stance, they think about what they might

242 Josie Pye in Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and Lavinia Herbert in Burnett's *A Little Princess* are examples of female bullies in Victorian texts for children.

243 Katharine Kittredge and Carolyn Rennie. "Old-School Bullies at Hogwarts.", 82.

244 Monica Flegel and Christopher Parkes. "The Social Function of Child Cruelty.", 11.

245 According to the website of the UK government, "[t]here is no legal definition of bullying" to date. It is usually characterised by its repetitive nature and intent "to hurt someone either physically or emotionally", and may include "physical assault[,] teasing[,] making threats [and] name calling". UK Government. "Bullying – A Definition.", n.p.

246 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 53.

247 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 158.

248 Phyllis Bixler. "Idealization of the Child and Childhood.", 89.

purchase with such an amount of money: “‘Imagine the dresses one could buy with that,’ said Beatrice. ‘And the hats,’ said Gwendolyn. ‘And the shoes.’ ‘And the chocolates. Boxes and boxes of chocolates’”²⁴⁹. The choice of items and their plans to immediately spend the reward point towards their still childish attitude towards money. The twins, however, become absorbed and corrupted by the idea of possessing the money, which occupies their *W-worlds* to an unhealthy extent, and they seem to stop at nothing in obtaining it.

By the time Beatrice and Gwendolyn attend Olga Keminsky’s birthday party, their ruthlessness has reached a degree where they do not even desist from physically assaulting and hurting Maia in the Keminskys’ cloakroom. During the party, to which they have only been invited because Maia would otherwise not have been able to come, the twins succeed in extracting the information about Finn’s whereabouts from Maia by harming her in different ways. Although Maia was supposed to pass the information on to the twins to set the ruse, which was devised by Finn, Clovis and herself, in motion and act accordingly, the twins are hurting her to the point where she cries “[r]eal tears”²⁵⁰. Beatrice, who initiates most of the twins’ actions, is the first to lay hands on their relative by taking her arm and twisting it, before Gwendolyn joins in and takes Maia’s “other arm and jerk[s] it back”²⁵¹. Finding that Maia is now willing to provide them with the information they need, “[t]he twins g[i]ve grunts of satisfaction”²⁵², a sound that dehumanises them and re-actualises the pig imagery present throughout Ibbotson’s narrative, and continue their torments.²⁵³ After giving Maia’s arm “[t]wo

249 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 114–115.

250 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 172.

251 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 172.

252 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 172.

253 The pig imagery is mainly applied by the Indigenous servants. Tapi, for instance, refers to the twins as “‘As Pestinhas’”, which Maia translates as “‘[n]asty little pigs’”. Finn also reports that the servants call the twins “‘the porkers’. [...] ‘You know, little fat pigs that snuffle and eat’”. Moreover, when the twins dress for Olga’s birthday party, they visually resemble pigs: “The twins were dressed in their favourite party pink; rather a *fleshy* pink, which was perhaps a pity because their short necks coming out of a double row of ruffles made them look a little like those hams one sees on butchers’ slabs near Christmas”. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 69, 102, 167, original emphasis. In referring to the twins as pigs, *Journey to the River Sea* employs a similar use of the term as in Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*. In Burnett’s novel, Mary is described as being “as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived” by the heterodiegetic narrator and, in turn, repeatedly uses the term ‘pig’ as an insult: “‘Pig! Pig! Daughter of Pigs!’ she said, because to call a native [in India] a pig is the worst insult of all”. Later, she uses this term to offend her English maid Martha for thinking that she might have been an Indigenous Indian girl: “‘You – you daughter of a pig!’” Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 3, 4, 17. While the term ‘pig’ is used derogatorily in both cases, *Journey to the River Sea* reverses the power relations in *The Secret Garden* by displaying the Indigenous servants making such an assessment about the children of their employers, which reinforces the text’s revisionist agenda.

more *savage yanks*”, Gwendolyn stops copying her twin sister and gets “hold of a handful of Maia’s hair and twist[s] it away from her scalp”²⁵⁴, which suggests that she relishes in Maia’s suffering and claims a certain amount of agency of her own.²⁵⁵ They even threaten her with more severe forms of abuse and physical mutilation should she withhold the information they need: “‘If you don’t tell us we’ll really hurt you.’ ‘And scratch your face, so that your precious Sergei won’t want to look at you again’”²⁵⁶. In attacking Maia, Beatrice and Gwendolyn display a monstrous form of agency that contradicts the innocence paradigm of childhood that has been prevalent in Western thought since Romanticism.

Through their later actions in particular the twins can be assigned to the category of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD. Even though they do not resort to such drastic measures as Florence in John Harding’s *Florence & Giles* (2010), who is responsible for the deaths of several people, they maliciously inflict severe bodily harm on others, in this case a distant cousin. In physically abusing Maia in the cloakroom, they turn into remorseless perpetrators, who remain cold and scheming to achieve an actualisation of their *W-worlds*, which has taken precedence over their *O-world* and socially accepted behaviour for children.²⁵⁷ While the twins turn into MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED CHILDREN, their acts *against* Maia inevitably also affect the latter’s position on the childhood scale, as she is turned into the victim of their cruel conduct. Enduring the twins’ assaults, Maia moves to the extreme position in the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. The fact that Maia puts up with bullying and assaults without retaliating makes the twins’ actions appear even more despicable and turns Maia into the more mature and ‘good’ child. In their roles as perpetrators, the twins, just like Florence, thus claim a “dark side of agency”²⁵⁸ and eventually transgress the

254 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 172, my emphasis.

255 This form of child-on-child violence and abuse finds its predecessors in Victorian fiction and characters such as seven-year-old Tom Bloomfield, who explains that he is “‘obliged to do it [strike his sister] now and then to keep her in order’”, or fourteen-year-old John Reed, who verbally abuses and strikes his cousin Jane Eyre on a regular basis. Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 16.; cf. Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 12–13.

256 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 172.

257 Their parents seem to not have fostered a positive development of their daughters with respect to social behaviour and proper conduct or provided them with a moral compass. The absence of positive parental role models suggests that Mr and Mrs Carter can be held at least partially responsible for the twins’ bullying of Maia and their monstrous acts in the cloakroom. Mrs Carter even seems to condone the twins’ actions by not reprimanding them for their actions when they tell Mr Low and Mr Trapwood that they twisted Maia’s arm until they had extracted the information they needed. Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 176.

258 Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson. “The Secret Sharer.”, 7.

ideological boundary constructed around childhood innocence through their violent acts.

The transgression of this boundary receives a particularly prominent position in the context of the twins' social background. According to Monica Flegel and Christopher Parkes, ethnicity and (social) class are significant parameters in the analysis of MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND MURDEROUS CHILDREN. They elaborate on the relevance of ethnicity by comparing Injun Joe from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), the antagonist in the story, who is half Native American, and eight-year-old Rhoda Penmark, "[t]he prototypical evil child in US cinema"²⁵⁹ and a child serial killer, from *The Bad Seed* (1956). Claiming that "[i]t is easy for a racist society to cast the evil 'half breed' [Injun Joe] into the pit of hell", they propose that it is much more difficult "to destroy a little blonde girl who is much closer to the centre of dominant culture" and "invested with [...] [a significant amount of] sentimental capital"²⁶⁰, which principally derives from the Romantic/Victorian construction of childhood. The Carter twins are likewise endowed with this kind of 'sentimental capital', amplified visually in their resemblance to 'little angels', and follows the nineteenth-century "construction of the child as that which is innocent, vulnerable, and in need of protection"²⁶¹. As children from a seemingly respectable white English middle-class family, their abusive acts appear all the more horrific by strongly contradicting the dominant expectations associated with childlike behaviour and are easily identified as nefarious deeds by young readers, who are likely to feel empathy with the girls' victims.

Beyond severe physical assault, Beatrice and Gwendolyn's monstrous empowerment finds expression in their calculated betrayal of Finn. When their first attempt at claiming the reward money proved futile, the twins revert to more systematic actions, including spying on Maia, disrespecting her privacy in going "to her room and pick[ing] over her things"²⁶² and assaulting her at the birthday party. As soon as they have extracted the information about Finn's hiding place, they leave the party, fetch their mother and see Mr Low and Mr Trapwood, who issued the reward.²⁶³ Only after they have once more ensured that they will receive the reward money in full, which makes their motivation unmistakably clear, they

259 Monica Flegel and Christopher Parkes. "The Social Function of Child Cruelty.", 6.

260 Monica Flegel and Christopher Parkes. "The Social Function of Child Cruelty.", 6.

261 Monica Flegel and Christopher Parkes. "The Social Function of Child Cruelty.", 3.

262 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 158.

263 Beatrice, in fact, did not want to get their mother involved in this at all, because she is afraid that Mrs Carter might try "'to get half the reward'". It is only Gwendolyn's sense of respectability and fear of the men down the docks, who might want them "'for the White Slave Traffic'", that prevents them from proceeding on their own. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 174.

betray Finn. Maia's previous assertions that Finn is "'only a boy and he's so afraid'" and, contrary to the twins' conviction, "'not a criminal'"²⁶⁴, have left Beatrice and Gwendolyn without compassion or a moment of doubt and hesitation for what they are about to do.²⁶⁵ Their ruthlessness in combination with their 'long-term' scheming and the severity of their betrayal constitutes a behaviour that is altogether more readily associated with adults and questions their child status.

The idea that the twins are precocious children and, in Romantic terms, more strongly aligned with the corrupt adult than the child world is furthermore drawn upon in their attitude towards money. In their avarice and greed, Beatrice and Gwendolyn follow in the literary footsteps of Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and the Earl of Dorincourt, Cedric's grandfather, in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and turn into misers. Even though they "were perfectly happy"²⁶⁶ when the police chief brought the reward, their happiness is only short-lived. Instead of spending their reward as initially devised or easing their parents' financial distress, the twins prefer to merely "look at it and count it and gloat over it"²⁶⁷ – a behaviour that is reminiscent of George Eliot's Silas Marner, who likewise used to count his coins "till their form and colour were like the satisfaction of a thirst to him"²⁶⁸. Paranoia-stricken that someone might take their reward, the twins seek out various hiding places for the money to prevent their parents from taking it and become increasingly distrustful and suspicious of each other.²⁶⁹ Before long, they carry the money in hand-sewn poaches around their necks, which they do not even take off for their lessons and occasionally pat "to make sure the money was still there"²⁷⁰. Their delusions and mutual distrust even prevent them from enjoying their childhoods, because they are overly concerned and preoccupied with an adult topic and adult desires. Eventually, their recip-

264 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 172.

265 Ibbotson's text condemns the twins' behaviour and actions by highlighting that, even though "there are people in Manaus who are very poor" and might hence be tempted by the considerable sum of money offered for Finn's capture, it is the twins, coming from a seemingly respectable middle-class background, who eventually claim the reward. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 104.

266 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 214, my emphasis.

267 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 219.

268 George Eliot. *Silas Marner*, 27.

269 The parallels to Eliot's weaver Silas Marner are striking here, as Silas, too, has a habit of hiding his money: "He had taken up some bricks in his floor underneath his loom, and here he had made a hole in which he set the iron pot that contained his guineas and silver coins". George Eliot. *Silas Marner*, 27–28. In hiding his gold underneath his loom, Silas is reminiscent of a dragon sitting on his hoard.

270 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 230.

rocal mistrust initiates the unfortunate series of events in which the bungalow burns down and the reward money is consumed by the flames.²⁷¹

After having been released from the hospital, Mrs Carter and the twins return to England and are punished for their deeds, in accordance with the idea of poetic justice, which is also a prevalent feature of Victorian children's novels as well as mid-Victorian novels in general.²⁷² Lady Parsons, a "quite amazingly mean"²⁷³ woman and the only relative the Carters seem to have in England, takes them in and turns them, after being initially bothered to hear about their self-inflicted misfortune, into domestic servants.²⁷⁴ A miser herself, she dismisses her paid servants to take in the Carters:

Lady Parsons had a brilliant idea. Her personal maid – the one who helped her to dress and did her hair and kept her clothes in order – was getting old. She would sack her, and she would also sack the paid companion who came to take the dog out and wind her knitting wool and read to her. And she would train the Carters to do their work! Not only would this save two whole wages, but there would be no need to give the Carters free time or Sundays off, which servants always seemed to want these days.²⁷⁵

Their punishment hence involves a loss of their social standing in society and a demotion to the status of those whom the Carters have deemed 'naturally' inferior: servants. Mrs Carter's precarious financial position puts her and the twins in a state of dependency they are unable to escape from and which henceforth seems to determine their future. It further entails that they have to accept Lady Parsons' conditions, who is very conservative in this regard, and end up having less free time than other servants.

271 Recuperating in the hospital from minor injuries, the twins once more subvert the idea of a child's usual behaviour by lamenting the loss of their money. When a nurse sees the children crying, she instinctively assumes that they are crying for and long to see their parents and attempts to console them by explaining that their "'mother's safe; she's going to be all right. She's in the next ward; you can go and see her'". She is, however, proven wrong in her assumption when the twins profess that they are lamenting their financial loss and not their parents: "'It's our money,' sobbed Beatrice. 'The money for the reward. Twenty thousand *milreis* each – and it's all burnt!'" Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 242. By not caring for their parents, who have sustained more severe injuries, and indulging in self-pity, the twins reinforce the idea that they may be children in terms of their age and outward appearance but not in their mentalities and resemble Fagin's precocious boy criminals in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* in this respect.

272 Mr Carter is not allowed to return to England with his family, because he "faced a trial and possible imprisonment for fraud and embezzlement" for having cheated the bank and owing money to various people. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 243.

273 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 268.

274 The Carters' social downfall and resultant position as domestic servants is reminiscent of and parallels the fate of Sara Crewe in Burnett's *A Little Princess*, who is promptly demoted – from model pupil to child servant – once she is presumed to be penniless.

275 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 268.

While many Victorian texts provide their misers with paths of redemption of one kind or another (see Ebenezer Scrooge, Silas Marner and the Earl of Dorincourt), Beatrice and Gwendolyn already seem beyond redemption. The comparatively child-appropriate tasks they are given in their new, humbling position as child servants, such as walking the dog, preparing Lady Parsons' tea and reading out loud, are only done reluctantly and not without wishing to hurt either human or animal. Beatrice, for instance, wants Lady Parsons' dog Kiki "to catch a chill and then pneumonia and then die"²⁷⁶, while Gwendolyn hopes that Lady Parsons burns her feet on the hot-water bottle.²⁷⁷ Thus, even though the twins are firmly under the adult supervision and control of Lady Parsons, which seems to prevent them from committing any more horrifying acts, their monstrosity and moral depravity are still present in their thoughts. In not giving the twins a redemption arc, Ibbotson emphasises the pivotal role of the domestic environment and parental responsibilities in the development of children and implies that Beatrice and Gwendolyn – still children in their age and looks – have already reached a point where redemption seems impossible.

Like many Victorian (domestic) child servants, the twins are eventually deprived of a proper childhood. Although the episode at Lady Parsons' is brief and is the last instance where the reader gets information on the fate of the twins, their position on the childhood scale is affected by the family's social fall. At Lady Parsons', Beatrice and Gwendolyn can be assigned to the group of the DIS-EMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, who have to cater to Lady Parsons' every whim and do the seemingly endless tasks she finds for them.²⁷⁸ This type of child is generally apt to evoke pity in the reader, as exemplified by Sara Crewe in her position as child servant, but the twins, due to their prior actions and monstrous thoughts, presumably do not.²⁷⁹ On the contrary, Ibbotson's narrative reinforces that the twins, in finding themselves in a position where they can no longer enjoy their childhood after having succumbed to adult desires (and thus a precocious *W-world*) and displaying a monstrous form of empowerment that contradicts the notion of childhood innocence, receive an appropriate punishment.

²⁷⁶ Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 266.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 267.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 269.

²⁷⁹ The lack of sympathy with the twins may also be due to the fact that they appear as exaggerated characters. In this respect, they are reminiscent of the many caricatured characters in the works of Charles Dickens and stand in the literary tradition of figures such as Mr Bumble in *Oliver Twist* (1838) or Mr Wopsle and Mr Pumblechook in *Great Expectations* (1861).

7.4. Finn: A Part-Indigenous Rousseauian 'Child in Nature'

Finn Taverner is a particularly interesting child character in the context of competing neo-Victorian visions of childhood in *Journey to the River Sea*, because he is a child of a British father and a Xanti mother. Just like Maia, he is an orphan and never knew his Indigenous mother, who died in childbirth because “‘the English doctor wouldn’t come out to an Indian woman in the night’”²⁸⁰. He only recently lost his father, who was a naturalist, in a canoe accident. Before the novel opens, he had been living on his own in the rainforest for four months and occasionally visited the Carters’ Indigenous servants at night, one of whom was his nurse when he was a baby.²⁸¹ With the death of his father, however, he became heir to Westwood, a large country house near York, and is, like Cedric Errol in Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, summoned to live with his aristocratic grandfather, Sir Aubrey Taverner, in England.²⁸² As a child who feels at home in the Amazon and enjoys his freedom, Finn resists moving to England and being subjected to British adult upper-class authority and control; instead, he attempts to seek the protection of the Xanti. Before he is able to set out to find his mother’s tribe, the arrival of the private detectives Mr Low and Mr Trapwood, sent by Sir Aubrey to bring Finn to England, at the beginning of Ibbotson’s story, puts him in a precarious position and causes him to go into hiding. He does so by switching between his Xanti and British appearances, looking like an Indigenous boy whenever he is on his way or comes close to Manaus, so as to obscure his part European origin and retain his freedom.

This subchapter elaborates on Finn as a part-Indigenous child and as a Rousseauian ‘child in nature’. It sets out with a glimpse at Victorian attitudes towards race and the ‘racial other’ in Victorian (children’s) literature to highlight Ibbotson’s neo-Victorian engagement with these ideologically charged discourses. It proceeds with Finn’s introduction *in absentia* through Mr Low and Mr Trapwood during Maia’s dancing lesson and an analysis of Maia and Finn’s first encounter in the rainforest. In this context, Finn’s connection to and relationship with the natural environment is examined in the light of Ibbotson’s indebtedness to Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, a text in which nature and the natural are predominant and that has been regarded as “a description of, and plea for, the importance of contact with nature”²⁸³. Since the central conflict revolves around Finn’s inheritance of and summons to Westwood, this subchapter also analyses Bernard Taverner’s traumatic childhood experiences in England, which are part

280 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 103.

281 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 97.

282 The layers of meaning generated by *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as an intertext of Ibbotson’s story are explored in more detail in the subchapter on Clovis King.

283 Alun Morgan “Places of Transformation in *The Secret Garden*.”, 81.

and parcel of Finn's decision to hide in the rainforest. After elaborating on Finn's function as catalyst and on his plan, which enables him to stay in Brazil, this section takes a closer look at the journey to the Xanti. Finally, it comments on the story's last chapter and in particular the children's 'shared' ending, which reinforces Ibbotson's neo-Victorian perspective.

In her depiction of the Indigenous population and of Finn as a part-Indigenous child, Ibbotson provides a neo-Victorian perspective on Victorian fears revolving around 'race'. She writes back to the "deeply rooted anxieties about the purity of race or the threat of cross-racial contamination", which "prevailed throughout the Victorian period"²⁸⁴, as well as to the oftentimes problematic and stereotypical literary depictions of Indigenous peoples and those perceived as 'racial others', fuelled by imperialist endeavours and the expansion of the British Empire.²⁸⁵ A substantial number of Victorian literary texts explore the connection between empire and race, among them Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), which has been subject to neo-Victorian rewriting from this particular vantage point in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).²⁸⁶ In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Rochester (née Mason) is a Jamaican Creole, who "grotesquely embodies English fears of, and fascination with, tropical passion"²⁸⁷. Even though she is "perhaps white", as Patrick Brantlinger maintains, "her passionate nature connects her to blackness, slavery, and the tropics"²⁸⁸ in the Victorian mindset. Likewise, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), "Heathcliff's darkness, the mystery of his origins, his savage, even racially stereotyped behavior make him a symbol of the colonized, the racially oppressed"²⁸⁹ and position him as culturally inferior.²⁹⁰ In the majority of Victorian novels, "racially marked outsiders [...] are far more likely to be either comic stereotypes or figures of monstrosity meant to repel

284 Sean Purchase. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 112.

285 For a more detailed account of the ideology of race and its development from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, see Irene Tucker. "Race.", 330–341.

286 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, for example, argue that *Wide Sargasso Sea* "presents a challenge to both Victorian and contemporary racial politics and brings into play significant postcolonial viewpoints". Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. "On the Neo-Victorian, Now and Then.", 499. The examples used in this paragraph are only two among many others. For more examples, see Deirdre David. "Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel.", 84–100, and Patrick Brantlinger. "Race and the Victorian Novel.", 129–147.

287 Deirdre David. "Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel.", 92.

288 Patrick Brantlinger. "Race and the Victorian Novel.", 139.

289 Deirdre David. "Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel.", 93.

290 Brantlinger observes that Heathcliff's "unclear but 'dark' racial identity is linked both to his untameable passions and to the slavery-like oppression he experiences after the death of Mr. Earnshaw, who rescued him from the slums of Liverpool". Patrick Brantlinger. "Race and the Victorian Novel.", 140.

rather than to evoke sympathy²⁹¹, which are perspectives Ibbotson's text questions and seeks to remedy.

Victorian and first Golden Age children's literature frequently perpetuated a similarly problematic view of the 'racial other' and promoted a white cultural superiority, not least by focusing on the experiences of white characters.²⁹² In J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911), the Neverland's Indigenous population is continuously referred to by means of the racist slur 'redskins', and described in a fairly stereotypical fashion: "They carry tomahawks and knives, and their naked bodies gleam with paint and oil. Strung around them are scalps, of boys as well as of pirates, for these are the Piccaninny tribe, and not to be confused with the softer-hearted Delawares or the Hurons"²⁹³. Moreover, the text evokes white cultural supremacy when the Indigenous people start to "prostrate[e] themselves before" Peter Pan and call him "the Great White Father"²⁹⁴ after he rescued Tiger Lily. This epithet is particularly problematic when considering the chief's somewhat oxymoronic name 'Great Big Little Panther', which connects him with animalistic fierceness and the natural world, while Peter becomes the 'white father' though he is only a boy. At this point, the text offers a sentiment reminiscent of the one that can be found in Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" (1899), in which Indigenous people are demonised and infantilised as "[h]alf devil and half child"²⁹⁵, presumed to be in need of the civilising forces of a 'paternal figure'.²⁹⁶

Another first Golden Age children's text reinforcing imperialist stereotypes is Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. In this novel, the Indigenous servants in India are described as "obsequious and servile", making "salaams and call[ing] them [their masters] 'protector of the poor' and names of that sort"²⁹⁷. On a regular basis, Mary "slapped her Ayah in the face when she was angry"²⁹⁸ and was brought up to think of herself as a white mistress. Her overtly racist attitude towards the Indigenous servants becomes particularly apparent when Martha Sowerby tells her

291 Patrick Brantlinger. "Race and the Victorian Novel.", 140.

292 Kipling's Mowgli, a child born to Indian woodcutters and raised among wolves, is an exception in this regard, but he is not contrasted to British characters.

293 J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 116.

294 J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 157.

295 Rudyard Kipling. "The White Man's Burden.", 334, l. 8.

296 In this respect, it is also striking that the one text Jean-Jacques Rousseau recommends to children in *Émile or On Education* (1763, orig. 1762) is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), because it "provides the most felicitous treatise on natural education". Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile or On Education*, 184. Yet, in this text, the titular protagonist also rescues a Native American cannibal, whom he names Friday and subjugates, not least by requiring him "to say *Master*", which "was to be my [Robinson's] name". Daniel Defoe. *Robinson Crusoe*, 163, original emphasis.

297 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 16.

298 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 16.

that she presumed her to be “‘a black’”²⁹⁹ and Mary, infuriated by this assumption, insults her. According to the young girl’s imperialist mindset, the Indigenous people “‘are not people – they’re servants who must salaam to you’”³⁰⁰, which is an assessment that dehumanises India’s population and foregrounds colonialist patterns of thought.

These colonialist and racist attitudes even inform texts for very young readers, as is, for instance, the case in Stevenson’s poem “Foreign Children”, which is part of his poem collection *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885). In this poem, a white (in all likelihood British) child speaker addresses children from different ethnic backgrounds (“Little Indian, Sioux or Crow, / Little frosty Eskimo, / Little Turk or Japanee”), foregrounding his privileged life and twice asking them “Oh! don’t you wish that you were me?”³⁰¹ The poem reiterates binary thinking and engages in forms of cultural othering by placing the life of the child speaker above those of the other children, whose lives are portrayed as “not so nice as mine”³⁰². The poem also exoticises and creates normative assumptions about food by referring to the “curious things” the other children eat, whereas the speaker is “fed on proper meat”, and foregrounds that only the child speaker is presumed to be “safe and live at home” whilst the other children “must dwell beyond the foam”³⁰³. Texts like Stevenson’s poem contributed to disseminating and familiarising very young children with the cultural mindset of the time, legitimising colonisation and imperialism via stereotypical and racist depictions of people of colour.

Where Victorian (children’s) texts tended to perpetuate cultural stereotypes and racist attitudes of their time, *Journey to the River Sea* questions and undermines such views in a neo-Victorian critique, most often by caricaturing those characters who endorse imperialist viewpoints and embody supremacist notions, including Mrs Carter and Mr Low and Mr Trapwood.³⁰⁴ Ibbotson presents a distinctly more favourable image of the Indigenous population than many of her Victorian predecessors and uses Finn as a mediator between both cultures.³⁰⁵ In

299 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 17.

300 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 18.

301 Robert Louis Stevenson. “Foreign Children.”, 57–58, ll. 1–4, 20.

302 Robert Louis Stevenson. “Foreign Children.”, 57, l. 10.

303 Robert Louis Stevenson. “Foreign Children.”, 58, ll. 13–16.

304 For an analysis of Mrs Carter and her entomophobia, which serves as a means of caricaturing her, see the subchapter on Mr and Mrs Carter. A reading of Mr Low and Mr Trapwood in this context is provided below when they inquire about Finn during Maia’s dancing lesson.

305 In contrast to Finn, Peevay, a part-Indigenous Tasmanian boy in Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers* (2000), experiences racist attitudes that impact his childhood: “Suspected by himself and others of being inherently monstrous on account of his racial difference, Peevay never experiences childish ‘innocence’”. Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 121.

her depiction of the Indigenous population and of Finn as a child of bi-racial parentage, Ibbotson addresses a topical subject matter, which is highly visible in the current political climate and the ongoing debates revolving around (literary) representations of Indigenous people(s).³⁰⁶ A depiction of characters of similar bi-racial parentage – a British father and an Indigenous mother – can also be found in some postcolonial novels targeted at a grown-up readership, e.g., in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996), where the relationship between the parents is shown to be fraught with problems due to the father's white supremacist stance.

Despite undoubtedly providing a more positive image of fictional Indigenous communities than readers of Victorian literature were likely to encounter, Ibbotson's depiction of the Xanti arguably still fails to avoid reproducing (imperialist) stereotypes in some respects, which also highlights challenges of representing Indigenous cultures in (neo-Victorian) literature. At first sight, she appears to evade the danger of cultural appropriation and misrepresenting existing Indigenous communities by creating a fictitious community, the Xanti. Yet, the depiction of a purely fictitious Indigenous community still runs the risk of reiterating clichés, which reflects the general dilemma non-Indigenous writers face when employing an Indigenous setting and/or Indigenous characters in their stories, even if they endeavour to write back to the kind of racist representation that was all too common in Victorian (children's) literature.

306 In her 2009 article "Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography", Susan A. Miller posits that "[t]he historical paradigm framing Indigenous discourse has roots in 1960s and 1970s writings by intellectuals and activists from Indigenous communities on several continents", whose aims were to challenge colonial and dominant discourses about Indigenous peoples. Focusing on the colonisation of America, she suggests that the dominant narrative centres on Christopher Columbus and is "[f]ramed in assumptions of European virtue and superiority" to the detriment of Indigenous peoples. Despite attempts of "challeng[ing] elements of that narrative" and removing "some of its more obvious anti-Indigenous biases", "its colonial assumptions and coded implications continue to poison the Euroamerican discourse of American Indian history". Susan A. Miller. "Native Historians Write Back.", 26, 25. An important step towards acknowledging and commemorating colonial atrocities and the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples was recently undertaken by a number of (US) universities in changing 'Columbus Day' into 'Indigenous Peoples Day'. This increasing awareness of the rights of Indigenous peoples can also be discerned in sectors other than academia. In 2018, for example, the American Library Association (ALA) and its division the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), changed their prestigious "Laura Ingalls Wilder Award" to "Children's Literature Legacy Award" due to racist contents in Ingalls' novels. They state that "[h]er works reflect dated cultural attitudes toward Indigenous people and people of color that contradict modern acceptance, celebration, and understanding of diverse communities" the ALSC represents. Anon. "ALA, ALSC Respond to Wilder Medal Name Change.", n.p.

The extent to which imperialist discourses informed the portrayal of fictional Indigenous communities in children's literature at the beginning of the twentieth century can perhaps be seen most clearly in Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. In Barrie's text, the Indigenous Neverlanders are said to belong to the tribe of the 'Piccaninnies'. Instead of referring to an actual Indigenous group, Barrie uses a term which is "[a] pejorative Jamaican Creole term for blacks"³⁰⁷ and African Americans besides having been a colloquial and derogative term for small (black) children.³⁰⁸ According to Paul Fox, the Indigenous Neverlanders embody "every conceivable racial stereotype of the primitive" and are described as "[n]aked, violent, barely a step above the animal, crafty, wonderful imitators, and inimical to interaction with others", which he sees as "determinations [...] derived from the racial discourses of Edwardian imperialism"³⁰⁹. Their depictions "as simple, less-evolved, and unsophisticated are incontrovertibly founded upon Orientalist discourse"³¹⁰ and abound in colonialist ideas about Indigenous communities, which appear to naturalise their presumed (cultural) inferiority.³¹¹ Barrie's depiction of the Indigenous community is rendered even more problematic due to an explicit comparison with two actually existing Indigenous peoples in North America: the Hurons and the Delawares. Such a comparison implicitly projects the (racist) characteristics and features of the Piccaninnies onto existing Indigenous communities, even if, as the narrator explains, they are gentler than their fictional 'counterparts'.³¹²

307 M. Lynn Byrd. "Somewhere Outside the Forest.", 58.

308 Cf. Anon. "Piccaninny.", 763.

309 Paul Fox. "Other Maps Showing Through.", 257.

310 Hyun-Joo Yoo. "Imperialism and the Politics of Childhood Innocence in *Peter and Wendy*.", 391.

311 For a closer reading of *Peter and Wendy* as a text reflecting an imperialist mindset, see Hyun-Joo Yoo. "Imperialism and the Politics of Childhood Innocence in *Peter and Wendy*.", 387–405. The history of racist representations of Indigenous communities in children's literature continued well beyond the Victorian and Edwardian periods. References to existing ethnic groups for instance impacted the publication history of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), which came under attack by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) when the story was to be turned into a film due to the racist depiction of the Oompa Loompas. In spite of revising the depiction of the Oompa Loompas, whose original description echoed racist notions of black (child) characters in Victorian children's books, such as Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899), in 1973 and further fictionalising the Indigenous community, racist and colonialist views prevail in Dahl's story, positioning the Oompa-Loompas in the role of the colonised and eminently exploitable 'Other'. For more information on the racist depiction of the Oompa Loompas and the objections of the NAACP, see Donald Sturrock's *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*, 492–494, Catherine Keyser's "Candy Boys and Chocolate Factories: Roald Dahl, Racialization, and Global Industry", 403–428, and Philip Nel's "Can Censoring a Children's Book Remove Its Prejudices?", n.p.

312 Cf. J.M. Barrie. *Peter and Wendy*, 116.

While Ibbotson's depiction of the Xanti does not display the kind of overt racism that is apparent in Barrie's novel, it nevertheless comprises and promotes certain stereotypes by evoking an image of the Xanti as the 'Other' of Western society. In *Journey to the River Sea*, Finn presents the Xanti based on his father's memories and introduces them as a secretive community: "'they were supposed to be special; very gentle and full of knowledge about healing, but they were very shy and mostly stayed hidden. Not many people had seen them'"³¹³. When Finn, Maia, Miss Minton and Professor Glastonberry arrive at the Xanti, Ibbotson elaborates on various aspects of daily life in more detail, including food, music and work. In this context, the Xanti are exoticised by having unusual pets (one boy, for instance, holds "a huge bird-eating spider with a liana tied round its middle, which he led along like a dog") and by their songs, which are "wild and strange, and often seemed to have no tune at all"³¹⁴. It also appears that, for the Xanti, "travel[ing] on the 'fire boat' after a lifetime of paddling canoes was the best thing they could think of"³¹⁵, which evokes notions of primitivism, technological inferiority and backwardness. For the most part, Indigenous communities are portrayed as the more positive alternative to Western society, due to attributes like "gentle", "kind" and "careful of the land"³¹⁶, but the reference to "the Curacara who had been cannibals for generations"³¹⁷ appears to hark back to Victorian stereotypes of the 'savage'. While Ibbotson attempts to provide a more complex depiction of her Indigenous community than Barrie in *Peter and Wendy* by elaborating on various aspects of daily life and aims at expressing appreciation and respect for Indigenous peoples, especially with regard to their appreciation of the natural environment, she nevertheless implicitly promotes some stereotypes, which highlights some of the pitfalls of including representations of Indigenous communities in a neo-Victorian critique.

Even though Finn is closely linked with the Indigenous community, which is a particularly interesting aspect for a neo-Victorian reading of this character, he is first introduced in a different context, through the lens of adult discourses of Mr Low and Mr Trapwood, the private detectives representing and reinforcing his family ties with the British aristocracy. Shortly after their arrival in Manaus, Mr Low and Mr Trapwood enquire about Finn's whereabouts during Maia's dancing lesson, where they appear completely "dressed in black" and are compared to "a

313 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 103. The Kogi people, "[a] culturally intact pre-Colombian society", who are "[h]ighly attuned to nature", might have served as an inspiration for the Xanti in this regard, as they also live a secluded life. Jini Reddy. "What Colombia's Kogi People Can Teach Us About the Environment.", n.p.

314 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 273, 274.

315 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 276.

316 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 78, 103, 275.

317 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 78.

pair of gloomy crows”³¹⁸, which gives rise to their soubriquet ‘the crows’. As it turns out, they only have a limited *K-world* regarding Finn, neither knowing his first name, nor what he looks like, and hope to obtain information on Bernard Taverner’s son from the children of Madame Duchamp’s Academy of Dance. In their conversation with the children, which does not yield the desired results, they stage and introduce Finn as some sort of ‘criminal’ who must be tracked down and secured to be brought to England. They not only advise the children to contact the police or come directly to them should they “‘see anything unusual’” but also threaten them with imprisonment should they hide Finn, explaining that they “‘would be guilty of interfering with the law’”³¹⁹. Moreover, they withhold the information about Finn’s inheritance, only hinting at the possibility that “‘[t]here might be good news – if it is the right boy’”, and evade the question what he has done with a mere “‘[t]hat is neither here nor there’”³²⁰, which leaves a lot of room for the children’s imagination. Their insistence that Finn “‘*must* be brought back to England’”, “‘[*m*]ust be taken back without delay’” and “‘*must* be found’”³²¹ points towards the perceived power imbalance and hierarchy between the adults and the child, which are reflected in their rhetoric by the repeated use of the modal verb ‘must’. Their endeavour constitutes an act of adult intervention and their authoritative manner points to the child’s presumed lack of agency: as a child, Finn *must* yield to adult power and control and follow them to Westwood.

Their staging of Finn and the way they talk to the children in the dance class is bound to shift both the characters’ and the readers’ sympathies to Finn, even though he has not yet made an appearance. As soon as Mr Trapwood starts to question the young dancers, he is talking down to them, revealing his attitude towards children, whom he clearly deems inferior and simple-minded: when he addresses them for the first time, he does so “as though he was speaking to a group of two year olds” and, as the narrative voice assesses, “seemed to think that the children had lost their wits”³²² by asking if they understood his plain instructions to go to the police in case they notice anything suspicious. By contrast, Mr Low speaks in a high-pitched, squeaking voice, which is fairly uncharacteristic of a grown man and is a means of caricature that turns him into a laughing stock. This becomes evident when he is “getting agitated” upon seeing that the children do not have or are not willing to share information on Finn and “his voice had risen to an even higher squeak”³²³, which makes him appear hysterical and un-

318 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 59.

319 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 60.

320 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 60.

321 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 59–60, my emphasis.

322 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 59, 60.

323 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 60.

dermines his authority. From the onset, 'the crows' are cast in the role of the antagonists in this venture and are not presented as overly sympathetic characters.³²⁴ An immediate result of their visit at the academy is that the children inevitably align themselves with Finn. Netta Haltmann, for example, "'ope[s] they do not catch 'im'", which is a sentiment shared by Maia, who considers "[t]o be found by Mr Low and Mr Trapwood and be dragged back to England [...] a most horrible fate"³²⁵. Mr Low and Mr Trapwood's attempt to convince the children to procure and pass on information that might aid them in finding the heir to Westwood thus has the opposite effect and indirectly introduces Finn as a victim of (British) patriarchal structures and adult control.

When Finn eventually makes an appearance, he is not identified as 'Finn' but is disguised as an Indigenous boy in a canoe. Similar to the child actor Clovis King, who dresses up for his stage performances, Finn temporarily changes his outer appearance to avoid being recognised.³²⁶ Accordingly, he appears in his 'Indigenous guise' when Maia meets him for the first time in the rainforest on her way to Manaus to see Clovis during his debut performance. While Maia doubts that he does not understand her, because Finn has "such a listening face"³²⁷, she is nevertheless convinced to have met an Indigenous boy. This impression is, to a considerable extent, created by his appearance. The clothes he wears are "the work clothes worn by the local Indians: a blue cotton shirt faded from washing and cotton trousers"³²⁸, which suggests that he lives in the vicinity and works for one of the European rubber planters. Yet, apparently unlike the other Indigenous workers, he wears "a broad band which partly covered his thick, coal-black hair" around his head and has "a pattern of red zigzags [...] painted on his cheekbones"³²⁹. The headband and the paint are obviously meant to signify a potential tribal membership, but they may also be read as an act of cultural appropriation due to Finn's limited *K-world* about the Xanti, whom he has never actually met due to his mother's death. Despite this potentially problematic act of appropriation, the visual signifiers – his work clothes, the headband and the paint –

324 Mr Trapwood, for instance, speaks in "an oily voice" and can "only manage a sinister leer" when he attempts to smile, which likewise turns him into a fairly grotesque and potentially frightening character. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 60.

325 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 61.

326 For an analysis of the child actor Clovis King, see the next subchapter.

327 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 75.

328 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 73.

329 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 73. These latter elements are picked up again when Maia sees Finn in the lagoon and are singled out as having widely contributed to her perception of Finn as an Indigenous boy: "He seemed to be the Indian boy who had taken her to Manaus, but his jet-black hair had gone, and so had the headband and the red paint. With his own fine, brown hair, he looked like any European boy who has lived a long time in the sun". *Ibid.*, 96.

contribute to marking him as Indigenous and the ‘racial other’, which is what Finn attempts to achieve.

His ‘Indigenous guise’ proves effective later on in the story, when he jumps out of the trapdoor leading to the cellar where he and Clovis have been hiding when they are found by Mr Low and Mr Trapwood. As soon as Finn emerges, imperialist stereotypes are reiterated. He is compared to “a trapped animal” and is considered “a savage, babbling away in an unearthly tongue”, who fights “like a demon”³³⁰, all of which were well-established stereotypes of Indigenous populations at the time the novel is set. As Sean Purchase argues, “particularly those with darker skins, foreign tongues, different cultures, religions, and generally strange ways” were often perceived as “suspiciously ‘other’”³³¹ by the Victorians, as is also reflected in the encounter between Finn and ‘the crows’. In pretending not to understand Mr Low and Mr Trapwood and speaking a local Indigenous language, Finn employs the same tactics he used during the first meeting with Maia, which contributes to him being perceived as “a savage” and reinstates the binary between ‘self’ and ‘other’ at work in racist thinking. Once Clovis, who is to impersonate Finn, steps out of the trapdoor, he immediately turns into Westwood’s rightful heir in Mr Low and Mr Trapwood’s imagination, because he is perceived along the lines of the ‘self’. He is a “golden-haired youth” and his “breeding showed in every movement; he was an undoubted and true aristocrat”³³². The deception in large parts proves successful due to Mr Low and Mr Trapwood’s racist assumptions according to which they readily accept Clovis as rightful heir and assign him an aristocratic “breeding” when he is merely a penniless actor stranded in Brazil.

In the context of the novel’s neo-Victorian perspective on the Indigenous population, it is all the more important that Maia starts to renegotiate and reject imperialist assumptions about Indigenous peoples during her first meeting with Finn already. Early on in their encounter, Maia realises that, as soon as Finn smiles, “he seemed just a boy of about her own age; not a mysterious and possibly threatening stranger”³³³. This realisation indicates that both of them are, first and foremost, children, regardless of their skin colour, ethnic backgrounds, social class and cultural identity. Seeing him as a child also must have contributed to her decision to trust him instinctively and accept his non-verbal offer to take her to Manaus. Even though he immediately removes “a big thorn embedded in her palm”³³⁴ – a remnant of her fall – when she steps into the canoe, she momentarily reverts to an imperialist mindset as soon as they set off. Not only does she

330 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 182, 183.

331 Sean Purchase. *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 106.

332 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 184.

333 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 73.

334 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 73.

consider herself "an idiot" for trusting him, she also fears that "[h]e would hit her on the head... he would take her off to his tribe as a slave... or worse..."³³⁵, where the last ellipsis leaves room for a number of possibilities. Yet, she immediately realises that she is "thinking like the Carters"³³⁶ and rejects this narrow and prejudiced mode of thought. Her changed perception is reflected in the narrator's remark that the mysterious mark on the boy's wrist, which the text refers to as a "sign of his foreignness" and otherness, "couldn't frighten her for long"³³⁷ and that she starts enjoying the journey. Unlike the Carters, who embody Victorian anxieties about race and perpetuate pejorative stereotypes of the Indigenous population, Maia consciously distances herself from racist views and, by implication, the prevailing attitudes of her time.

As in many other children's texts, some of the protagonists, in this case Maia and especially Finn, are linked with a natural environment during their first meeting. Children's literature is, as Jenny Bavidge contends, "a field [...] more usually connected with the pastoral mode", in which "the powerful cultural association of childhood with the rural and natural"³³⁸ is often foregrounded. This association, as Karin Lesnik-Oberstein suggests, is firmly ingrained in the Western cultural imagination: she argues that "[t]here can be few ideas in Western culture as intimately connected and intertwined as 'nature' and the 'child'" and maintains that "[t]he child as the natural, the natural in the adult as the child, the child of nature, the child in nature, [and] the nature of the child" are "concepts [that] permeate the processes of self-definition of adults and adult society"³³⁹. Crediting John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as crucial figures in the process of inventing 'the child', she professes that "both concepts, the 'child' and the 'natural', began to evolve and to accumulate the clusters of meaning which they hold for contemporary Western society, roughly during the eighteenth century" and often "developed simultaneously and interdependently, most significantly and famously in Rousseau's *Émile*"³⁴⁰. In *Émile or On Education*, Rousseau positions "the child [...] at birth" as "a disciple [...] of nature"³⁴¹, suggesting an intimate link between the two from the start, and considers the child's education in and in accordance with nature paramount. Therefore, he urges his readers to "[r]emove [...] [children] from big cities where the adornment and immodesty of women hasten and anticipate nature's lessons" and restore children "to their first abodes where rustic simplicity lets the passions of

335 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 74.

336 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 74.

337 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 74.

338 Jenny Bavidge. "Stories in Space.", 320, 323.

339 Karin Lesnik-Oberstein. "Children's Literature and the Environment.", 208.

340 Karin Lesnik-Oberstein. "Children's Literature and the Environment.", 210.

341 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile or On Education*, 61.

their age develop less rapidly”³⁴². The child as envisioned by Rousseau thus ideally “live[s] in seclusion – the company of his tutor excepted – until late adolescence”³⁴³ and “learn[s] from direct experience in the natural environment”³⁴⁴ as a ‘child in nature’.

The trope of the ‘child in nature’ is omnipresent in Victorian and Edwardian (first Golden Age) children’s texts and constitutes a recurring element in neo-Victorian children’s fiction. According to Jane Darcy, late Victorian and Edwardian authors of children’s literature tended “to idealize and romanticize childhood by depicting children or childlike figures leading an idyllic life in a rural environment”³⁴⁵, as is the case in Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908). Sometimes, this connection is also established with a less bounded natural environment, for example the sea in Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863) or the jungle in Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*. To this day, Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* is one of the most well-known examples celebrating the bond between children and the immediate natural surroundings in the form of a hidden garden that is restored to ‘life’ by the children and has the ability to heal and nurture them in return. This garden with its healing properties is, as Jackie C. Horne and Joe Sutliff Sanders maintain, among the elements that “have garnered the novel both a continued audience and a central place in the canon of children’s literature”³⁴⁶. The child’s proximity to natural environments evinced by Victorian and Edwardian writers, such as Grahame, Kingsley and Burnett, is also evident in neo-Victorian children’s fiction, in which gardens seem to have remained a popular setting.³⁴⁷ Even though Ibbotson’s text does not employ the garden trope, the Amazon rainforest is nevertheless a setting where nature abounds and the connection between childhood and the natural is played out. It arguably has Victorian/Edwardian antecedents in *The Jungle Books* and Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), which are set in the Indian and African jungles respectively and show children growing up in natural surroundings. Finn in Ibbotson’s narrative also grew up in a ‘jungle’ – albeit not having been raised by wolves or apes as are Mowgli and Tarzan – and thus

342 Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile or On Education*, 231.

343 Galia Benziman. *Narratives of Child Neglect in Romantic and Victorian Culture*, 47.

344 Karin Lesnik-Oberstein. “Children’s Literature and the Environment.”, 211.

345 Jane Darcy. “The Representation of Nature.”, 210.

346 Jackie C. Horne and Joe Sutliff Sanders. “Introduction.”, xiii.

347 The garden, as Mary Goodwin emphasises, in fact was one of the principal settings in late-Victorian and Edwardian children’s fiction. Cf. Mary Goodwin. “The Garden and the Jungle.”, 110. Neo-Victorian children’s and YA novels in which gardens play a crucial role include but are not limited to Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, Penelope Lively’s *A Stitch in Time* (1976), Helen Cresswell’s *Moondial* (1987), Mary Downing Hahn’s *The Doll in the Garden* (1989), Sarah Singleton’s *The Poison Garden* (2009) and Karen Inglis’ *The Secret Lake* (2011).

embodies the connection between the child and the natural environment among the children in *Journey to the River Sea* most distinctly.

Although the information on Finn's life prior to the events related in *Journey to the River Sea* is scant, Ibbotson's story suggests that Finn has been brought up as a Rousseauian 'child in nature'. The text indicates that he lived most, if not all, of his life near the lagoon and went "on collecting trips"³⁴⁸ with his father in the rainforest, surrounded by and constantly engaging with the natural environment. His father's profession as a naturalist must have fostered an early contact with the local flora and fauna and, even after his death, Finn has the impression that his father is still there to show him "'[a] new insect or a plant'"³⁴⁹. It seems that Finn's father has been a (Rousseauian) tutor to the child and that 'nurture' widely contributed to developing and enhancing the child's bond with the natural world.³⁵⁰ Ultimately, Finn seems to have claimed a life as 'child in nature' for himself when he refused to attend St Joseph's school in Manaus. After only one week in school, "Finn had come home and told Bernard that if he wanted Finn to go back, he would have to handcuff him and drag him there by the hair"³⁵¹, highlighting that he will not live the conventional life of a (British) school boy. His resoluteness, made apparent by the physical force required to return him to school, stresses his sense of self-determination that eventually enables him to continue to live in the forest, and thus in a largely uninhabited area, with his father. He later confirms this claim by staying in the rainforest on his own after his father has passed away.³⁵²

The first encounter between Maia and Finn also positions the latter in and assigns him to the natural world by introducing him against the vast green space of the rainforest. After having recovered from her fall, Maia sees Finn (albeit without making the connection that he might be the boy 'the crows' are looking for) in his canoe, which miraculously appeared from behind a seemingly impassable "green barrier", "a wall of reeds and creepers and half-submerged trees"³⁵³. His sudden, and to Maia inexplicable, appearance creates a powerful image of the child simultaneously *in, emerging from and surrounded by* the

348 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 98.

349 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 98.

350 According to Rousseau, a father is an ideal tutor: "to make a man, one must be either a father or more than a man oneself". Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Émile or On Education*, 49–50.

351 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 165–166.

352 Finn also plans to continue using his connection to the natural sphere should he become a doctor by employing his knowledge of and collecting plants, so as to avoid becoming a doctor who "'just gives people pills'". Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 198. In this respect, Ibbotson's text reinforces that "childhood experiences in, of, and with the natural world are often deeply formative". Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd. "Introduction: Into the Wild.", 5.

353 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 72.

natural environment and inevitably links Finn with the 'green world'. This image is complemented by his careful steering motions, whereby "the water seemed scarcely to be disturbed"³⁵⁴, suggesting that he is in tune with and mindful of his immediate surroundings.

Finn's connection with the local flora and fauna is further consolidated during the subsequent canoe ride to Manaus. The path Finn has chosen for this purpose is one where the vibrant beauty of the rainforest can be seen and where "lush green trees [...] leant so far over the water that she [Maia] felt as though they were travelling between the roots of the forest"³⁵⁵, which is a potent image that evokes notions of the primeval and the pristine.³⁵⁶ In Finn's canoe, Maia sees the forest for the first time as she imagined it and experiences an actualisation of her *W-world*, which is inevitably linked with Finn and his affinity with the natural world. Yet, the ultimate connection between Finn and the rainforest is drawn when they get closer to Manaus and the narrator remarks that "[h]e would go no further to civilization"³⁵⁷, thus setting up a nature/wilderness-culture/civilisation divide. At this point, Ibbotson's text suggests that Finn's life takes place *in* the forest and apart from civilisation, as is reinforced by his prompt turning of the boat and return to the lagoon, a place where Finn's connection to the natural environment is most pronounced.

The lagoon is a place bearing decidedly pastoral overtones and is reminiscent of Mary Lennox's secret garden. Christine M. Heppermann has already hinted at the connection between *Journey to the River Sea* and *The Secret Garden* in her review of Ibbotson's text when she asserts that "the Brazilian rainforest becomes a Secret Garden [*sic*]"³⁵⁸ for Maia. Yet, it is Finn's lagoon that bears the strongest similarities to Burnett's *hortus conclusus*, whereas the rainforest, in its vast spatial expanse, retains some qualities of the Missel Moor. The similarities between the lagoon, which is fittingly referred to as Finn's "secret world"³⁵⁹, and the secret garden become particularly evident in their shared spatial make-up. Similar to

354 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 72.

355 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 74.

356 Finn, in fact, knows "the waterways which led to Manaus like the back of his hand" and must have selected this particular path for their canoe ride on purpose. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 165. His familial background and knowledge of the environment links him with Kimball (Kim) O'Hara in Kipling's *Kim* (1901). Kim, who "becomes an imperial hybrid" and "looks like an Indian but underneath is an Irish boy", also confidently moves around in his (Indian) surroundings: "he knew the wonderful walled city of Lahore from the Delhi Gate to the outer Fort Ditch" and enjoys "the stealthy prowling through the dark gullies and lanes, the crawl up a water-pipe, the sights and sounds of the women's world on the flat roofs, and the headlong flight from housetop to housetop under cover of the hot dark". Deirdre David. "Empire, Race, and the Victorian Novel.", 97.; Rudyard Kipling. *Kim*, 2, 3.

357 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 75.

358 Christine M. Heppermann. "Eva Ibbotson *Journey to the River Sea*.", 78.

359 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 76.

the garden, the lagoon is a secluded place and “shielded from the outside by a ring of great trees”³⁶⁰ functioning as a natural enclosure and visual demarcation. Despite the fact that the lagoon may not be as ‘impenetrable’ as the walls of Mary’s garden, it is nevertheless encircled by what appears to be a ‘green wall’ of trees and evokes a sense of isolation that is also felt by Mary, who “seemed to be hundreds of miles away from any one”³⁶¹ once she closes the door to the garden behind her.³⁶² The lagoon, just like the garden, also exhibits heterotopic qualities insofar as it “presuppose[s] a system of opening and closing that both isolates [...] [it] and makes [...] [it] penetrable”³⁶³: its “only entrance, the passage through the rushes, seemed to have closed behind them [Maia and Furo, who takes her to Finn]”, and Maia immediately has a feeling of being “alone in the world”³⁶⁴. In an amalgamation of both the door and the sprays of ivy covering the door, the rushes conceal the entrance to the lagoon and seem to only admit those with prior knowledge of their function as a negotiable natural barrier.

In contrast to Mary’s garden, Finn’s lagoon does not need to be ‘awakened’ or ‘resuscitated’ and is already an idyllic, thriving place when Maia lays eyes on it for the first time – similar to the midnight garden in Pearce’s novel. It is described as a version of the *locus amoenus*, whose beauty keeps Maia “spellbound”³⁶⁵:

The sheltering trees leant over the water; there was a bank of golden sand on which a turtle slept, untroubled by the boat. Clumps of yellow and pink lotus flowers swayed in the water, their buds open to the sun. Humming birds clustered in an ever-changing whirl of colour round a feeding bottle nailed to a branch...³⁶⁶

As this brief description suggests, the lagoon is a harmonious place of quiet and calm where flowers bloom in rich colours, animals can serenely sleep and trees provide shelter. Given the strong intertextual links to *The Secret Garden*, Finn’s lagoon can be read as an ‘exoticised’ version of Mary’s garden in summer, when it “bloomed and bloomed and every morning revealed new miracles”³⁶⁷. For Maia, the lagoon clearly is a paradisiacal place of timelessness “‘where one would want to stay for ever and ever’”³⁶⁸, and hence an ideal place. This impression is reinforced by Finn, for whom the lagoon has been a place of bliss where he “used

360 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 96.

361 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 47.

362 The idea of being surrounded by green walls can also be found in Burnett’s text. As soon as the garden ‘awakens’, the grey walls suddenly start “‘changing’”, which Mary, when looking at one of them, likens to a green haze settling upon it: “‘It is as if a green mist were creeping over it. It’s almost like a green gauze veil’”. Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 95.

363 Michel Foucault. “Of Other Spaces.”, 26.

364 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 96, my emphasis.

365 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 96.

366 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 96.

367 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 151.

368 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 100.

to wake up every morning and think, ‘Here I am, exactly where I want to be’”³⁶⁹, which is a statement that reiterates the connection between the child and the natural environment.

Even though Finn is likely to be compared by readers to characters like Tarzan and Mowgli, because he, too, grew up in a ‘jungle’ (even if in a more realistic way), he is not a feral child and thus bears more striking similarities to Burnett’s Dickon Sowerby.³⁷⁰ As several scholars have observed, Dickon is “the child most closely associated with nature” in Burnett’s text and “represents the ultimate paragon of the ‘child of nature’”³⁷¹, known by everyone and everything around him. Although Finn is rather a child *in* than *of* nature, he shares Dickon’s fondness of and proximity to the natural environment. In their respective stories, both characters make their first appearance outside, in a natural environment and display a close affinity to animals.³⁷² Where Dickon has “‘made friends with th’ pony’” and “‘got sheep on th’ moor that knows him, an’ birds as comes an’ eats out of his hand’”³⁷³, Finn has a dog, feeds hummingbirds with a bottle of sugar water and can observe wild, non-domesticated animals, such as an anteater and turtles, from close up in the lagoon. As children roaming the moor (Dickon) and the rainforest (Finn) on a daily basis, they have acquired a vast knowledge about their immediate surroundings and become “guide[s] into the green world”³⁷⁴ for Mary and Maia respectively, who both come from ‘abroad’ and yet need to learn (i. e., extend their *K-worlds*) about the local flora and fauna. Finn not only introduces Maia to the wonders and beauty of the rainforest, but also “showed her which nuts to pick and which to avoid, how to get fruit down from the high branches and

369 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 99.

370 A neo-Victorian children’s/YA text that draws more explicitly on *The Jungle Books* and *Tarzan of the Apes* is Louis Nowra’s *Into That Forest* (2012), in which two girls, Hannah O’Brien and Rebecca (Becky) Carsons, temporarily live with and are adopted by a pair of tigers in the Tasmanian Bush.

371 Danielle E. Price. “Cultivating Mary.”, 8.; Alun Morgan “Places of Transformation in *The Secret Garden*.”, 86.

372 When Dickon is introduced, Burnett combines both of these elements and describes him in the following way: “A boy was sitting under a tree, with his back against it, playing on a rough wooden pipe. He was a funny looking boy about twelve. He looked very clean and his nose turned up and his cheeks were as red as poppies and never had Mistress Mary seen such round and such blue eyes in any boy’s face. And on the trunk of the tree he leaned against, a brown squirrel was clinging and watching him, and from behind a bush nearby a cock pheasant was delicately stretching his neck to peep out, and quite near him were two rabbits sitting up and sniffing with tremulous noses – and actually it appeared as if they were all drawing near to watch him and listen to the strange low little call his pipe seemed to make”. Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 57. This description reinforces that “he is a magnetic centre of attraction for his audience of woodland creatures”. Shirley Foster and Judy Simons. “Frances Hodgson Burnett.”, 339.

373 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 21.

374 Roni Natov. *The Poetics of Childhood*, 93.

how to walk quietly, [...] how to make body paint from urucu berries, and how to fetch water from the river without getting scum into the kettle"³⁷⁵. Unlike Dickon, who teaches Mary about flowers and gardening, thus contributing to and enabling her transformation, Finn teaches Maia survival skills; this would have been deemed improper for her gender and consequently bears a more subversive potential than Mary's lessons.

Journey to the River Sea's stance in favour of a life in nature is especially evident in the depiction of Finn's wooden hut, which elicits homely feelings and is presented as the antithesis to the Carters' bungalow. The hut in the lagoon is a place where Maia, who "thought she had never seen a place she liked more"³⁷⁶, could easily feel at home. In contrast to Mr Carter's study, where "piles of paper lay in untidy heaps on the drawers and filing cabinets"³⁷⁷, the boxes of specimens, the books and other paraphernalia that belonged to Finn's father are in order and neatly stacked on the desk. The hut itself is "spotlessly clean with a slight smell of woodsmoke [*sic*] and the watery scent of the reeds coming in through the window"³⁷⁸. While the cleanliness of the place at first sight establishes a link to the Carters' bungalow, the smells of the natural surroundings wafting in through the window form a strong contrast to the artificial, chemical smells of disinfectants that permeate the Carters' house and once more reiterate Finn's connection to the natural environment. They evoke the impression that he actually lives *in* and is not merely surrounded by the natural world, even when he is in a domestic environment. As the only 'other' home Maia has come across in the story so far, Finn's hut presents an alternative way of living in the rainforest and is used to expose the Carters' idiosyncrasies and their hostility towards the local flora and fauna. Where the Carters' veranda is sealed off from the natural world by wire netting, only Finn's garden is "protected by a wire fence"³⁷⁹ to prevent animals from eating the vegetables his father planted there. While the Carters insist on exclusively eating canned food imported from Britain, Finn lives off the land and has local fruit ("avocados, prickly pears, nuts, a melon"³⁸⁰) in a bowl on the table, which he, in all likelihood, picked himself. Yet, he also serves afternoon tea and biscuits, but "proper ones with sultanas and raisins"³⁸¹, not the dry, imported biscuits Maia is provided with at the Carters. This suggests that his hut is a hybrid

375 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 199.

376 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 99.

377 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 50.

378 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 99.

379 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 100.

380 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 122.

381 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 101.

place.³⁸² In contrast to the Carters' bungalow, which, as has been argued above, is a "'not home'"³⁸³, Finn's hut qualifies as a home.

Since the lagoon is a place where Finn's *W-world* is actualised and he is satisfied, the summons to Westwood threatens and endangers this state. In Ibbotson's narrative, Westwood, a place Finn only knows from his father's memories, is presented in opposition to the lagoon: where the lagoon is a natural environment and a sanctuary that is linked with freedom, Westwood is a house presumed to curtail freedom by being repeatedly associated with imprisonment and linked with disempowerment through Bernard's experiences of severe child abuse. Effectively, the text thus appears to reiterate the binary opposition between the house as adult sphere (linked with adult authority and supervision) and the garden/the natural world as a child's realm characteristic of Edwardian literature.³⁸⁴ Given Westwood's associations, following his grandfather's summons would actualise what Marie-Laure Ryan refers to as a "dysphoric [state]"³⁸⁵ and stands in conflict with both Finn's *W-world* and the current state of the TAW.

Finn's reluctance to turn into the heir to Westwood is predominantly based on his father's traumatic childhood experiences in England. In his ancestral home, Bernard, whose mother died shortly after his birth, was regularly bullied by his brother Dudley, beaten by his father and scoffed at by his sister Joan, because he did not fulfil the ideal of masculinity expected of Taverner boys.³⁸⁶ His siblings, similar to Jane Eyre's cousins, were MONSTROUS CHILDREN, who laid hands on and mistreated their younger brother. Joan, who is aptly nicknamed "the Basher", for instance, "threw him in the lake and held his head under the water to make him swim" and Dudley shut him into "a big oak chest [...]" for a whole night when he was three years old³⁸⁷, which implies that his abuse lasted a considerable amount of time. Even though the information on Sir Aubrey's abusive acts is sparse, the text indicates that he beat Bernard on a regular basis. He also "sent him away to the toughest school" where "the teachers caned him even more than his father had done, and the boys did interesting things to him like squeezing lemon juice into his eyes and piercing the soles of his feet with compass nee-

382 Afternoon tea, in particular, is employed as a playful, ironic element at this point, poking fun at and commenting on British customs, much like the tea party in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Not only does Finn provide afternoon tea in a highly British fashion, with sugar tongs, a milk jug and even a napkin, so that it appears genuinely out of place, it also takes the dog, who drinks tea himself, to remind him that it is time for afternoon tea. Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 101.

383 Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis. "'Home' and 'Not Home' in Children's Stories.", 223.

384 Cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time.", 7.

385 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, 118.

386 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 127.

387 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 149, 126, 148.

dles"³⁸⁸, leaving 'disciplining' and tormenting his son to the teachers and the peer group. As a result of the psychological harm inflicted upon him and the physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his siblings and father, Bernard continued to be "terrified of his family"³⁸⁹ and, similar to Victorian predecessors such as David Copperfield and Oliver Twist, planned to escape the abusive environment by running away and actualising his *W-world*.³⁹⁰

The depiction of the Taverner family in Bernard's memories indicates that it emulates the predominant pattern of families in neo-Victorian fiction. As Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben maintain, these are frequently reimagined "in the problematic terms of failed, abusive, or disintegrating families"³⁹¹. Bernard's childhood clearly is remembered "as a nightmare rather than a carefree dream of joy and innocence"³⁹², where stamping out Bernard's 'aberrance' and making him conform to expectations was the family's primary concern. As several other neo-Victorian texts, such as Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) or Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002), *Journey to the River Sea* reinforces that "even privileged children" in their upper- and middle-class homes and families "are exposed to permanent psychological damage, if not outright physical danger"³⁹³, and that even the households of the aristocracy are not by default a safe place for children. While there were a "few things at Westwood which Bernard had liked"³⁹⁴, such as the bluebell wood, his childhood experiences, as those of various (neo-)Victorian precursors were altogether symptomatic of a traumatic childhood. He can thus be assigned to the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD of the childhood typology.

Bernard's traumatic childhood experiences had a lasting psychological impact on him, so much so that he suffered from recurring nightmares throughout his adult life. The text even suggests that the memories of Westwood were intrusive and constituted his only source of fear: "What Westwood had done to Bernard Taverner was well-known to his friends. Taverner had been fearless in the jungle,

388 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 126.

389 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 126.

390 During the seven years it took to save the money to actualise his *W-world*, he appears to have regularly recentred to an *F-universe*, which provided him with a mental escape. Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 127. In this respect, he seems to follow into the literary footsteps of Jane Eyre and David Copperfield, who also enter *F-universes*, albeit via books, to mentally escape their abusive environments.

391 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. "Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.", 2. Charles Dickens, "[a]s one of the period's most prolific and popular writers", for instance, "provided numerous examples of harmful families in his work". Ibid., 17.

392 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 120.

393 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 137.

394 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 149.

but those who had camped with him on his collecting trips remembered nights when he had woken in terror after a dream, with the name ‘Westwood’ on his lips³⁹⁵. While he was able to repress the painful memories of his childhood during the day, living an active life as an explorer, they subconsciously surfaced during the night in his dreams and were linked to place. Their nocturnal re-surfacing suggests that his experiences at Westwood, which were made during a formative phase of life, still affected and disrupted his adult life. In this respect, the text addresses and picks up on “[t]he prevalent neo-Victorian trope of childhood trauma”³⁹⁶, which is further consolidated by the juxtaposition between his “fearless” adult life in the rainforest and the “terror” caused by his childhood memories of Westwood.

Bernard’s traumatic childhood seems to have endowed Finn with a vicarious experience of abuse. Not only must he have been aware of his father’s haunting nightmares, he also only received fragmentary information on his ancestral home, because Bernard “‘never talked about Westwood if he could help it’”³⁹⁷, in all likelihood because these memories still were excruciating to him. Finn’s notebook, in which he put down what his father told him about Westwood and his childhood, seems to be filled with pages on child cruelty and abuse, because Finn has to skim through its pages to find something Bernard actually liked about Westwood.³⁹⁸ His father even made him promise to find the Xanti should anything happen to him, as they would be able to keep him safe until he reached majority, which can be read as an active attempt to keep Finn away from Westwood and spare him an equally traumatic childhood.³⁹⁹ For Finn, “who was afraid of nothing else”, Westwood is a looming presence and, as Maia later finds out on the *Arabella*, “still a dread”⁴⁰⁰, which is why he is adamant about not going to England and retaining the current state of the TAW.

Living with his grandfather thus also seems to threaten bringing about a deterioration of his position on the childhood scale. The fragments of Finn’s childhood included in Ibbotson’s story prior to his father’s death indicate that he has lived the life of the ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD of the typology and has turned into a self-sufficient, EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD after his father’s passing. On the basis of what Finn knows about Westwood, permanently staying in this place would turn him into a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, where he would be subsumed under adult authority and control, at least as long as his grandfather

395 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 79.

396 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 127.

397 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 147–148.

398 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 149.

399 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 100.

400 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 253.

is still alive, and potentially also fall victim to mistreatment and abuse. The former is precipitated by the appearance and presence of Mr Low and Mr Trapwood in Manaus. As representatives and executioners of British aristocratic control, they already threaten to curtail Finn's freedom and place him in a precarious position. To avoid being turned into a **DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD** at Westwood and being able to continue his life in the rainforest, Finn has to abandon the lagoon, embark on a journey to find and (temporarily) seek refuge with the Xanti.

Unlike the other child characters in *Journey to the River Sea*, who aim at ameliorating their situations, Finn mostly attempts to maintain the current state of the TAW (as part of his *W-world*) and predominantly serves as a catalyst for Maia and Clovis rather than having a genuine character development himself. This is evident in his relatively 'fixed' position on the childhood scale as an **EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD**. Even though this position is threatened by Mr Low and Mr Trapwood (and by extension Sir Aubrey), it does not deteriorate, unlike Maia's position at the Carters'. Moreover, Finn seems to take a secondary role as Maia's teacher with respect to the 'green world' of the rainforest and is engaged in getting the *Arabella* ready for his journey to the Xanti in the first part of the novel, which is a fairly unchildlike and uneventful occupation, while he appears to gradually recede into the background in the second half of *Journey to the River Sea*. This does not mean that he is irrelevant for the plot, though; on the contrary, his actions propel the plot forward, but he also always seems to actualise the *W-worlds* of other characters while simultaneously actualising or maintaining his own.

The main 'catalytic' event associated with Finn is his plan to evade and hoodwink 'the crows'. Motivated by his will to retain the present state of the TAW and actualise his *O-world*, which consists of the promise he gave his father, he comes up with a plan that resolves his problem and simultaneously actualises Clovis' *W-world*, i. e., his longing to return to England and his foster mother. As a stranded child actor, who ran away from the abusive environment he was exposed to among the actors, Clovis is unable to actualise this *W-world* and return to England of his own accord. The plan Finn comes up with comprises that Clovis takes his place as heir to Westwood, stays for a week or two before confessing that he is not Finn and is eventually able to return to his foster mother. Meanwhile, Finn will have plenty of time for his escape and journey to the Xanti, even if Clovis' true identity is already discovered during the sea voyage. For Clovis, Finn's plan seems to be the only way out of his misery and bring about an immediate actualisation of his *W-world*. Finn thus affects Clovis' position on the childhood scale significantly and functions as a catalyst to the latter's happy ending.

Finn's plan also reinforces Ibbotson's indebtedness to *The Secret Garden* and highlights the novel's neo-Victorian thrust. *Journey to the River Sea* demonstrates that "neo-Victorian fiction serves not one but two masters: the 'neo' as well as the 'Victorian'; that is, homage to the Victorian era and its texts, but in combination with the 'new' in a postmodern revisionary critique"⁴⁰¹. This critique predominantly revolves around the issue of social class that is not only central to but has already been challenged, albeit only temporarily, in *The Secret Garden*.⁴⁰² In fact, as Shirley Foster and Judy Simons ascertain, the secret garden can be regarded a "revisionary environment" in which "class and gender hierarchies are abandoned"⁴⁰³ before they are reinstated towards the end of the novel. In *Journey to the River Sea*, Finn's plan eventually contributes to *permanently* challenging class hierarchies, as it further consolidates Ibbotson's reversal of the roles Burnett appointed to Colin and Dickon, whose equivalents are Clovis and Finn. Clovis, who shares Dickon's social rank and status, is turned into an aristocrat, thus sharing a position with Colin, when he eventually decides to continue the deception and stay at Westwood, which implies a certain transgression of class boundaries that are firmly held in place at the end of Burnett's source text. While the movement of both characters seems to be a reversal at first (Colin wants to go out into the garden and Clovis aims at being restored to a domestic environment), both storylines close with a (re)turn to an aristocratic mansion they will eventually inherit. Finn, by contrast, shares Colin's social rank by birth, but is modelled on the working-class character Dickon in other respects. Instead of claiming his place as family heir, as Colin eventually does when he returns to Misselthwaite Manor with his father in the concluding scene of *The Secret Garden*, Finn forfeits his place and inheritance, opting for a life in the Brazilian rainforest, where social class boundaries are resolved.

After the successful execution of the plan, Finn attempts to complete the actualisation of his *W*- and *O*-worlds by leaving Maia and the lagoon to find the Xanti, but turns out to be unable to do so. Instead of enjoying his journey, he mostly misses Maia's company, who "had obeyed his orders quickly but not blindly" and whom "he had learnt to trust [...] completely"⁴⁰⁴. When he is gone for only three days, he even starts to question the entire venture, "wonder[ing] what it [finding the Xanti] was all about"⁴⁰⁵, and starts to feel lonely for the first time when he has been on his own for several months. Even the rainforest suddenly loses some of its appeal in Maia's absence: "This morning he had found himself starting to say, 'Look, Maia!' when he saw an umbrella bird strutting

401 Samantha Carroll. "Putting the 'Neo' Back into Neo-Victorian.", 173.

402 Cf. Shirley Foster and Judy Simons. "Frances Hodgson Burnett.", 333–334.

403 Shirley Foster and Judy Simons. "Frances Hodgson Burnett.", 338.

404 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 212.

405 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 213.

along a branch, and when he realized that she wasn't there, the exotic creature, with its sunshade of feathers, had seemed somehow less interesting"⁴⁰⁶. Similar to Tom in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, for whom the midnight garden seems to temporarily turn into "a green emptiness"⁴⁰⁷ when he cannot find Hatty in it at one point, Finn's appreciation of the rainforest is somewhat diminished by Maia's absence. Thus while "positive social interaction in places can also be important in the development of place attachment by contributing to the forging of bonds of friendship and a sense of community"⁴⁰⁸, the sudden absence of friendship and community can have a negative impact on the perception of place. Whether because of his loneliness, his premonition that something is amiss, which Ibbotson problematically links to Finn's 'Indigenous heritage', or a combination of both, Finn eventually returns after only one week to pick up Maia and take her with him.

When Finn returns, he does so principally to have company on his journey and actualises Maia's *W-world*, assuaging her thirst for freedom, excitement and adventure in the process, which emphasises his role as catalyst. From the onset, Maia has been linked with journeys and journeying and "wanted to make this journey with Finn" as soon as he mentioned that he will have to leave the lagoon when "[f]ive minutes ago she had wanted to stay in the lagoon for ever"⁴⁰⁹. For Maia, the river and the boat symbolise freedom and the adventure she had hoped for but is essentially denied in the uneventful Carter household. Whilst Miss Minton already contributed to extending what environmental psychologists refer to as the child's "environmental or territorial 'range'", which describes "the child's 'spatial realm of experience' and comprises the various spaces (domestic, leisure, play, etc.) with which a child habitually interacts"⁴¹⁰, to include the compound, she does not permit Maia to join Finn on his adventure. Prior to his return even "Finn had made it clear that he would not take Maia with him" and, yet, "she could not stop dreaming"⁴¹¹ about the journey, wishing that he would change his mind. The conflicting positions of the TAW and Maia's *W-world* are only resolved when Finn returns, finds Maia injured and unconscious near the remains of the Carters' burnt down bungalow and eventually takes her on the *Arabella* and to the Xanti.

As soon as Maia is on the boat and they set off, Finn is increasingly linked to his 'Indigenous side' and plants. When he treats the cut on her leg he does so by "bandag[ing] her leg and [making] her swallow one of his bark potions",

406 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 212.

407 Philippa Pearce. *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 114.

408 Alun Morgan "Places of Transformation in *The Secret Garden*.", 92.

409 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 101.

410 Alun Morgan. "Places of Transformation in *The Secret Garden*.", 93.

411 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 197.

knowing “what was best for her”⁴¹². Instead of following his “European side” and taking “her to the hospital for proper treatment”⁴¹³, which is in and of itself a racist assessment, Finn reverts to his Indigenous knowledge about plants and employs natural remedies as healer, which signifies a holistic approach. The success of his treatment is reflected in the almost healed wound Maia finds underneath “a mulch of some strange green mould”⁴¹⁴ that was covered by the bandage. On their way, Finn also collects various plants with medical properties to sell and restock his own medical box: “He found a tree whose leaves were made into an infusion to help people with kidney complaints, and brought back a silvery fern to rub on aching muscles”, all of which have “Indian names”⁴¹⁵. Ibbotson’s text hence seems to suggest that the closer Finn comes to the Xanti, the stronger his ‘Indigenous side’ becomes.

Despite his active role in Maia’s recovery, Finn appears to step back in the second half of the novel. While the narrator still relates the events of *their* journey up the Negro and the Agarapi rivers to Xanti country, Maia functions as primary focalizer and the text foregrounds her impressions and thoughts. In those rare instances where Finn’s thoughts and feelings are addressed, they appear to be concerned with either Clovis, raising the doubt “if they had been fair to him”, or Maia, whom he “had almost kidnapped”⁴¹⁶ and never told anyone about her well-being or present location. On the *Arabella*, he continues to be a mentor for Maia, showing her how to store, label and dry the plant specimens they have collected along their way, and is responsible for steering the boat and studying the incomplete maps that are supposed to take them near the Xanti.⁴¹⁷ Even their conversations, as far as they are recounted in the novel, seem to be geared more towards Maia than Finn and consolidate his secondary position during the journey.

Finn’s gradual marginalisation is especially evident once Finn, Maia, Miss Minton and Professor Glastonberry arrive at the Xanti.⁴¹⁸ The Xanti have so far been constructed as Finn’s extended family, where he will, as Maia presumes,

412 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 248.

413 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 248.

414 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 250.

415 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 252.

416 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 252, 253.

417 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 251, 252.

418 After Miss Minton had been told that the bungalow had burned down, she started to search frantically for Maia. Receiving news that “‘[a] man in a trading canoe on the Agarapi saw the *Arabella* [...] [a]nd was certain that two children were aboard’”, Miss Minton and Professor Glastonberry steal the Carters’ boat to pursue the *Arabella* and draw level with Finn and Maia a week later. Although Miss Minton had planned on taking Maia back to Manaus, she relents and they decide to follow Maia and Finn to the Xanti. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 256.

“‘have lots and lots of relatives. Aunts and uncles and cousins – and maybe grandparents too. A huge family...’”⁴¹⁹. Still, although their stay with the Xanti comprises an entire chapter in Ibbotson’s novel, this chapter focuses on Maia’s and Miss Minton’s (and arguably also Professor Glastonberry’s) experiences in the Indigenous community rather than Finn’s family reunion. In fact, it foregrounds that *Maia* finds a kind of surrogate family among the Xanti, opening with the observation that “Maia had never had any sisters or cousins, but she had them now”⁴²⁰. The narrator’s account of the visit seems to imply that what Finn does is hardly of importance and only mentions his activities in passing. For example, readers get to know that “Finn spent much of his time with the old chief and the men who surrounded him”⁴²¹; yet the text never provides snippets of their conversation or comments on their activities, as is the case with Maia’s and Miss Minton’s interactions with the Indigenous people. To Maia it even seems that “Finn was quieter here [...], not always working out how to get to the next thing and the next”, which he had done up until this point in the story, and “looked European” among the Xanti when in Manaus “Finn had looked Indian and exotic”⁴²², as if he did not really belong to either place.

Arguably, this privileging of Maia’s and Miss Minton’s interactions with the Xanti ties in with the novel’s revisionist agenda and neo-Victorianism’s hallmark feature of directing attention towards marginalised groups, in this case women and the Indigenous tribe. In its strong focus on female experience, especially Maia’s, in the second half of the story, Ibbotson also seems to have ‘rewritten’ the often discussed and somewhat contentious last chapters of *The Secret Garden*, which foreground the male upper-class voice and narrative of Colin.⁴²³ By contrast, in Ibbotson’s novel, Maia continues to have a prominent position in the story and is not only an active presence during the trip to and temporary stay with the Xanti, but also in the closing scenes of *Journey to the River Sea*, where Finn is also present.

Finn seems to have been able to evade living at Westwood when he set out on his journey, but his escape appears to be only a temporary success. Once the

419 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 154.

420 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 272.

421 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 275.

422 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 278, 277.

423 Foster and Simons, for instance, argue that Mary is effectively marginalised in the latter part of the novel, where “[t]he fantasies of female power which the novel projects so powerfully remain, however, tantalizingly unresolved” and the novel’s “social vision [...] carr[ies] worrying implications for the feminist critic”. Shirley Foster and Judy Simons. “Frances Hodgson Burnett,” 324, 334. While Stephen Roxburgh acknowledges that, “[a]lthough our attention in the final chapters of the book is almost entirely on Colin, his recovery constitutes Mary’s real achievement”, she nevertheless is sidelined by her cousin. Stephen D. Roxburgh. “‘Our First World.’”, 127.; cf. Danielle E. Price. “Cultivating Mary,” 11.

rescue mission led by Captain Pereira found them among the Xanti, Finn returns to Manaus with the others, where a letter from Clovis seems to put an end to his autonomy. Reading the “frantic note” Clovis has sent, Finn “decide[s] that Westwood was to be his fate”⁴²⁴ and travels with Maia and Miss Minton to England. This decision and his acknowledgement of defeat is an immediate result of his stay with the Xanti, who “thought that everyone’s life was like a river; you had to flow with the current and not struggle, which wasted breath and made you more likely to drown. And the river of life seemed to be carrying him back to Westwood”⁴²⁵. The river symbolism implies that his stay seems to have been a rite of passage for him and cast his life into a new perspective. The sacrifice Finn makes in going to Westwood is reflected in his perception of the place when he is looking at the house. For Finn, Westwood is an “awful place” that “look[s] unspeakably dismal, with its useless turrets and jagged battlements”⁴²⁶. The closed gate, which was “surmounted by jagged spikes”⁴²⁷, even evokes associations of a prison-like place where his freedom will be curtailed and thus stands in stark spatial opposition to the vast, seemingly unbounded environment of the rainforest. Once he sees Clovis running down the driveway, his first impression is that they have “‘tried to cut his throat’”⁴²⁸ when he is only wearing a scarf, which reflects his fear of the place and its inhabitants. Based on his father’s memories, Finn perceives Westwood as an environment that stifles rather than encourages childhood experience and constitutes a “‘not home’”⁴²⁹ for him where his *W-world* will never be actualised.

Although Clovis’ letter at first signified an end to his freedom of choice and autonomy, their meeting appears to reinstate both and Finn is able to return to Brazil. About to be legally declared heir to Westwood, Clovis sent for Finn due to a conflicting position of his *O-world*, as he permanently took Finn’s place when he was only supposed to stay for one or two weeks in Westwood and is unable to “‘live in a great house and take the money’” that is Finn’s, when the rightful heir has to “‘live in a wooden hut’”⁴³⁰. Finn, however, once more forfeits an aristocratic British life to permanently retain his position as an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD in Brazil, renouncing patriarchal power and breaking the Taverners’ blood line his grandfather is so keen to uphold. Yet, despite his resistance to Westwood, Finn is not averse to being

424 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 281, 282.

425 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 282.

426 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 286.

427 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 286.

428 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 286.

429 Jon C. Stott and Christine Doyle Francis. “‘Home’ and ‘Not Home’ in Children’s Stories.”, 223.

430 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 288.

subsumed under adult authority in a family or family-like setting. In fact, Maia, Finn, Professor Glastonberry and Miss Minton had already planned "[t]o build a proper House of Rest near the Carters' old bungalow and live there in the rainy season, studying hard so that if Maia wanted to go to music college later, or Finn to train as a doctor they would be prepared"⁴³¹ and would go on explorations during the dry season. The text suggests that Finn aims at remaining a 'child in nature' by staying in and exploring the rainforest with a family of his choice – a variation of the nuclear family consisting of father, mother and children and hence a "transnormative family"⁴³².

The temporary stay in England and the resolution of the plot suggest a shared ending for Maia, Finn and Clovis, who all make an appearance in and take an active role in the final chapter. While Maia returns under the adult supervision of Miss Minton to the academy she attended before setting off for the Amazon, Finn and Clovis meet to resolve the problem hinted at in Clovis' letter before Finn visits Maia at the academy. In this last chapter, Ibbotson once more highlights her neo-Victorian stance with regard to *The Secret Garden*, whose final chapter closes with the words "Master Colin!" and where Mary is completely denied a voice. It is striking that Clovis, who shares Colin's position and upper-class rank at this point in the story, prematurely achieves his happy end, leaving the final ending for Maia and Finn, the equivalents to the marginalised and silenced Mary and Dickon of Burnett's narrative.⁴³³ The final scene is shared by Maia and Finn, who are both able to return to the rainforest. Instead of giving preference to a single character of the closing tableau, Miss Minton's final words "'We are *all* going home'"⁴³⁴ suggest a happy ending for the three of them that is in line with Ibbotson's predilection for positive outcomes: "'I must have happy endings, whether I write for children or grown-ups,' she says. 'When I settle down to write or even read a book, the idea that it might all end miserably is something I can't bear'"⁴³⁵. While the ending of Burnett's novel is a happy one, Ibbotson in addition opted for a more equitable and open ending in *Journey to the River Sea* that suggests a new beginning and a new adventure for Maia, Finn and Miss Minton when they return to Brazil.⁴³⁶

431 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 292.

432 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

433 Foster and Simons argue along similar lines: "Just as Mary is removed from the focus of attention at the end of the novel, so Dickon, the working-class child who has been central to the regenerative process, is completely forgotten in the finale's emphasis on reconciliation between father and son". Shirley Foster and Judy Simons. "Frances Hodgson Burnett.", 340.

434 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 292, original emphasis.

435 Nicholas Tucker. "Eva Ibbotson: Journey of a Lifetime.", n.p.

436 A.S. Byatt's "Morpho Eugenia" (1992) ends in a fairly similar fashion with William Adamson and Matilda (Matty) Crompton aboard the *Calypso* on their way to the Amazon. Even though Maia, Finn and Miss Minton are not yet on the boat, the open endings of both stories and the

7.5. Clovis: The Lived and Performed Childhoods of a Child Actor

In contrast to Maia, the Carter twins and Finn, Clovis King is a character with a working-class background, which introduces a notably different perspective on childhood. Unlike the other child characters, he does not have any impact on Maia's position on the childhood scale, but proves crucial for the analysis of competing neo-Victorian visions of childhood in other regards. Clovis is an orphaned child actor in the Goodleys' traveling theatre troupe, 'The Pilgrim Players', and on his way to Brazil when the story opens. Even though he is actually the first child character Maia meets since her departure from London, he takes a more prominent position in the latter part of the story. As a child actor, who has been touring with the Goodleys for four years, he *performs* childhoods on the stage while being largely deprived of a comparatively carefree childhood himself. In Manaus, he continues to perform the part of Cedric Errol in Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, who epitomises the 'ideal', innocent and pure child and "is a child very much in the tradition of both Romantic poetry and also of formulaic stories"⁴³⁷. As one of the most explicit intertexts of Ibbotson's story, Burnett's novel evokes an image of childhood which expands and complements the neo-Victorian depictions of childhood in Ibbotson's narrative by a Victorian one and thus invites comparison.

To analyse Clovis' childhood experiences, this subchapter places special emphasis on the discrepancy between his lived and his performed childhoods. It sets out with a glimpse at the situation of child actors in the (late) Victorian and Edwardian eras and the depiction of physical work in children's literature before proceeding with an analysis of Clovis' childhood experiences as part of the traveling group of actors. In this context, the first meeting between Maia and Clovis on the boat to Manaus is explored and the ephemerality of childhood is addressed. After discussing Clovis' position on the childhood scale at the beginning of Ibbotson's novel, it continues with an analysis of his brief visit to the Carters and his temporary stay with Finn in the rainforest, neither of which can bring about an actualisation of his *W-world*, since the latter is shaped by his

idea of a return to the Amazon highlights the particular appeal of the place for these characters. Both stories suggest that where their Victorian literary predecessors, such as Angel Clare in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), made experiences in Brazil that do not prompt a return, their neo-Victorian counterparts take a more favourable attitude towards the rainforest.

437 Angelika Zirker. "Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels.", 56. Anna Wilson likewise emphasises the parallels between Cedric Errol and "the exemplary child of an earlier form of children's literature, the moral tale, in which angelic children are held up as examples of perfection for their readers to follow, while selfish and brutal ones are shown being duly punished, both in this life and the next, for their misdeeds". Anna Wilson. "Little Lord Fauntleroy.", 237.

desire to return to England, which sets him apart from both Maia and Finn. The remainder of the chapter focuses on his experiences as ‘fake Little Lord Fauntleroy’ in Westwood, when his *W-world* has been actualised, and argues that, while Clovis consciously turns into a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, he, somewhat paradoxically, has nevertheless attained an ‘ideal’ childhood in the end.

From the point of view of neo-Victorian studies, Clovis King arguably is of particular interest since this character is used to introduce the phenomenon of child actors into *Journey to the River Sea*. In fact, child actors and performers are a recurring element in neo-Victorian fiction for children. In Valerie Weldrick’s *The Blakeley Ghost* (1980), for instance, the titular ghost is fourteen-year-old Frederick (Fred) Allmann, a child actor who died due to a backstage accident trying to rescue his twin sister Martha in 1908, the year the Blakeley theatre opened. In Eloise Williams’ *Gaslight* (2017), Nansi is a fourteen-year-old child-actress-cum-thief, who variously employs her acting abilities to play small (ghost) children on stage, accomplish the thieving jobs she has to do for the vile theatre owner and free her mother from an asylum. In Sharon Gosling’s *The Golden Butterfly* (2019), thirteen-year-old Luciana Cattaneo eventually finds her vocation as assistant to a female magician, participates in performing illusions on stage and learns about the hardships of theatre life. As these and other texts, *Journey to the River Sea* contributes to keeping the child performers who populated the Victorian and Edwardian stages in astonishing numbers in the literary cultural imagination by reworking their oftentimes precarious lives for a contemporary child readership.

While children toiling as chimney sweeps, in mines or in factories might be the predominant images of child labour in the nineteenth century, a substantial number of children made their living by becoming child performers. On stage, they could become enormously successful and slip into a “tremendous range of roles”⁴³⁸. Besides playing in all-child productions, which became particularly popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, “children frequently acted major roles, alongside adults, in plays and pantomimes”⁴³⁹, as does Clovis King in *Journey to the River Sea*. This versatility of roles was often accompanied by a lucrative pay. According to Tracy C. Davis, “statistics show that the children’s wages were of real benefit to them and that the rate of pay was exceptionally

438 Marah Gubar. “The Drama of Precocity.”, 64. For instance, May Hannan, who commenced her acting career when she was only two years old, “had acted in India, Australia, New Zealand, on the continent of Europe, and in every town of importance in England” by the time she was seven and a half years old. Anon. “Child Actresses.” *The Era*, 5 July 1890, 9.

439 Marah Gubar. “The Drama of Precocity.”, 64.

attractive, especially for girls”⁴⁴⁰. Drawing on different sources, she compares the wages of children working on the stage to those in other professions:

A 7-year-old girl helping a landlady to clean for several hours a day earned only a few pence each week. One 11-year-old girl working every night for 4½ hours in a shop earned a total of 1s a week. Another child received twopence and her food for turning a mangle for 3½ hours daily and for 10 hours on Saturday. Matchbox makers working in all their out-of-school hours and at weekends made 6d per gross. A trouser maker working 4 hours a day made 1s 6d per week; a 14-year-old beadworker worked 5 hours a day for a weekly wage of 2s 6d; and at the top end of the scale, a 12-year-old brushmaker earned 3s for her week’s labour, but rates of pay higher than 1s a week were exceptional for female children. In the theatre, however, children could earn between 3d and 6d a night for dancing in provincial pantomimes, or between 6d and 1s in London.⁴⁴¹

Extraordinarily successful child performers could earn significantly more. In an article in *The Penny Illustrated Paper* in 1909, ten-year-old Miss Elise Craven is said to have been paid the “abnormally large sum” of “£100 a week”⁴⁴². The fact that child performers could hope to earn a substantial income was a consequence of the popularity of children on the stage. For the majority of the theatre-going public, the particular appeal of these child performers was not so much their representation as “embodiments of purity” but derived mostly from “[t]heir prematurely developed skills and much-vaunted versatility [that] enabled them to blur the line between child and adult, innocence and experience”⁴⁴³. This form of precocity contributed to the widespread fascination with child performers, yet it simultaneously led to social reformers’ and activists’ calls for protecting the young on stage.

An increasing amount of attention was paid to child performers on stage in the second half of the nineteenth century when the discussion about whether child performers are in fact engaging in stage *work* or merely in *play* during their performances sparked public interest. While “[f]or children who acted professionally, who participated in the rote learning and rehearsal which enabled

440 Tracy C. Davis. “The Employment of Children in Victorian Theatre.”, 124.

441 Tracy C. Davis. “The Employment of Children in Victorian Theatre.”, 124.

442 Anon. “P.I.P. Playgoer” *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 20 February 1909, 123, my emphasis.

443 Marah Gubar. “The Drama of Precocity.”, 64. In fact, Marah Gubar refers to Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1888) to exemplify the audience’s fascination with precocity: she claims that the play’s “tremendous success attests to the public’s fascination with precocity, since young Fauntleroy’s charm arises directly from his uncanny emotional maturity, which allows him to relate to his mother and other characters as an adult”. Marah Gubar. “The Drama of Precocity.”, 65–66. In contrast to the boys in Fagin’s gang in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, Cedric is “precocious [...] in a positive way that seems entrancing and admirable rather than pathetic or disturbing”. Marah Gubar. “Entertaining Children of All Ages.”, 21.

their performance, there was never any doubt that they were engaged in work”⁴⁴⁴, not all were aware of the physical and mental strain suffered by (young) child actors on stage. The diverging opinions on this matter resulted in “[p]rotests against the presence of youngsters on the stage [that] peaked in the 1880s, when activists such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett campaigned to bar children under ten from any kind of theatrical employment”⁴⁴⁵. These reformists and activists were “[c]ommitted to persuading the playgoing public that they were complicit in the wholesale destruction of childhood”⁴⁴⁶ through the exploitation of the young.⁴⁴⁷

In response to these campaigns and concerns, several acts to safeguard child performers were passed in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. The Children’s Dangerous Performances Act of 1879, for instance, protects children below the age of fourteen from having to participate “in any public exhibition or performance whereby [...] the life or limbs of such child shall be endangered”⁴⁴⁸. The Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1889 prohibited the employment of child performers under the age of ten, whilst allowing courts to issue performance licences for children between 7 and 10 when they are satisfied that “proper provision has been made to secure the health and kind treatment of any children proposed to be employed thereat”⁴⁴⁹. Fourteen years later, the Employment of Children Act of 1903 effectively banned children under 10 from the stage.⁴⁵⁰ The

444 Anne Varty. *Children and the Theatre in Victorian Britain*, 16.

445 Marah Gubar. “The Drama of Precocity.”, 73. The age limit stipulated by Fawcett coincides with the age limit established in the 1878 Factory and Workshop Act. This act banned children under the age of ten from working in factories and workshops and enforced school attendance for those between ten and fourteen: “A child who has not in any week attended school for all the attendances required by this section shall not be employed in the following week, until he has attended school for the deficient number of attendances”. Alexander Redgrave. *The Factory and Workshop Act, 1878*, 63, 67, *The Factory and Workshop Act, 1878*, 41 Victoria, chap. 16, § 20, 23. The minimum age of ten for underground work in mines was already enacted in the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842, which also banned women and girls from this kind of work.

446 Marah Gubar. “The Drama of Precocity.”, 73.

447 For a more detailed account on the debates in the 1880s, see Anne Varty. *Children and the Theatre in Victorian Britain*, 173–177. Gubar observes a similar form of activism in the United States: “Beginning in the 1870s, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children fought to ban child performers from the stage, but for every activist trying to pass and enforce such laws, there were many more people – theater managers, current and former child performers, their guardians, and their large and multigenerational fan base – who resisted such legislation and pointed out the absurdity of outlawing stage labor when children across the country were enduring much worse working conditions and lower pay in fields, factories, and city streets”. Marah Gubar “Entertaining Children of All Ages.”, 5–6.

448 Irish Statute Book. “Children’s Dangerous Performances Act, 1879.”, chap. 34, § 3.

449 The National Archives. “Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act 1889.”, 2, Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act, 1889, Victoria 52 & 53, chap. 44, § 3.

450 Cf. Irish Statute Book. “Employment of Children Act, 1903.”, chap. 45, § 11.

gradually increasing attention paid to the safety and protection of child performers thus is in line with the growing amount of legal attention paid to safeguarding children and ensuring their welfare in the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries; yet, in contrast to laws attempting to ameliorate the working conditions of children employed in textile factories (The Factory Act of 1833) and mines (The Mines and Collieries Act of 1842), those for children in the entertainment sector were passed comparatively late.

Considering that a substantial number of children in the Victorian and Edwardian periods had to work for their living, it is noteworthy that classic children's texts published around this time seldom show child characters working for their subsistence or pursuing serious professions where they have to engage in hard work. In these texts, as Maria Nikolajeva argues, "work is not an issue by definition and is therefore promptly de-emphasized"⁴⁵¹. She suggests that, in case it "is depicted at all, it will most likely be downplayed, camouflaged, obscured, and its significance distorted"⁴⁵², which entails wider considerations concerning the representation of social class. According to Nikolajeva, the lack of depictions of child labour is due to the fact that "[t]raditional children's fiction creates and preserves what may be called a pastoral convention, maintaining a myth of a happy and innocent childhood, apparently based on adult writers' nostalgic memories and bitter insights about the impossibility of returning to the childhood idyll"⁴⁵³. Moreover, most of the texts that are nowadays deemed 'classic' children's texts, such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906) and Lucy M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), were marketed at middle- or upper-class children and hence portray protagonists living comparatively comfortable childhoods that should reflect the readers' own.⁴⁵⁴

451 Maria Nikolajeva. "'A Dream of Complete Idleness'.", 307.

452 Maria Nikolajeva. "'A Dream of Complete Idleness'.", 307.

453 Maria Nikolajeva. "'A Dream of Complete Idleness'.", 306. This idea ties in with Jacqueline Rose's claim about 'the impossibility of children's fiction', as the subtitle of her seminal work *The Case of Peter Pan* (1984) puts it. Rose argues that "[c]hildren's fiction draws in the child, it secures, places and frames the child" and effectively provides children with adult constructions of childhood. Jacqueline Rose. *The Case of Peter Pan*, 2.

454 An obvious exception in this regard is the chimney sweep Tom in Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863), who has to climb into chimney flues, where he is "rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw" and "soot got into his eyes" before he dies and is reborn as a 'water-baby'. Charles Kingsley. *The Water-Babies*, 5. Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* is another exception. Even though she is restored to her upper-class childhood at the end of the novel, she has to work hard for her subsistence when she is presumed to be left a pauper and turned into a maid. At her lowest point she admits that she has to endure hard work, starvation and cold: "'I can't bear this,' said the poor child, trembling. 'I know I shall die. I'm cold; I'm wet; I'm starving to death. I've walked a thousand miles today, and they have done nothing but scold

However, while Nikolajeva's observations are applicable to the protagonists of many first Golden Age children's texts, they do not necessarily apply to the secondary characters. At times, hard work is only implied, as is the case in Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, in which Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert originally wanted to adopt "a boy to help Matthew on the farm" and have to hire "[l]ittle Jerry Buote from the Creek"⁴⁵⁵ for the job, work is addressed more explicitly in other texts. Martha in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, for instance, has "to do the housemaid's work up here [upstairs] an' wait on you [Mary] a bit"⁴⁵⁶, and is introduced when she is lighting a fire in Mary's room. She is repeatedly shown to engage in housemaid's work and is sometimes kept so preoccupied by her duties "that Mary had no opportunity of talking to her"⁴⁵⁷. One of the most striking examples where hard physical work is elaborated on extensively can be found in *A Little Princess*, a text that draws attention to the plight of child servants. In Burnett's text, the pathetic scullery maid Becky has to work all day and is "tired out beyond even the endurance of her hard-working young body"⁴⁵⁸ when Sara finds her fast asleep in her room one afternoon. She is forced to do all sorts of chores, including "black[ing] boots and grates, and carr[ying] heavy coal-scuttles up and down stairs, and scrubb[ing] floors and clean[ing] windows", is always hungry and "so stunted in growth that she looked about twelve"⁴⁵⁹ when she is fourteen. In fact, Becky's mistreatment and exploitation, which is described in detail and juxtaposed to the comfortable life of the children attending Miss Minchin's academy as pupils, render her one of the more memorable characters in Burnett's story. Unlike many protagonists, these secondary characters are usually not "freed by the novelistic conventions of children's fiction for a life of leisure"⁴⁶⁰ by the end of their respective narratives.

While more recent children's literature also features many middle-class protagonists, at least historical novels written for young readers show a remarkable interest in the plight of working-class children. Even a cursory glance at neo-Victorian children's fiction shows a plethora of child characters, both protagonists and secondary characters, who have to work to earn their living: the crossing sweeper Frank Kilderbee in Weldrick's *Time Sweep* (1976), the miner Jeremy Visick in David Wiseman's *The Fate of Jeremy Visick* (1981), the kitchen boy Tom (Edward Larkin) in Helen Cresswell's *Moondial* (1987), the runaway Jim

me from morning until night. And because I could not find that last thing the cook sent me for, they would not give me any supper". Frances Hodgson Burnett. *A Little Princess*, 153.

455 Lucy M. Montgomery. *Anne of Green Gables*, 30, 42.

456 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 17.

457 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*, 81.

458 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *A Little Princess*, 56.

459 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *A Little Princess*, 55.

460 Maria Nikolajeva. "A Dream of Complete Idleness", 311.

Jarvis in Berlie Doherty's *Street Child* (1993), the chimney sweep Will Reed in Jim Eldridge's *The Sweep's Boy* (2010) and the servant girl Flora Dean in Karen McCombie's *The Whispers of Wilderwood Hall* (2016).⁴⁶¹ This form of "distancing [...] [work] to the historical past, where it feels less threatening and offensive" for a contemporary (Western) child readership, is one of several strategies Nikolaeva identifies that aim at "disarm[ing] work, presenting it as something that is [or rather should be] essentially irrelevant to the world of childhood"⁴⁶². She maintains that "[b]y placing the narrative in the past, authors defamiliarize work as a motif, making it strange, exotic and thus extraordinary"⁴⁶³. Yet, in addition to exploring and laying bare "the immensity of the contrast between the working child of past ages and the Western child of today"⁴⁶⁴, the incorporation of working-class childhoods in neo-Victorian (children's) fiction also emphasises the genre's revisionist impulse. This type of historical fiction turns to those "at the margins"⁴⁶⁵, providing an "attempt to reappraise the 'bad old days' of the nineteenth century from a social and cultural perspective that is markedly different from that of the here and now"⁴⁶⁶, whilst challenging the historical record of the time from which working-class children were all too often eclipsed.⁴⁶⁷

In Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea*, the allure of an acting career for a child as well as its downside are portrayed. Clovis King is introduced as a child actor who has been touring around the world with the Goodleys' unsuccessful and highly indebted theatre company. As it turns out, the Goodleys had recruited Clovis four years ago, when he was probably 8 or 9 years old, on the grounds that he "'had a good voice and could sing and looked right'"⁴⁶⁸ for the children's parts and juvenile leads they promised to teach him. Tempted by the prospect of becoming a successful child actor, who would "'make a lot of money and come back rich and famous'"⁴⁶⁹, Clovis left his foster mother, with whom he had been living for some time, if not all of his childhood.⁴⁷⁰ Upon adoption by Mr and Mrs

461 For further examples, see Liz Thiel's article "Beyond Expectations: Historical Fiction and Working Children," 64–72.

462 Maria Nikolajeva. "'A Dream of Complete Idleness'," 307.

463 Maria Nikolajeva. "'A Dream of Complete Idleness'," 313.

464 Liz Thiel. "Beyond Expectations," 65.

465 Samantha Carroll. "Putting the 'Neo' Back into Neo-Victorian," 195.

466 Liz Thiel. "Beyond Expectations," 65.

467 It should be noted that Liz Thiel essentially describes the revisionist approach characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction by attributing "a sense of re-examination" and "reappraisal of the past" to historical novels reimagining the nineteenth century. Liz Thiel. "Beyond Expectations," 65. Her article was published in 2001, when the term 'neo-Victorian' was not yet as established as it is today.

468 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 16.

469 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 16.

470 There were, in fact, child stars who achieved wide acclaim and became "rich and famous" on the stage. Elsie Leslie (1881–1966), for instance, was an immensely successful American child

Goodley, his name was promptly changed from Jimmy Bates to ‘Clovis King’, most likely to give him a ‘catchy’ and impressive stage name that would increase his popularity.⁴⁷¹ While there was a time in the beginning when “he’d enjoyed acting”, he was quickly disillusioned by the lowly accommodation and subpar living conditions “‘in beastly hotels full of bedbugs’”⁴⁷² and now hopes that the theatre troupe will in the near future return to England, where they have not been for years.

The gap between his childhood experiences with his foster mother in England, which are not part of the story, and his miserable life as a child actor, i. e., between his two lived ‘childhoods’, are explicitly addressed by Clovis during his first encounter with Maia on the boat to Manaus. Even though the references to his former childhood remain sparse, the information that is provided in Ibbotson’s text suffices to conjure up images of a Romantic childhood. This becomes evident when Clovis tells Maia that, at the time the Goodleys found him, he “‘was playing cricket on the village green with my friends’”⁴⁷³. Being engaged in play with his peers in a cultivated but still green space, which can be considered an allusion to “the [g]reen [t]opos”⁴⁷⁴ in the widest sense, points towards a happy and carefree childhood – an idea that is further consolidated by references to other forms of child play: “‘Do they still play conkers [...] and make a Guy on Bonfire Day? And what about snowmen? Has there been a lot of snow?’”⁴⁷⁵. Moreover, he also seems to still have had an infantile, innocent perception of the world at this time: only when he visits his foster mother at a later point in the story does he notice that, though nothing had really changed in the cottage, “everything looked smaller, and... poorer, somehow” and wonders if “things [had] been hard for his foster mother”⁴⁷⁶. The fact that he now notices “how small it [the cottage] was”⁴⁷⁷ and that his foster mother lives in a precarious situation can be read as an indication of his erstwhile blissful childhood innocence. Four years ago, he seems

actress, who had her debut in 1884. Incidentally, she also played the title role in the Broadway production of Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1888, which consolidated her mainstream fame. For a reception of her performance as Little Lord Fauntleroy in the press, see, for instance, Anon. “The Drama in America.” *The Era*. 29 December 1888, 7.

471 His stage name is evocative of Nan King’s, the stage name of Nancy Astley, in Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet* (1998).

472 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 226, 17.

473 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 16. The location of his foster mother’s cottage also suggests the possibility of a “neo-Romantic connection to nature”: she “lived in the end cottage of a row of small farm cottages on Stanton Green”, where “some boys were kicking a football on the grass”. Adrienne E. Gavin. “Unadulterated Childhood.”, 166.; Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 224, 225.

474 Jane Suzanne Carroll. *Landscape in Children’s Literature*, 49.

475 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 18.

476 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 225.

477 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 227.

to have been unaware of “the defining attributes of adulthood, including its financial and occupational obligations”⁴⁷⁸, which he, in his precocious childhood existence as a working-class child actor, is no longer able to ignore.

Yet, Ibbotson’s novel also suggests that, while Clovis was touring with the Goodleys, his *W-world* has contributed to a retrospective idealisation and embellishment of his childhood in England. As part of the traveling theatre company, he was subjected to the monotony of “‘trail[ing] about from one awful hot place to another’” and had to stay in hotels such as the Hotel Paradiso in Manaus, where “[g]rey slugs crawled over the wooden floors of the showers, the lavatories were filthy and the smell of bean stew being tortured to death in rancid cooking oil stole through the rooms and corridors all day”⁴⁷⁹. His living and working conditions thus to a considerable extent impacted his *W-world*, which revolves around his longing for England and his foster mother’s cottage. Accordingly, he appears to have remembered everything grander and more splendid in his homesickness for England. Since Clovis functions as focalizer in this instance, Ibbotson provides hints that he is aware of a potential distortion of his memories, when he notices that “[h]e’d wanted so much to be back here when he was with the Goodleys, but now...”⁴⁸⁰. Bringing about an actualisation of his *W-world* at this point in the story and seeing his childhood home after what at least for a child amounts to a considerable stretch of time turns out to be a disappointment and calls into question the Romantic qualities ascribed to his childhood before.

Arguably, the retrospective subjective idealisation of Clovis’ ‘lived’ childhood may also have been impacted by the childhood he performs on stage, namely Cedric Errol’s in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Despite using Burnett’s text as one of the story’s most explicit intertexts, *Journey to the River Sea* hardly elaborates on the plot of and assumes readers’ familiarity with Burnett’s novel to implement the contrast between Clovis’ actual and performed ‘childhoods’.⁴⁸¹ While Clovis’

478 Maria Nikolajeva. “‘A Dream of Complete Idleness’”, 306.

479 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 16, 66–67.

480 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 227.

481 The most extensive amount of information on Burnett’s story is provided in a short summary while Clovis is rehearsing and in the theatre programme. During Clovis’ rehearsal, the narrator summarises Burnett’s story as follows: “He [Clovis] was the hero, of course, the little American boy who finds he is the heir to a great castle in England owned by his crusty old grandfather, the earl. The boy’s name was Cedric and he called his mother ‘Dearest’ and together they travelled to England and melted the heart of the earl and did good to the tenants and were loved by everyone”. Some more information is provided in the theatre programme Mrs Carter reads to her children: “‘*Clovis King in the part he has made particularly his own,*’ read Mrs Carter. Clovis was Cedric, the American boy who finds he is heir to his grandfather’s title and has to leave his simple life in New York, where he is friends with the grocer and the shoe-shine boy, and travel to England to start a new life as an aristocrat. ‘*With his beautiful mother, Dearest, he melts the heart of his stern old grandfather, the earl,*

‘childhood’ is marred by rehearsals and work on stage, Cedric’s is an altogether happy and carefree one. In New York, where Cedric and his mother ‘Dearest’ (Mrs Errol) lived in genteel poverty, he wanted for nothing and enjoyed playing with his friends in the streets. Once he is brought to England, he enjoys the privileges linked with his grandfather’s wealth and estate, such as learning to ride on horseback. Thus, every time Clovis slips into the role of Little Lord Fauntleroy, he is temporarily able to transcend social class barriers in the imaginary space of the play, i. e., in the fantasy textual actual world (or FTAW), while these remain firmly in place off stage, i. e., in the textual actual world (or TAW). The friction that is created by the *performance* of an ideal, unburdened upper-class childhood by someone whose working-class existence bars him from such a life reinforces the relevance of social class in the overall representation of childhood. It points to a gap between childhood as it should ideally be and ‘childhood’ (or rather the lack thereof) as experienced by Clovis and many actual Victorian working-class children, reflecting nineteenth-century reformists’ calls, such as those by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to raise awareness of the incongruity between the emerging ideas of childhood and the plight of many working-class children.

Although the discrepancy between Clovis’ lived childhood and his performed one is addressed extensively in Ibbotson’s novel, the main focus of the first encounter between Maia and Clovis lies on growing up and the ephemerality of childhood, which thematically links Ibbotson’s novel to Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden*.⁴⁸² Unlike the protagonists in many classic Edwardian children’s texts, where children most often remain children and do not age, Ibbotson shows Clovis in the process of growing up. When Maia sees him for the first time, he is wearing his costume and a reference to the ephemerality of childhood is implemented visually: “He had fair hair, long and curly, and was dressed in old-fashioned clothes – velvet knickerbockers and a belted jacket *too short in the sleeves* – and when he turned round she saw that he was looking unhappy and afraid”⁴⁸³. In his attire, Clovis presents a recognisable variation on the very image of Little Lord Fauntleroy “that captured the public imagination”, namely “the little boy with the long golden curls wearing the velvet suit with the lace collar”⁴⁸⁴.

and starts doing good to the peasants on the estate. But there is a dastardly plot [...] to usurp Little Lord Fauntleroy’s place which is foiled...’ . Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 19, 81, original emphasis.

482 See chapter 6 “Ephemeral (Neo-)Victorian Childhood in Pearce’s Time-Slip Novel *Tom’s Midnight Garden*”.

483 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 15, my emphasis.

484 Anna Wilson. “Little Lord Fauntleroy.”, 236. For an analysis of dress in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and the reception of his velvet suit in the cultural imagination, see *ibid.*, 232–258. The stage adaptations of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* contributed significantly to the Little Lord’s popularity and Reginald B. Birch’s illustrations helped to visually inscribing him in the cultural imagination: “In a few years, after the book hit the stage, there would be no one from

Yet, in contrast to the Little Lord, who is inscribed in the cultural imagination as a *little* boy, as is already signified by the story's title, Clovis continues to grow up and has in fact already outgrown his jacket. As in Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*, growing up is presented as a necessary part of life and a process that cannot be halted or delayed.

However, growing up is a dilemma for Clovis that places him in an utterly precarious position due to the demands of his profession as a child actor. It was fairly common for older children to play significantly younger ones and across gender boundaries on the Victorian and Edwardian stages, as did Iris Hawkins, who played a boy of four when she was already eleven years old.⁴⁸⁵ Still, Clovis will no longer be able to imitate the "heartly childish voice"⁴⁸⁶ of Cedric Errol or convincingly play any children's parts once his voice breaks. Neither will he be able to conceal the age difference between himself and seven-year-old Cedric, which has been further aggravated by the picture of Clovis in the programme that "had been taken three years earlier and [on which] he looked very sweet"⁴⁸⁷. The dilemma he faces at the beginning of *Journey to the River Sea* is that, while he may be able to conceal his spots with make-up to camouflage the age gap, he will not be able to "'wear make-up on my voice'"⁴⁸⁸ or altogether stop it from breaking in the performance of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. His imminent voice break thus augments and jeopardises Clovis' already problematic situation as a traveling child

the smallest midwestern American town to the streets of Paris who had not heard of Cedric, and *who did not know what he looked like*, for Frances had sent Birch a photograph of Vivian dressed in a velvet suit and lace collar to give him some notion of how to present the small, street-wise New Yorker". Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 110, my emphasis. Yet, the novel itself was already a publishing success, as Wilson observes: "Only Lewis Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (1880) was in more libraries by 1893; reader polls consistently put *Little Lord Fauntleroy* among the top 10 books for children". Anna Wilson. "Little Lord Fauntleroy.", 235. In 1900, it was voted among the 100 best books for children and still ranked ninth. Cf. Anon. "Best Hundred Books for Children." *The Daily News*, 25 January 1900, 6. For a reading of the immense success and cultural afterlife of Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, see U.C. Knoepfelmacher's article "Little Lord Fauntleroy: The Afterlife of a Best-Seller.", 185–213.

485 Cf. Anon. "Clever Children." *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 8 April 1905, 215. Ibbotson's text lists an example where the age difference is even greater. According to Miss Minton, Sarah Bernhardt "'was seventy years old'" when she came to Manaus and "'played Napoleon's young son and she was a sensation!'" Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 65. This clearly is a reference to the historical Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), who was a French actress and played Napoleon's son in Edmond Rostand's *L'Aiglon*, which premiered in 1900.

486 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, 53.

487 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 80.

488 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 15.

actor and may even put an end to his acting career if the Goodleys throw him out and leave him penniless in Brazil.⁴⁸⁹

When Clovis' voice finally breaks during the debut performance of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in Manaus, it does so during a pivotal moment that distinctly addresses the ephemerality of childhood. In an emotionally charged and touching scene towards the end of the play, in which Cedric puts his hand on his grandfather's knee and asks the Earl "'Will I have to stop being your little boy?'" , Clovis' voice suddenly breaks and henceforth stays a "deep bass voice"⁴⁹⁰. Here, Ibbotson changed the wording from *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, in which Cedric asks "'Shall I be your boy, even if I'm not going to be an earl? [...] Shall I be your boy, just as I was before?'" ⁴⁹¹ In altering the phrasing of the source material from 'boy' to 'little boy', Ibbotson makes age and ageing the defining categories that resonate more strongly in the cultural climate in which the story is set: the Edwardian era. As Gavin and Humphreys maintain, "[f]or the Edwardians childhood became an escape, a solution, an ideal"⁴⁹² and growing up was linked with a sense of loss and elicited melancholic feelings. Clovis' fear of growing up therefore corresponds with the Edwardians' attitude towards and perspective on childhood. Unlike Peter Pan, Clovis cannot stay a prepubescent child "in forever childhood"⁴⁹³ and eventually has to grow up, as is signified by his vocal break. The breaking of his voice at this particular moment suggests that there is only one answer to the question directed at the Earl.

489 The idea that Clovis is of no more use to the Goodleys once he is grown up may remind contemporary readers of the many child stars in film and television whose popularity began to wane once they outgrew the children's roles that had made them famous. Shirley Temple (1928–2014), for instance, was one of the first and critically most acclaimed American child film stars of her time. At the age of six, she was the first child to receive the Academy Juvenile Award and turned into a superstar. As an adult, she pursued her acting career for a time, before she turned to politics and became a diplomat.

490 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 84, original emphasis.

491 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, 197. This does not mean that there might not have been (stage) adaptations of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* that also place a special emphasis on age by having him refer to himself as 'little boy' in this particular scene. In Burnett's own version, *Little Lord Fauntleroy: A Drama in Three Acts Founded on the Story of the Same Name*, at least, Cedric only asks about being the Earl's boy: "'That other boy – he will have to be your boy now, as I was, won't he? [...] Won't he? I thought – shall I be your boy even if I'm not going to be an earl?'" Frances Hodgson Burnett. *Little Lord Fauntleroy: A Drama in Three Acts*, 44. Likewise, the successful 1980 TV adaptation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, which is among the most popular versions to date, merely refers to Cedric (Ricky Schroder) as 'boy'. In this version, Cedric asks his grandfather (Alec Guinness): "'Does it mean I have to go away from here, grandpa? [...] Will I still be your boy like before?'" Jack Gold (dir.). *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, 1:23:17–1:23:25.

492 Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time.", 4.

493 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 12.; cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time.", 11.

Yet, while Ibbotson's narrative propagates that growing up is a natural process, the Goodleys do not seem to regard it as such. When the Carter twins start their high-pitched giggling after Clovis' voice has broken, most of the audience joins in and laughs for the duration of his next two speeches before Clovis runs off the stage.⁴⁹⁴ As soon as the curtain comes down, Clovis' career as a child actor is closed and the *Fauntleroy* matinées have to be cancelled. Before long, the Goodleys set up an emergency meeting to talk about ways to remedy their situation, "but as usual they started by nagging Clovis"⁴⁹⁵. Mrs Goodley, for instance, asks Clovis if he could not "'have waited another week before you started honking like an old grandfather'", while Nancy Goodley reproaches him for "'turn[ing] us into a laughing stock'"⁴⁹⁶. They neither acknowledge growing up as a natural given nor do they show the slightest sympathy for Clovis' situation, whom they emotionally torment during the meeting.

The Goodleys, as adults who are responsible for Clovis, thus largely determine his position on the childhood scale at the beginning of the story. As member of 'The Pilgrim Players', Clovis belongs mostly to the category of the DIS-EMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. Not only is he emotionally abused on a seemingly regular basis ("as *usual* they started by nagging Clovis"⁴⁹⁷), he is also physically abused by Nancy, who, as he tells Maia on the boat, would "'pinch you as soon as look at you'"⁴⁹⁸. Likewise, the lowly accommodation and barely edible food can be regarded as forms of severe neglect, as they make Clovis feel sick and affect his well-being to a considerable extent. This becomes evident during the emergency meeting, where "[h]e was crouched on a dirty footstool, clutching his stomach which was heaving after the Paradiso breakfast of bean stew and fish bones, and he was covered in bites because the hotel sheets were crawling with bedbugs"⁴⁹⁹. During this meeting, he has reached his lowest point and feels "as wretched as he had ever done, and frightened, too"⁵⁰⁰, as several other events occurred that threaten the theatre company's existence. Realising that his situation is unlikely to improve as long as he stays with the Goodleys, he claims a certain amount of agency after the emergency meeting by running away to see Maia and Miss Minton, hoping that they will be able to help him and actualise his *W-world*. Similar to Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, who both run away as a consequence of being severely mistreated, Clovis attempts to ameliorate his desperate situation by claiming

494 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 84.

495 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 92.

496 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 92.

497 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 92, my emphasis.

498 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 20.

499 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 92.

500 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 93.

agency and briefly moves closer to the EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD.

Before he eventually finds a better home, however, Clovis has to face even more false hopes and disillusionment. After his dreadful experiences with the Goodleys, the Carters' seemingly respectable British middle-class household initially seems the perfect temporary solution for Clovis. This impression is reinforced when he arrives at the bungalow and sees the exterior surroundings: "But now as he made his way up the gravel path to the house, his spirits rose. It was so *neat and tidy and quiet*. No chickens to give you fleas, no barking dogs running the length of their chains"⁵⁰¹. Unlike Maia, who resents the quiet and the chemical cleanliness of the Carters' bungalow, Clovis relishes the sight of their house and feels vindicated in his decision to see Maia and Miss Minton. It seems as if Clovis shares Mr Low and Mr Trapwood's view that when he reached the Carters' bungalow he has found "[a] *decent* British household at last"⁵⁰² and displays a sense of national identity and belonging to England which is reminiscent of Mrs Carter's attitude.

Since his *W-world* revolves in large parts around food and specifically British food, the Carters' dinner even suggests a provisional actualisation of his *W-world*. Throughout the story, Clovis has repeatedly expressed his homesickness in relation to British food, which is "what he missed most from England"⁵⁰³. His longing for British meals is directly connected to his foster mother, who was employed as "a cook in a big house"⁵⁰⁴ and seems to have provided him with nurturing food all his life. Clovis thus links food with place, and British food with home.⁵⁰⁵ The fulfilment of his longing seems to be within reach when he visits the Carters and sees "a most comforting sight"⁵⁰⁶ through the window:

The Carters were having supper, sitting around a large table spread with a clean white cloth. He could see Mrs Carter – a kind-looking plump woman in a blue dress with frilly sleeves, serving something onto pudding plates. A pink blancmange; Clovis could see it shaking a little on the dish and his mouth watered. *Shape* his foster mother had called it.⁵⁰⁷

501 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 106, my emphasis.

502 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 115, my emphasis.

503 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 19.

504 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 17.

505 The connection between food and home is a recurring motif in children's literature: "When the character of a children's book departs from home (a necessary part of initiation), food can serve as a link back home. Since food emphasizes affinity, 'own' food, food from home is especially important". Maria Nikolajeva. *From Mythic to Linear*, 16.

506 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 106.

507 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 106–107, original emphasis.

The boy's perception of the dishes on the Carters' table, which remind him of his foster mother's cooking, is at odds with Maia's, for whom the Carters' food is dull at best and downright appalling most of the time. After Clovis' experiences with the food at the hotel, which consisted of overcooked local food (bean stew) and garbage (fish bones), the artificial but comforting food at the Carters' seems to bring his *W-world* closer to actualisation. His perception of Mrs Carter contributes to this, since the woman appears as a motherly and nurturing figure when she provides the individual family members with food and thus appears to complete the family idyll.

As soon as Clovis enters the bungalow, however, his hopes of staying here for a couple of days are shattered and his *K-world* about the Carters is actualised. Similar to Maia, he imagined the twins to be "welcoming and kind"⁵⁰⁸ but finds them mocking him. He realises that Beatrice and Gwendolyn were the ones who had started the "high-pitched, merciless titter that had spread across the footlights in the theatre and set the other children off", which "had hounded him"⁵⁰⁹ ever since his last performance. Likewise, Mrs Carter is not the motherly figure he imagined when he looked through the window, but is rather dismissive. When she asks Clovis about the bedbug bites on his legs, he realises that "he no longer looked like a boy wonder on the stage. [...] His long hair was unwashed; his clothes were too small for him, and stained"⁵¹⁰ and he is made aware of the gap between his lived and performed childhoods. Even though Clovis shares the Carters' attitude towards insects (he blushes upon being asked about the bites and minds the bedbugs "just as much as Mrs Carter"⁵¹¹), which seems to vindicate Mrs Carter's entomophobia to a certain extent, he is not welcome in their bungalow. As an orphaned child actor with no prospects and no remarkable family connections, Clovis cannot increase the class-conscious Carters' social capital and is merely regarded as a "verminous stray"⁵¹², of whom the Carters want to get rid again immediately.⁵¹³ It is notable that both the updating of Clovis' *K-world* and the shattering of his hopes (and hence the non-actualisation of his *W-world*) at this moment are again expressed in terms of food. The pink blanc-

508 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 94.

509 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 107.

510 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 109.

511 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 109.

512 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 109.

513 The Carters' class consciousness is not only evident in Mrs Carter's continuous references to Lady Parsons, but also in her delight that her daughters have been invited to Olga Keminsky's birthday party. Even though "[s]he hated the Russian family", she acknowledges that this connection might bring certain advantages for the twins: "a count was a count, and who knew what might come of it for her girls?" Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 159. Unlike Mr Brownlow in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838), who takes Oliver in out of pity and regardless of his present state, Mrs Carter once more proves to be shrewd and selfish.

mange, which looked so appetising and mouth-watering through the window and was initially a signifier of a provisional actualisation of his *W-world*, has “sunk into a watery mush”⁵¹⁴. Its liquid state reinforces that Clovis’ hopes have been blighted by the end of his encounter with the Carters, and the initial illusion of a family idyll has been destroyed; the Carters do not present a viable alternative to him, not even a temporary one.

Nevertheless, Clovis’ initial reaction to the Carters and their food strongly suggests that his mindset and his *W-world* overlap to some extent with the Carters’; this impression is confirmed when he temporarily lives with Finn in the rainforest, where class barriers are removed and Clovis is presented with the opportunity of turning into a Rousseauian ‘child in nature’. Yet, for Clovis, as for Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, the tropical climate is an unhealthy one; while the Amazon, unlike India in Burnett’s narrative, does not turn into “a place of disease and death”⁵¹⁵, it is nonetheless presented as an “insalubrious environment”⁵¹⁶ where he feels too hot and where the hotel food makes him sick. When he is staying with Finn, his experiences with the natural environment of the rainforest differ significantly from Maia’s, for whom the lagoon turns into a kind of ‘secret garden’ and nurturing space:

When she had first seen Finn’s hut and the lagoon, Maia thought it must be the nicest place in the whole world. Clovis did not think that at all. He liked being inside the hut, especially at meal-times, but he found the surrounding jungle most alarming. The anteater lumbering down to drink like a grey tank sent Clovis rushing back indoors, and the chattering of the monkeys in the trees kept him awake at night.⁵¹⁷

Even though Clovis at first thought that he “‘wouldn’t mind living in a place like this’”⁵¹⁸, the boy, like the Carters, mostly seems to fear the natural environment and does not feel comfortable in the rainforest, preferring the interior and enclosed spaces to the spaciousness of the forest.⁵¹⁹ His negative experiences while touring with the Goodleys, his intense homesickness and his ‘family’ ties in England affect his capacity to appreciate the local flora and fauna and effectively keep him from permanently living in the forest or even turning into a ‘child in nature’ for a short amount of time. This suggests that one and the same envi-

514 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 109.

515 Anja Drautzburg. “‘It was the garden that did it!’”, 42.

516 Mary Goodwin. “The Garden and the Jungle.”, 107.

517 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 147.

518 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 124.

519 Unlike the Carters, however, Clovis does not reject the natural environment in its entirety. For instance, he “liked the humming birds”, which are among the smallest of birds, and “learnt to refill their bottles of sugar water”, which suggests that he enjoys certain aspects of life in the rainforest. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 147.

ronment, in this case the rainforest, can be ideal for one child but unsuitable for another.

Living in the rainforest neither actualises nor changes Clovis' *W-world* and instead confirms his homesickness; yet, Finn's plan of action proves to be a way out. Knowing that Clovis wants to return to England, Finn comes up with a solution that is a far cry from the idea of childhood innocence and incorruptibility that can be found in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Oliver Twist* or *David Copperfield* (1850). He proposes that Clovis pretends to be Finn temporarily, which allows him to return to England as heir to Westwood and Bernard Taverner's son, while Finn stays in the rainforest and joins the Xanti, his mother's Indigenous tribe. Given that the Westwood episode bears the strongest intertextual connections to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Finn's resoluteness about "never going back to Westwood. Never"⁵²⁰ suggests that he refuses to literally step into the footsteps of Cedric Errol. Unlike Cedric, who embraces his new social position as future earl and follows the summons of his grandfather, Finn does not yield to adult authority. He claims he would rather take the ultimate step towards adulthood and adult liability by "shoot[ing] them [Mr Low and Mr Trapwood] and go[ing] to jail"⁵²¹ when they find the lagoon than going to Westwood as rightful heir. Not only would this drastic step deny him any childlikeness and even threaten to turn him into a MURDEROUS CHILD, the intention to do so already endows him with a certain amount of worldliness Cedric lacks. While Cedric "is already good at the beginning, and whatever happens to him, he stays so"⁵²², Finn has been corrupted by hearing about his father's experiences in Westwood, which influence his *W-world* and determine the steps he is willing to take to maintain the current state of the TAW.

Where Finn is the opposite of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in terms of both his *W-world* and his actions, Clovis turns into a 'fake *Little Lord Fauntleroy*' when he accepts Finn's proposal and assumes his identity temporarily, introducing a variation on the "*dastardly plot [...] to usurp Little Lord Fauntleroy's place*"⁵²³ in Burnett's novel that is particularly interesting in so far as it stresses the children's agency. In Clovis' case, the intertextual relations to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* are even more pronounced and *Journey to the River Sea* explicitly draws on Burnett's vision of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD to lay bare Clovis' degeneracy and impurity. Not only does Ibbotson provide a textual reference to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* when Clovis arrives in Westwood and sees the servants lined up to welcome him ("he remembered that this had happened in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*"), which

520 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 132.

521 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 132.

522 Angelika Zirker. "Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels.", 59.

523 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 81, original emphasis.

evokes Burnett's intertext for a modern readership, but Clovis himself, with his "blond curls"⁵²⁴, appears to bear a striking visual resemblance to Cedric Errol. Even his return to England as Finn Taverner is based on the same premise and follows a similar trajectory as Cedric's in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Clovis, too, is to be brought to England as a prospective heir to live an aristocratic life with 'his' grandfather, which highlights Ibbotson's indebtedness to Burnett's story. Yet, for all apparent similarities, Clovis cannot turn into a second or an older version of Cedric.⁵²⁵

Unlike Cedric, Clovis is no longer an 'ideal(ised)', innocent child but has already been corrupted by experience. In his occupation as a child actor, Clovis has glimpsed the adult world and been exposed to adult topics and concerns. As part of the traveling company, he was under severe psychological pressure, knowing that he would lose his position as soon as his voice cracks, and was preoccupied with financial worries. He did not have "any money because no one ever gets paid"⁵²⁶ in the Goodleys' company, held himself responsible for the financial loss resulting from the cancelled *Fauntleroy* matinées and found out that not only the Goodleys but also "the theatre was losing money, and the management was threatening to cancel the second week of their booking"⁵²⁷. Where Cedric is protected by his mother from "things [...] that a little boy can't quite understand"⁵²⁸, Clovis is confronted with topics that should ideally be beyond his concern, such as work, money and debts, and has to get along without motherly care. Clovis' more experienced position is also evident in his conversation with Maia on the boat to Manaus. When Clovis explains his precarious

524 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 204, 15.

525 Elsie Leslie, the child actress who played Cedric Errol in the Broadway performance of Burnett's play, apparently displayed a similar amount of innate goodness that is also attributed to Cedric and was referred to as "An American Representative of Little Lord Fauntleroy" in the title of a contemporary newspaper article: "Fêted, petted, loaded with presents, accustomed to hearing rounds of applause greet her every speech upon the stage, Elsie Leslie would set an example of perfect simplicity and unselfishness to any child I know. She never speaks or seems to think of her theatrical triumphs. Playing with her little friends or talking to her many 'grown up' visitors, she never makes a remark about herself unless forced to do so, and she has read none of the newspaper notices which have appeared on all sides since she played Editha's Burglar, and created the part of the little lord in Mrs. Burnett's dramatisation of her beautiful story, 'Little Lord Fauntleroy'. [...] [A]t home Elsie is like other children of her age, except that, as I said before, she could set many of them an example both in good manners and sweet temper. [...] A resolve which she made about Christmas pleased me very much. Seeing that so many strangers were sending her presents, she decided that no one of her family must give her any, but they must let her spend the money which would have been used for that purpose on some poor children who had nothing". Anon. "An American Representative of Little Lord Fauntleroy." *Manchester Times*, 30 March 1889, 5.

526 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 16, original emphasis.

527 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 93.

528 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, 15.

situation and financial worries, Maia attempts to comfort him by reasoning that he still is a child and “‘[p]eople don’t throw children out like that’”, whereupon Clovis retorts “‘Oh, don’t they? [...] You don’t know what it’s like –’”⁵²⁹. Even though both children are roughly the same age, Clovis is the more experienced due to his working-class background. He seems to know what adults are capable of and that ‘being a child’ is no guarantee for being treated like one, which goes well beyond Maia’s comparatively innocent and unilateral view on childhood that results from her privileged upper-class upbringing.⁵³⁰ Belonging to the upper class thus contributes to keeping her in a relative state of innocence for much longer and allowing her to remain closer to the ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD as epitomised by Cedric Errol.

The way Clovis chooses to bring about an actualisation of his *W-world* reinforces the impression that he has been corrupted by his experience. Even though he views Finn’s plan with initial scepticism, he consents to it shortly afterwards and thus chooses the most comfortable way of bringing about an actualisation of his *W-world*, notwithstanding that its execution is morally reprehensible. It is striking that Clovis does not try to find an honest way of returning to England, but opts for betrayal and deception and, in fact, legitimises his actions by considering them as a mere performance.⁵³¹ In other words, his occupation as a child actor and exposure to the adult world seem to have affected and compromised his *O-world* and now guide his decisions. This also entails that as soon as Clovis adopts Finn’s identity, arrives in Westwood and proceeds with the plan as devised, he effectively bears traces of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, albeit in its least intense manifestation. Clovis’ negative empowerment as an impostor is based on his willingness to deceive the people in Westwood, and especially Finn’s grandfather, for at least a week through performance for his personal gain. Hence, Finn’s plan may be a pragmatic solution for the two of them, but it comes at the expense of childhood innocence.

Despite the fact that Clovis is not an ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD, the text suggests that he is able to attain what seems to be an ‘ideal’ childhood from his perspective, albeit only in his disguise as Finn Taverner. In Westwood, Clovis’ *W-world* is partially actualised when he is provided with an array of British meals he was longing for in Brazil and a more moderate climate: “It was cool. It was in fact very

529 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 16.

530 Her privileged position also surfaces when she reflects on Clovis’ working-class background shortly afterwards: “It seemed to her really sad that a boy should have to worry about getting spots – and that he shouldn’t be at all excited about travelling to the Amazon”. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 20. Her parents and later the academy seem to have kept her in ignorance about the problems her peers from the lower social classes have to face.

531 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 226.

cool with an east wind blowing off Westwood Moor, and Clovis drank in the air with relief”⁵³². In addition, those who prevented Finn’s father Bernard from having an ‘ideal’ childhood in Westwood by physically and emotionally abusing him are absent when Clovis arrives and ‘his’ grandfather has “obviously mellowed a lot since Bernard was a boy”⁵³³. Not only does “Westwood with its two lakes and its three woods”⁵³⁴ permit a neo-Romantic bonding with nature, it also provides Clovis with a garden where he is engaged in childhood play with ‘his’ cousins.⁵³⁵ He no longer has to worry about money or having to work; not only will he inherit the Taverner estate and fortune in due course, he is also given “a ten-shilling note for pocket money”⁵³⁶ by his grandfather he can spend as he sees fit. Through performance and Finn’s willingness to forfeit his place, Clovis is thus able to achieve a carefree life that is akin to Cedric’s in Dorincourt and transcend class barriers that remained firmly in place for Victorian working-class children.

Ibbotson’s text further draws attention to the gap between Clovis’ morally questionable form of empowerment and his seemingly ‘ideal’ childhood in Westwood by emphasising the performative quality of his actions, which contributes to revealing him as a ‘fake Little Lord Fauntleroy’. Upon reaching Westwood, Clovis’ actions are framed by a reference to the start of a performance (“[h]e took a deep breath as he had always done before he went on stage”⁵³⁷) he employs to deceive Sir Aubrey. Throughout the Westwood episode, further references to acting follow, and Clovis displays a continuous awareness of his performance: after having replied to one of ‘his’ grandfather’s questions, “[h]e looked at Sir Aubrey to see if he had overdone it but he hadn’t”, he “offered his arm to the Basher [‘his’ Aunt Joan] (which he knew was correct because of all the

532 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 203. Just like in Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, the fresh moor wind seems to have a beneficial and therapeutic effect on Clovis. The intertextual parallels between both texts are again striking at this point, as both Mary and Clovis ‘return home’ to a place surrounded by a moor in the English countryside after having been abroad, where they were exposed to what is for them an ‘unhealthy’ climate. As in Burnett’s text, which continuously emphasises “the physical benefits of the fresh (usually cold) air of Yorkshire”, Clovis is reinvigorated by the cold air on the Westwood moor, which stands in stark contrast to the heat in Brazil. Jane Darcy. “The Representation of Nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden*.”, 216–217. Similar to Burnett, Ibbotson does not further describe the moor: “‘Moor’ as a literary concept arguably belongs to Brontë, and Burnett refuses careful descriptions of Yorkshire’s wilder spaces exterior to Misselthwaite Manor, leaving the moors to Heathcliff, Cathy, and the public imagination”. Katharine Slater. “Putting Down Routes.”, 11.

533 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 224.

534 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 128.

535 Cf. Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 224. One of those woods, for instance, is the ‘bluebell wood’, which already evokes an idyllic image by its name. It is situated “[o]n a slope down to the river” and, in Bernard’s time, was home to woodpeckers and badgers. *Ibid.*, 149.

536 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 224.

537 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 204.

plays with dinner parties that he had acted in)” and is “wondering whether to break down and cry, a thing all actors learn to do at the drop of a hat”⁵³⁸, when he hears that he will not be allowed to learn to ride on horseback and his grandfather expected a tantrum. These references suggest that what comes naturally to Cedric, who always remains true to himself and is the “model child who behaves perfectly in every situation”⁵³⁹, requires a performance on Clovis’ part.

The gap between the ‘ideal’ and the negatively empowered child is further apparent in the encounter with Clovis’ foster mother, during which Mrs Bates attempts to put him back on the path of righteousness and restore his sense of morality. While she initially believes that Clovis’ experiences sound “like a fairy story”⁵⁴⁰, she is quickly disillusioned and distraught when Clovis relates Finn’s plan and the role he plays in its execution. Like Mrs Errol in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Mrs Bates turns into a moral guide, making Clovis aware of the difference between performing on stage, where “‘everyone knows it’s only pretence’”⁵⁴¹ and his position in Westwood, where Clovis deceives people for his own benefit.⁵⁴² It is striking that during the entire visit Mrs Bates addresses Clovis as ‘Jimmy’, evoking his seemingly true and ‘authentic’ self, which is the only one she knows. When she thus encourages Clovis to confess, she appeals to Jimmy, the child Clovis once was, and reminds him that *Jimmy* “‘couldn’t live a lie’”⁵⁴³. By the end of the visit, when Clovis plans on confessing on the next day, he seems to have temporarily regressed into his more innocent childhood self again, and Mrs Bates’ attempt to reinstate his bent *O-world* appears to be a success. The amount of truthfulness and sincerity Mrs Bates requests and ascribes to Jimmy also aligns Clovis more closely with Cedric Errol again. Yet, as the text posits, Clovis cannot maintain this identity, which is a part of his past: “He’d been Jimmy Bates, and then Clovis King and now was Finn Taverner”⁵⁴⁴. His multiple identities follow in succession and Clovis is unable to permanently return to his childhood self and resolve the lie.

His negative empowerment, which is still a far cry from Beatrice and Gwendolyn’s, is particularly evident when he decides to permanently adopt Finn’s

538 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 206, 207–208, 223.

539 Angelika Zirker. “Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s Novels.”, 54.

540 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 226.

541 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 226.

542 Knoepfelmacher explains Mrs Errol’s impact on Cedric in the following way: “‘Dearest’ thus continues to exert her control over the beautiful child who strikes all beholders as his mother’s mirror image. Because he projects her solicitude for others onto his misanthropic grandfather, she remains Cedric’s sole exemplar and prototype”. He even suggests that Cedric “acts as a mere agent of his mother’s presumed idealism, the victory the novel celebrates is hers as much as his”. U.C. Knoepfelmacher. “Little Lord Fauntleroy.”, 191, 192.

543 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 227.

544 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 225.

identity and turn his temporary performance of what appears to be an ‘ideal’ childhood into his real life for good. Following the visit of his foster mother, Clovis attempts to bring about an actualisation of his *O-world*, which revolves around “the thought of what his foster mother would say if he did not tell the truth”⁵⁴⁵, by confessing that he is not the rightful heir. However, when Sir Aubrey, who saw in Clovis “the grandson of his dreams”⁵⁴⁶, suffers from a stroke upon hearing the truth, Clovis declares his confession a jest, opting for continuing the lie to ‘protect’ his grandfather. He thus puts Sir Aubrey’s *W-world* over his own *O-world* and is aware of this when he explains to Finn “‘I know I shouldn’t have done, but if you’d seen his face...’”⁵⁴⁷. He thereby demonstrates that while Jimmy – the child he was several years ago – may be unable to live a lie, Clovis disguised as Finn is able and willing to do so. It is only when ‘his’ grandfather wants to legally declare him heir to Westwood that Clovis has scruples to accept Finn’s inheritance and identity permanently without the latter’s consent: “‘I couldn’t take it [a life as heir to Westwood] from you for the rest of your life. For always. How could I live in a great house and take the money that’s really yours when you live in a wooden hut [...]?’”⁵⁴⁸ Since *O-worlds* contain “a system of commitments and prohibitions defined by social rules and moral principles”, the latter of which “may be defined by the characters themselves”⁵⁴⁹, Clovis must have considered Finn’s final approval of and the mutual benefit deriving from taking his place as moral justification for himself, even if impersonation and defraud are not. The utilitarian solution to live a lie thus brings about the actualisation of Sir Aubrey’s, Finn’s and his own *W-worlds*, which resolves most of the conflict and brings about the ‘happy ending’ for all three characters, but comes at the cost of Clovis’ true identity. Similar to Finn, who declares he would be willing to go the ultimate step towards adulthood by committing murder, Clovis has reached a point of no return and will, for the rest of his childhood, remain a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, even if only in its least intense manifestation.

While the Westwood episode suggests that Clovis’ former childhood self Jimmy is irretrievably lost, he nevertheless regresses into a carefree childhood, which echoes the Edwardian sentiment and attitude towards childhood. His voice break suggests that he is gradually leaving his childhood days behind and cannot entirely be considered a child anymore. Yet, at the same time Clovis is significantly more childlike than Maia or Finn in his homesickness and longing for his foster mother and seems to be in need of the childhood he is offered as Finn

545 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 229.

546 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 206.

547 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 288.

548 Eva Ibbotson. *Journey to the River Sea*, 288.

549 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 116.

Taverner in Westwood. In this respect, Ibbotson draws attention to the fact that work as a child actor has proven disruptive of his childhood: when he should ideally have had a carefree childhood, Clovis was deprived of one and forced to live a precocious existence, so that he now attempts to recapture this time with whatever means necessary. As was pointed out above, the dubious moral behind Clovis' attempt to attain what he deems an 'ideal' childhood is thrown into sharp relief by the intertextual references to the literary figure of the morally in-corruptible Little Lord.

Including the Victorian vision of an idealised childhood in the form of Cedric Errol in the range of competing embodiments of childhood serves to highlight the neo-Victorian potential of *Journey to the River Sea*, which is, for instance, manifest in rendering the characters more complex and ambivalent than Burnett's 'Ceddie'. While critics have noted "a change in the depiction of children from ideal to real, from sentimental to authentic [...] in Burnett's writing [from *Little Lord Fauntleroy* to *The Secret Garden*] that reflects a more general development in the portrayal of children in the nineteenth century (that would go on well into the twentieth)"⁵⁵⁰, both Victorian and Edwardian narratives generally were very likely to display their child characters in a black-and-white fashion. This is also true for novels that were not written for children. In these texts, children tend to be either innocent, incorruptible and thoroughly 'good', such as Eppie in *Silas Marner* (1861) or Oliver in *Oliver Twist*, or wicked, depraved and 'bad', such as the Reed children in *Jane Eyre* (1847) or the Bloomfield children in *Agnes Grey* (1847). Even in Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, in which children are depicted as "much more interesting, complex and likeable"⁵⁵¹, Mary and Colin eventually are converted into 'good' and redemptive children, "who are the agents of rebirth in others"⁵⁵². Clovis, by contrast, clearly lacks and never obtains these redemptive qualities and displays a moral ambiguity that Victorian and Edwardian fictional children generally do not possess.

In Ibbotson's text, Clovis' ambivalence is highlighted by inviting the readers to compare him to Cedric Errol, whose simultaneous presence and absence haunt *Journey to the River Sea*. In Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Cedric is presented as an emblem of the innocent, pure and redemptive child, whose *W-world* is influenced by the assumption that everyone is good (like himself), even his misanthropic grandfather, and who consistently follows the maxim "'not to think about yourself, but to think about other people'", which, as his mother told him, is "'the best kind of goodness'"⁵⁵³. Throughout the story, Cedric possesses

550 Angelika Zirker. "Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels.", 54.

551 Angelika Zirker. "Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels.", 66.

552 Phyllis Bixler. "Idealization of the Child and Childhood.", 89.

553 Frances Hodgson Burnett. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, 119–120.

an infallible moral compass and remains an honest child, whose *K-world* is limited to a certain extent and who is kept in childlike innocence about the quarrel between his grandfather and his mother. Yet, where Cedric is philanthropic and sincere, Clovis is shrewd and corrupted. He disregards his *O-world* in favour of his and other characters' *W-worlds*, has trouble owning up to the truth and abandons his identity for a life as an aristocrat. In portraying Clovis as a more complex character, as is reflected in his changing positions on the childhood scale, Ibbotson reinforces that "many acts of adaptation involve some element of critique, transformation, revision, or destabilisation of its antecedent(s) and/or the ideas and ideologies of the past represented therein"⁵⁵⁴. In showing Clovis depart from the ideal of innocence that is set up by Cedric, Ibbotson questions and demythologises the notion of the 'altruistic, innocent and pure child' that is at the core of Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

7.6. Concluding Remarks

In *Journey to the River Sea*, Ibbotson juxtaposes highly heterogeneous and versatile neo-Victorian images of childhood. The competing visions in Ibbotson's novel use (social) class, gender and ethnic background as variables and are much more differentiated than the depiction of childhood in Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*, in which Hatty, a late-Victorian upper-class girl, is the main representative of a neo-Victorian embodiment of childhood. This focus on multiple child characters is in line with Edwardian writers' fondness of (smaller) groups of children, all of whom usually stay under age in their stories, as do the child characters in Ibbotson's novel.⁵⁵⁵ Moreover, Ibbotson revisits and questions the influential and enduring Romantic vision of the child as 'innocent' and 'pure' when elaborating on the childhood experiences of Maia, Finn, Clovis and the Carter twins.

Throughout *Journey to the River Sea*, Ibbotson stresses that a child character's position on the childhood scale cannot only be influenced by adults, but also by other children. Where Finn, in forfeiting his place as heir to Westwood, ameliorates Clovis' position, the twins, as MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED CHILDREN, contribute to worsening Maia's position. It seems that a deterioration through child-on-child violence is facilitated by a familial environment where the child is not fully accepted but from which he/she/they cannot readily escape due to parental/adult supervision and hypothetical responsibilities of care. The text

554 Alexia L. Bowler and Jessica Cox. "Introduction to Adapting the Nineteenth Century.", 2.

555 Cf. Adrienne E. Gavin. "Unadulterated Childhood.", 166.; cf. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries. "Worlds Enough and Time.", 11.

indicates that affecting the position of another child is contingent upon the acting child's position on the childhood scale as well as the means available to this child. Clovis, who is mostly a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD and widely lacks agency while staying with the Goodleys, is without any means and therefore cannot influence Maia's position on the childhood scale. Finn and the twins, by contrast, display a certain amount of agency and possess the required means to bring about a change (for better and worse) in Maia's position.

Even though various child characters claim agency and achieve positive and/or negative forms of empowerment at various points in the story to actualise their *W-worlds*, Ibbotson's reimagined past is not an environment where children, and especially girls, are free from adult power and control. As Kim Wilson argues, "[h]istorical fictions for children featuring agentic female protagonists are problematic in terms of the ideological framing of the text", because "[t]he past was a very different world – one in which females, as a general rule, accepted their status as inferior and structured their expectations in alignment with this belief"⁵⁵⁶. Yet, a story that avoids anachronisms and "provides an accurate depiction of female agency in past times would be abhorrent to a modern female audience that anticipates far greater freedom and independence"⁵⁵⁷. In this respect, Ibbotson seems to have struck a compromise by endowing Maia with a certain, if still limited, amount of agency whilst featuring Finn and Miss Minton as agents in expanding her realm of experience and allowing her to participate in adventures. Even Finn, the child with the greatest amount of autonomy and agency among the child characters of *Journey to the River Sea*, cannot escape adult power and control, as the summons to Westwood and his subsequent journey to seek refuge with the Xanti imply. In Ibbotson's text, all children are – to varying degrees – reliant on adults and sometimes even appear to be more confined than some of their predecessors in Edwardian children's fiction, especially those in Edith Nesbit's novels, which suggests a more realistic take on children's agency.

Furthermore, in promoting and celebrating the child's contact with the natural environment, *Journey to the River Sea* not only writes back to (Golden Age) children's texts, but also comments on twenty-first-century ecological interests. Despite the fact that "[c]hildren are still presumed to have a privileged relationship to nature, thanks largely to the legacy of romantic and Victorian literature, which emphasized – often to the point of absurdity – the child's proximity to the natural world"⁵⁵⁸, children's contact with natural environments nowadays

556 Kim Wilson. *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Readers*, 85.

557 Kim Wilson. *Re-Visioning Historical Fiction for Young Readers*, 85.

558 Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd. "Introduction: Into the Wild.", 6.

is rapidly declining, not least due to urbanisation and the dwindling of natural spaces. Alun Morgan argues that “[c]hildren today are more likely to be hermetically sealed inside (their room, their home, their school, the family car) thanks to a constellation of factors that are severely undermining positive contact between children, nature, and the outside world more generally”⁵⁵⁹. The story’s thematic focus on the natural world can hence be read as a response to children’s increasingly limited interaction with natural spaces. Ibbotson most poignantly illustrates this point in her depiction of the Carter twins, who shun the ‘green world’ waiting outside their front door, by making them the least likeable child characters and a counterexample that children would not want to emulate, which gives her story a slightly didactic tone. While the environment that is described in more detail is an ‘exotic’ one and typically beyond the reach of a Western readership, who is more likely to encounter alligators, humming birds and capybaras in zoos than in their natural habitats, Ibbotson’s story nevertheless has the capacity to kindle readers’ interest in the natural world and foster an eco-critical interest in preserving the environment and biodiversity in general as well as the Amazon rainforest in particular. In lending itself to an ecocritical reading the modern lens through which the past is seen becomes particularly tangible.

Ibbotson’s portrayal of the rainforest as a place of adventure and beauty also dissolves the spatial binaries of ‘self’ and ‘other’ often at work in Victorian and Edwardian children’s texts. In their texts, “[l]ate Victorian and Edwardian writers often suggested that tropical climates were largely responsible for indolence whilst the temperate climates such as in Europe were likely to give rise to vigorous and creative people”⁵⁶⁰. In *Journey to the River Sea*, Ibbotson questions these views by ‘reversing’ the plot of Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, sending the female protagonist on a journey from London to Brazil and rendering the ‘exotic’ natural environment interesting, appealing and full of life. In her story, she presents both the English countryside (however briefly) and the setting of the Amazon in thoroughly positive terms. For Ibbotson, both are different but equally valuable and beneficial in their own ways. Therefore, instead of promoting imperialist and nationalist claims of belonging by delineating the English countryside in more favourable terms, Ibbotson invites an evaluation of places on the basis of individual preferences of the characters (and readers).

The additional Victorian fictional childhoods evoked in *Journey to the River Sea* highlight Ibbotson’s preoccupation with the Victorian literary heritage. Implicit and explicit references to these fictional children point to both certain continuities in the depiction (or rather reimagining) of Victorian/Edwardian literary childhoods and the novel’s neo-Victorian engagement with previous

559 Alun Morgan. “Places of Transformation in *The Secret Garden*.”, 82.

560 Alun Morgan. “Places of Transformation in *The Secret Garden*.”, 90.

texts. Hadley argues that “the frequency with which Victorian figures, both fictional characters and historical Victorians, are revived in neo-Victorian fictions is perhaps more a result of the extent to which our contemporary perception of the Victorian era is influenced by the stories and images of individual Victorians”⁵⁶¹. Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden* have been identified as the most distinct intertexts of *Journey to the River Sea* and are certainly among those works of fiction that continue to shape people’s ideas about Victorian childhood. The intertextual references to Burnett’s novels, which are nowadays considered ‘classics’ of children’s literature and still widely read, simultaneously highlight the place these source texts still occupy in the cultural imagination, serve as a means of keeping those texts and the child characters preserved in their pages ‘alive’ and add a quantum of neo-Victorian critique.

561 Louisa Hadley, *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative*, 148–149.

8. Blighted Neo-Victorian Childhoods in Waters' *Fingersmith*

Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) is among the most successful and critically acclaimed neo-Victorian novels. It was shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize and for the Orange Prize and won the CWA Ellis Peter Dagger for Historical Crime Fiction and the British Book Awards Author of the Year award. It was also adapted as a two-part miniseries by Aisling Walsh for BBC One in 2005 and inspired the 2016 film *The Handmaiden*, directed by Park Chan-wook, which transports Waters' novel to South Korea in the 1930s. *Fingersmith*, Waters' last neo-Victorian novel to date, is part of her trio of neo-Victorian novels, along with *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Affinity* (1999).¹ Often considered in conjunction, these three novels explore lesbian identities in the reimagined Victorian era and have been "prominent in the emergence and development of 'neo-Victorianism' as a category of fiction and as a critical category"². By 2008, when the first issue of the *Neo-Victorian Studies* journal was published, Waters had "become arguably the best-known and most widely read of the various contemporary purveyors of literary neo-Victorianism"³ and was to influence critical debates for years to come. Her novels, which are by now core texts in neo-Victorian studies, have received extensive scholarly attention and established her "as a neo-Victorian writer with the revisionist agenda of dismantling the received notion of compulsory heterosexuality fostered by patriarchal ideology and of tracing lesbian practices back to the Victorian period"⁴. Yet, it was when she was writing *Fingersmith*, as she admits herself, that she "was at [...] [her] most immersed in the

1 Besides *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*, Waters has written three other historical novels to date: *The Night Watch* (2006) and *The Little Stranger* (2009), both of which are set in the 1940s, and *The Paying Guests* (2014), which is set in the 1920s. As Waters explained in an interview, after the publication of *Fingersmith*, she "want[ed] to move in a slightly different direction". Abigail Dennis. "'Ladies in Peril'", 51.

2 Kaye Mitchell. "Introduction: The Popular and Critical Reception of Sarah Waters.", 7.

3 Abigail Dennis. "'Ladies in Peril'", 41.

4 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 1.

19th century”⁵ and its literary and cultural productions, distinctly drawing on Wilkie Collins’ popular sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1860) and Charles Dickens’ orphan story *Oliver Twist* (1838), the latter of which, as this chapter suggests, is crucial for the analysis of childhood in *Fingersmith*.⁶

Written in the style of Victorian sensation fiction, *Fingersmith* is a novel with many twists and turns. This revisionist historical novel follows two seventeen-year-old girls, Susan ‘Sue’ Trinder and Maud Lilly, who narrate the story as alternating autodiegetic narrators in retrospective, and is subdivided into three parts, with the first two partially relating the same set of events, first from Sue’s and then from Maud’s perspective.⁷ Both girls are involved in Richard ‘Gentleman’ Rivers’ plan, according to which – as Sue is led to believe – he will swindle Maud out of her inheritance of the fifteen thousand Pounds she is to receive upon marriage. Accordingly, Sue is installed as Maud’s lady’s maid at Briar and is supposed to facilitate her falling in love with Gentleman and help him execute his plan to clandestinely marry Maud, only to commit her to a private mental asylum immediately afterwards. Yet, as it turns out, Maud, who has been groomed by her perverse uncle to become his amanuensis and aid him in his undertaking of compiling an index of pornographic texts from the age of thirteen onwards, is in on this plan as well and hopes to free herself from her uncle’s oppressive regime. Thus, despite being in love with Sue, Maud marries Gentleman and helps him commit Sue to the mental asylum under her own name before she is taken to London and, unexpectedly, to Mrs Sucksby’s house on Lant Street, where Sue grew up. It is then revealed that the entire plan was devised by Mrs Sucksby, who swapped her own baby daughter Maud for Marianne Lilly’s shortly after Sue’s birth and is now reunited with her biological daughter, whom she keeps in the house against her will. Meanwhile, Sue attempts to escape from the asylum, an undertaking in which she eventually succeeds with the help of Charles Way, the former knife-boy at Briar, and returns to London to exact her revenge on Maud. In the final confrontation in the house on Lant Street, Gentleman is stabbed to death in a commotion and Mrs Sucksby, who confesses having committed the murder to protect her daughter(s), is sentenced to be hanged. The novel closes with a scene at Briar, where Maud, following her uncle’s death, now lives on her own and has taken to writing pornographic texts herself. In the closing scene,

5 Claire Armitstead. “Sarah Waters.”, n.p.

6 For a reading of the intertextual echoes of *The Woman in White*, see, for instance, Lauren N. Hoffer and Sarah E. Kersh’s article “The Victorian Family in Queer Time: Secrets, Sisters, and Lovers in *The Woman in White* and *Fingersmith*.”, 195–210.; for a comparison between *Fingersmith* and *Oliver Twist*, see Hatice Yurttas’ “Masquerade in *Fingersmith*.”, 109–134.

7 Mark Llewellyn suggests that the change of perspective to relate the same events can be understood as “a signal perhaps of the need to re-read and rewrite the story at every turn”. Mark Llewellyn. “Breaking the Mould?”, 197.

Maud and Sue are given the prospect of a happy ending, embracing their lesbian identities and their desires for one another.

As this brief summary suggests, childhood only plays a marginal role in the overall sequence of events and is not among the topics that first come to mind when discussing this novel. The secondary position of childhood experience in Waters' narrative is reflected in the comparatively small number of pages dedicated to the early life of Sue and Maud respectively. Yet both Sue's and Maud's accounts, which are told "in the form of an autobiography", "start by relating the tales they have been told of their birth"⁸ and with information on their childhoods and upbringing. All of this, however, deserves closer attention, as the length of the present chapter suggests. Sue's childhood memories, with which *Fingersmith* opens, are referred to only very briefly: merely ten pages, i.e., less than half of Chapter One, are spent on relating her comparatively pleasant childhood experiences on the baby-farm-cum-thieves'-den on Lant Street, where she grew up under the motherly 'care' of Mrs Sucksby. Although Maud's experiences at Briar comprise almost an entire chapter, i.e., more than 20 pages, and are explored in more detail, they still constitute a relatively small portion of her entire account. In light of the subordinate role childhood plays in the narrative, it is hardly surprising that, while Waters' novel has received ample scholarly attention, the extant criticism rarely considers *Fingersmith* specifically in the context of its representations of childhood. The most notable exceptions in this regard are Marie-Luise Kohlke's two articles "Neo-Victorian Childhoods: Re-Imagining the Worst of Times" (2011) and "Perverse Nostalgia: Child Sex Abuse as Trauma Commodity in Neo-Victorian Fiction" (2018), in which she examines *Fingersmith* alongside various other novels.⁹ Yet, both of her articles predominantly focus on Maud's extreme experiences at Briar, where she is physically and emotionally mistreated and arguably also a SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD when she is introduced to her uncle's collection of pornography, from which she has to read to Mr Lilly and his male guests on a regular basis.

Besides Sue and Maud, Waters' novel also features a character who, despite being already fourteen years old, is still very childlike in some respects and thus also proves to be an intriguing character for an examination of neo-Victorian representations of childhood: the knife-boy Charles Way. Even though Charles is merely a secondary character, whose presence in parts one (narrated by Sue) and two (narrated by Maud) is severely circumscribed, he is afforded a more central role in the course of events in the final part (again narrated by Sue), where his childlikeness is often foregrounded and seems to be distinctly at odds with his

8 Sarah Gamble. "'I know everything. I know nothing'.", 49.

9 This does not mean that other scholars did not comment on Maud's and Sue's childhood experiences, but that their articles first and foremost focus on other aspects.

age. In contrast to Maud and Sue, he has not yet been subject of scholarly interest at all, neither in the context of childhood nor any other. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that *Fingersmith* has already been read through a neo-Victorian lens multiple times and been analysed from various theoretical angles, an extensive analysis of the novel's representations of childhood is still missing.

This chapter begins with an examination of Maud's childhood by first having a look at the information provided on her time in the mental asylum, where she grew up until the age of eleven, before focusing in more detail on her experiences at Briar, where she is subject to patriarchal/adult power and control and abused in multiple and cruel ways. It places special emphasis on her 'education' in her uncle's library and the (ramifications of her) cataloguing and readings of her uncle's pornographic texts, which highlight the formative aspect of childhood. The next subchapter starts with an analysis of Sue's childhood memories and argues that the swapping of Sue and Maud at birth contributed to commodifying her childhood. In this context, it is further suggested that the explicit intertextual references to *Oliver Twist* provide a crucial point of reference for the examination of Sue's childhood, because she grows up in a house that functions as both baby farm and thieves' den, which echoes Oliver's time at Mrs Mann's and Fagin's. The last subchapter concentrates on Charles, who can be interpreted in different ways: as a particularly childlike character and in the context of homosexuality, dramatising the blurring of the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Hence, this section proposes two readings which both take into account his time as knife-boy at Briar and his role in the third part of Waters' narrative, where both his childlikeness and implied homosexuality are particularly pronounced. It further maintains that *Fingersmith*'s intertextual indebtedness to *Oliver Twist* is even more apparent in the character of Charles and serves to reinforce his childlikeness. The closing remarks of this chapter briefly take Walsh's 2005 adaptation of *Fingersmith* into consideration, in which Sue's and Maud's childhood experiences have undergone significant changes and Charles seems to have lost (most of) his childlikeness.

Since Waters' text features two autodiegetic characters narrating their stories in retrospect, it is indispensable to comment, at least briefly, on the choice of narrative situation and its implications. As Barbara Schaff observes, all of Waters' neo-Victorian novels are written "as first-person narratives" and are modelled "on famous strong and articulate Victorian autobiographical accounts such as Jane's in *Jane Eyre* or Pip's in *Great Expectations*"¹⁰, both of which, like Sue's and Maud's, begin with the childhood experiences of their protagonists. She argues that the narrative form in *Fingersmith* is that of "a memory (Susan Trinder's [...]) interrupted by a narrative written in the present tense and thus crafted as a self-

10 Barbara Schaff. "On Not Being Mrs Browning.", 71.

consciously imaginative autobiographical account (Maud Lilly's [...])"¹¹. Both forms of narration are highly subjective and, due to being liable to potential (retrospective) distortion or misremembering, must not necessarily coincide with the events that took place in the textual actual world (or TAW). This is further suggested by the fact that Sue and Maud as narrators "are unreliably located in time"¹² and enjoy the privilege of already knowing the narrative outcome, possessing "foreknowledge"¹³ of the events, as Sarah Gamble puts it. She observes that this "foreknowledge surfaces in deliberately performative declarations that often take the form of provocatively direct address"¹⁴, which she exemplifies by using Sue's assertion "You are waiting for me to start my story. Perhaps I was waiting, then. But my story had already started – I was only like you, and didn't know it"¹⁵. Readers of Waters' text are hence "forced to rely on the perspective of characters who often know far less than they suppose", i.e., characters whose *knowledge-worlds* (or *K-worlds*) were limited when the events took place, and are "deprive[d] [...] of the security of a reliable narration"¹⁶, which reinforces Waters' indebtedness to *The Woman in White*. Yet, it is precisely the kind of subjectivity deriving from Waters' (fictional) autobiography-style writing and the use of autodiegetic narrators that is central to creating the Victorian sensation fiction inspired twists in her narrative, in which the childhood experiences of both narrators are often far from insignificant.

8.1. Maud: The Corrupted, Exploited and Abused Child

Maud Lilly is introduced as an upper-class orphan with a very unusual childhood, having grown up in a mental asylum before she was taken to Briar by her uncle Christopher Lilly when she was eleven. Her childhood experiences open her retrospective account in the middle section of *Fingersmith* and are largely confined to Chapter Seven, which chronicles her physical, emotional and arguably also sexual childhood abuse by her uncle, "a cruel, peevish eccentric who cares only about his collection of books and rare prints"¹⁷. At the age of seventeen, when the events in the narrative unfold, Maud still lives with her uncle at Briar

11 Barbara Schaff. "On Not Being Mrs Browning.", 71. For parts I and II, Waters employs an internal multiple focalization, telling roughly the same events from two different perspectives, Sue's and Maud's, implicitly questioning the reliability of the information readers are presented with. Part III, by contrast, uses a single/fixed focalization, employing Sue as focalizer.

12 Lauren N. Hoffer and Sarah E. Kersh. "The Victorian Family in Queer Time.", 196.

13 Sarah Gamble. "'I know everything. I know nothing'.", 54.

14 Sarah Gamble. "'I know everything. I know nothing'.", 54.

15 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 14.

16 Sarah Gamble. "'I know everything. I know nothing'.", 45.

17 Lisa Tuttle. "A Monster Sensation.", 208.

and has endured several years of abuse and mistreatment. This subchapter looks more closely at Maud's childhood memories, which appear to be closely linked to spatiality, "an important theme and prominent image"¹⁸ throughout Waters' texts, and focus on her time in the mental institution and on Briar. It begins with an analysis of Maud's time in the asylum, where she was supposedly born, cared for and raised by the nurses as one of them, before it proceeds with an examination of Briar as a site of violence, physical abuse and disempowerment. In this context, the library, where Maud "suffers what amounts to paedophilic abuse"¹⁹, is analysed in more detail. Finally, this subchapter takes a look at her uncle's practice of keeping her childlike in some respects during adolescence and explore the repercussions of Maud's traumatic childhood experiences, suggesting that her account distinctly draws on the Wordsworthian notion that "The Child is Father of the Man"²⁰, or in this case the woman.

Maud's account of her childhood starts with a prosaic reconstruction of her birth in the mental asylum to which her mother was committed as a result of absconding from her father and brother and bearing a child out of wedlock. This story is, as Georges Letissier maintains, a "fantasised – and, as proven later, totally erroneous – recreation of her own birth"²¹ that is constitutive of her somewhat troubled relationship with the woman she presumed to be her mother until adulthood. According to this fantasy, which is part of Maud's *K-world*, her supposedly mentally ill mother gave birth to her child while being strapped to a table, because "the women [in the asylum] fear she will tear me in two"²², before dying on account of blood loss shortly after Maud has been born. In the few minutes between the baby's birth and her mother's death, Maud is put to her mother's bosom and starts sucking her breast, initiating a bond between the mother and her new-born child. This scene of nurturing and intimacy is, however, disrupted by her mother's passing, which was anticipated by the constant, onomatopoeitic "*drip drop! drip drop!*"²³ of her blood during and after the delivery. When her mother dies, Maud begins to "suck [her mother's breast] harder"²⁴, a reaction that can be read as signifying her need for a mother and the nurturing qualities of the milk. However, instead of receiving more nourishment, Maud is plucked from her mother's bosom and hit by the asylum nurses when she

18 Claire O'Callaghan. "Sarah Waters's Victorian Domestic Spaces.", 122.

19 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 137.

20 William Wordsworth. "'My heart leaps up when I behold'.", 246, l. 7.

21 Georges Letissier. "More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.", 386.

22 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 179.

23 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 179, original emphasis.

24 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180.

starts to weep. This scene can be read as foreshadowing the physical and emotional abuse she will have to endure at Briar.²⁵

Yet, even though Maud's mother died in childbirth, as many other women throughout the Victorian era, when maternal mortality rates were high, Maud has internalised an interpretation of her birthing that positions herself as murderess of her own mother. The reader is presented with this information in the first part narrated by Sue. Upon visiting Marianne Lilly's grave, which she is forced to take care of, Maud claims that she is "to blame for her [mother's] death" and feels "as if I had stabbed her with my own hand!"; she even regrets not to "ha[ve] been stopped" from being born, which might suggest a form of survivor's guilt, but is in all likelihood used to stir Sue's sympathies.²⁶ After all, whilst Maud also admits at one point in her narration of the events in Part Two that "[i]t was my birth that did it [kill her mother]!", she also tells the reader that "it is an effort, to keep the note of triumph from my voice"²⁸, whereby she retrospectively assigns herself a murderous empowerment that goes unnoticed by Sue.²⁹ In her confession, she thus evokes the notion of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, who is implicated in the suffering and death of others, in this case her own mother, when she was still a new-born child and clearly unable to perform monstrous or murderous acts. This introduces an interpretation which arguably serves to further undercut the sentimental tone characteristic of the Victorian motif of women dying during childbirth.

Only in her adulthood is Maud eventually provided with the truth about her parentage by Grace Sucksby, who is revealed to be Maud's biological mother and updates Maud's *K-world*. As it turns out, Mrs Sucksby swapped her own child, whose existence she denied henceforth, claiming that her newborn had died, for Marianne Lilly's child Sue. Marianne, who was running away from her father and brutal brother, sought refuge at the baby farm on Lant Street in 1844, where she bore a baby girl. Knowing that her male relatives were about to find her, she asked Maud's biological mother to swap Sue for a "little motherless girl" to save her daughter from being taken by her father, promising to "settle half of my fortune

25 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180. In contrast to many death bed scenes involving dying mothers in Victorian texts, such as *Oliver Twist* and *Silas Marner*, Waters places a special emphasis on corporeality and thereby stresses her neo-Victorian take in this particular scene.

26 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 122.

27 This latter idea is reinforced by the fact that she has tears in her eyes. Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 122.

28 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 277.

29 Even as an adolescent, Maud claims to still have murderous fantasies regarding her mother, which are part of a non-updateable *wish-world* (or *W-world*): "I wish – as I have wished many times – that my mother were alive, so that I might kill her again". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 277.

on’ ”³⁰ the baby used in the intrigue. After asking Marianne to put her intentions down in writing – to make “‘it binding’” – and receiving the sealed letter, Mrs Sucksby takes “one particular baby”³¹ (her own daughter) for the swap, hoping to lay hands on Marianne’s entire fortune in due time. Just born, Maud thus is turned into a commodity in her mother’s scheme to obtain the money and subjected to a childhood marred by violence. Mrs Sucksby, who had seen what Marianne’s male relatives were capable of, deliberately placed her infant daughter in an abusive household, “condemning Maud to an even more degrading future than that received by Sue in the thieves’ lair”³². As a baby farmer, Maud’s biological mother seems to treat her own child much like the others in her care and quickly, albeit only temporarily, disposes of her own daughter when she can make profit.³³

Despite having been given away by her biological mother, Maud finds twenty surrogate mothers in the nurses of the mental asylum where she spent the first years of her life. She believes that they keep her, similar to the cat, as “a thing to pet and dress with ribbons” and is unsure about the full extent of their love, but she still considers herself their daughter, “sleep[ing] with each of them in turn, in their own beds, and follow[ing] them in their duties upon the madhouse wards”³⁴. By dressing her like a small nurse the asylum nurses seem to have fostered Maud’s sense of belonging to the asylum, which she retrospectively regards as her “first home”³⁵. Her nurse garb, consisting of a grey gown, an apron, a cap and a set of miniature keys, not only evokes the pre-Romantic idea of children as diminutive adults but must also have encouraged Maud’s identification with her ‘asylum mothers’.³⁶ The relationship she developed with the various nurses over the years seems to have been so intense that she is even

30 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 333.

31 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 334.

32 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 8. Mrs Sucksby has seen the amount of violence Marianne’s brother uses to merely obtain information about Marianne’s whereabouts prior to the swap when the woman who sent her to Lant Street in the first place explains that he whipped her with his cane and beat her back black. Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 328.

33 Mariaconcetta Constantini maintains that Mrs Sucksby’s treatment of Maud and Sue respectively allows drawing conclusions about the other orphaned or abandoned and commodified infants in her ‘care’. She claims that “[t]heir future acquires a darker tint with the discovery that Mrs Sucksby is an unscrupled mother, who has betrayed her adopted daughter and ‘sold’ her biological child”. Mariaconcetta Constantini. “‘Faux-Victorian Melodrama’ in the New Millennium.”, 30. The aspect of baby farming is explored in more detail in the subchapter on Sue.

34 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180.

35 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 248.

36 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180.

“undisturbed by the revelation that she is an orphan”³⁷, because she has “known the favours of a score of mothers”³⁸, who appear to have replaced and compensated for the lack of parental love and affection.

Following the example of her ‘asylum mothers’, Maud becomes a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, who torments supposedly disruptive and troubling inmates. The sparse information Maud provides on her mistreatment of inmates consists of having been “encouraged to [...] strike [troublesome women] with a wooden wand, cut to my hand”, and imagining herself “contentedly teasing lunatics until [...] [she] die[s]”³⁹ when she was about nine or ten years old. Her imitation of the nurses’ “sadistic treatment”⁴⁰, which is only fleetingly referenced in her account, gains an additional layer of meaning when Sue recounts her experiences at Dr Christie’s asylum, a place where she is drugged, plunged, “beaten up, gagged and undressed, and shut up in a padded cell”⁴¹, in more detail in Part Three. In Waters’ text, “the asylum functions as implicit prison”⁴² for its inmates and thus positions Maud as a warden, equipping the child with a certain amount of control over the interned female adults and reversing adult-child power relations. Maud’s complicity in the continuous abuse of the institutionalised women, both physically (with her baton) and emotionally (with words), endows her with a monstrous form of agency that was instilled in her by the nurses from a young age onwards, reinforcing that nurture – not a presumed innate depravity – resulted in her corruption and turned her into an abusive child.⁴³

At the age of eleven, Maud is introduced to her guardian and uncle when he visits the asylum to inspect the child and mandate her transfer to his house. As Maud enters the nurses’ parlour, she is told that a ‘gentleman’, a word the child does not yet fully comprehend, is waiting for her and then sees Mr Lilly for the first time.⁴⁴ Similar to Mr Low and Mr Trapwood in Ibbotson’s *Journey to the River Sea* (2001), Maud’s uncle is ominously dressed in black, wearing a black coat and black silk gloves and leans on “a cane with an ivory knob”⁴⁵, an object

37 Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 38.

38 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180.

39 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180.

40 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 15.

41 Monika Fludernik. *Metaphors of Confinement*, 559.

42 Monika Fludernik. *Metaphors of Confinement*, 561.

43 Although Victorian literature features children in extreme institutions, such as *Oliver Twist*, who spends a part of his childhood in the workhouse, the asylum usually is not one of them. Yet, the (mental) asylum is a prominent setting in Victorian sensation fiction, as can be seen with texts such as Collins’ *The Woman in White* or Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), and is first and foremost associated with adults.

44 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 181.

45 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 181.

that, for the modern reader, serves as both a threat of physical violence and a reminder of the ivory trade and the attendant exploitation of both animals and human beings in the nineteenth century. His “imperfectly hidden” eyes, “cadaverous” cheeks and dark-tipped tongue turn him into a terrifying and hideous figure from whom “[a]n ordinary child” – a group from which Maud exempts herself – “might shrink”⁴⁶. In contrast to Mr Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre* (1847), who is perceived as “a black pillar” with “a bass voice”⁴⁷ by a small and intimidated Jane Eyre, Mr Lilly appears frail and speaks in a “low, tremulous, complaining [voice], like the shadow of a shivering man”⁴⁸, and is sensitive to noise. Despite his supposedly feminine attributes and traits, he nevertheless turns out to be an unrelenting Victorian patriarch who will succeed in making Maud conform to his wishes by preventing his niece from actualising her *wish-world* (or *W-world*). A first hint at the scope of his patriarchal power and authority is given when Maud refuses to live with him at Briar.⁴⁹ Not only does he threaten to put her in a room, where, as he tells the child, “‘you may work yourself into fits’” and “‘no-one shall mind you’”, but he also attempts to intimidate her with potential starvation, evoking the scenario where he and his staff “‘shall mind you so little we shall forget to feed you, and then you shall die’”⁵⁰. As Maud’s guardian, he makes her aware of the position she will occupy in his household and outlines the adult-child power relations that will henceforth govern their relationship.

Mr Lilly’s stately home in the Buckinghamshire countryside, to which Maud is brought shortly afterwards, is in various respects no place to raise a child. Its name, Briar, not only echoes Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*, but can also be read as an allusion to “Briar-Rose”, more widely known as “Sleeping Beauty”, “another pervasive intertext in *Fingersmith*”⁵¹. It elicits the same sense of seeming impenetrability and hostility as the hedge of thorns in the Brothers Grimm’s version of the fairy tale, which “grew taller every year, until at last it surrounded the entire palace and grew over it so that nothing at all could be seen of it any longer, not even the banner on the roof”⁵². The walls of Briar fulfil a similar function in that

46 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 181.

47 Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 33, 34.

48 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 181.

49 Mr Lilly already exerted patriarchal control over Maud prior to their meeting in placing the child under the care of the asylum nurses to provide her with a “cautionary instruction in the dangers of female transgression”. Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 15.

50 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 182.

51 Hatice Yurttas. “Masquerade in *Fingersmith*.”, 123.; cf. Paulina Palmer. *Queering the Uncanny*, 85.

52 Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm. “Briar-Rose.”, 156. Charles Perrault’s version of “Sleeping Beauty” places a special emphasis on the impenetrability of the thorny forest. The change of

they conceal the misdeeds inside the house, where Maud, similar to Briar-Rose during her hundred years of sleep, is “‘kept from the world’”⁵³. The association of B/briar with imprisonment is also aptly captured in Mr Lilly’s self-created emblem, which is attached to all of his books to signify ownership and consists of “a lily, drawn strangely, to resemble a phallus; and wound about with a stem of briar at the root”⁵⁴. In Greek mythology, lilies are linked with Hera, the goddess of marriage, women and childbirth, and are symbols of purity, a connection that is also evident in John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1865).⁵⁵ By giving the lily in his emblem a phallic shape, Mr Lilly has not only removed its association with purity (and, by implication, innocence), but has also widely ‘overwritten’ its feminine associations by encasing it in briar, which seems to strangle/pervert the lily at its root, just as Mr Lilly is corrupting Maud. According to Lucie Armitt, this emblem hints at “violence of a sexual nature”⁵⁶ Maud is to experience in the library from the age of thirteen onwards and simultaneously points towards her process of corruption and her inability to escape her uncle. While (early) nineteenth-century floral dictionaries, such as Henry Phillips’ *Floral Emblems* (1825), picked up on the associations of the lily with purity and modesty, the flower was also increasingly linked with death and graves, as “Victorian men wanted their wives to be innocent and pure in thought and the lily was one means of expressing this

the castle’s surroundings is described in the following way: “within a quarter of an hour so many trees had shot up, large and small, all around the castle park, with brambles and thorns all intertwined, that neither man nor beast could have got through”. Charles Perrault. “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.”, 87.

53 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 30. Paulina Palmer also compares *Fingersmith* to “Sleeping Beauty”, arguing that Maud “lives, as if enthralled by hetero-patriarchy’s evil spell, at the country house at Briar waiting like the Sleeping Beauty for Sue to penetrate the thorny barrier of social privilege entrapping her and awaken her with a same-sex kiss”. Paulina Palmer. *Queering the Uncanny*, 21. By contrast, Kate Mitchell highlights Briar’s fairytale-esque qualities when it is first mentioned in Sue’s narrative, where its “depiction [...] shifts between fairytale and realism”. She argues that Gentleman refers to Briar “with fairytale inexactness” when he describes it as “‘a certain out-of-the-way sort of house, near a certain out-of-the-way kind of village, some miles from London’”, which also makes it a doubly secluded place. Kate Mitchell. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 133.; Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 23. In drawing recourse on realism, he reifies this description shortly afterwards in declaring that “‘[t]he crib in the country is a damnable place: two hundred years old, and dark, and draughty, and mortgaged to the roof – which is leaky, by the by’”. Ibid., 24. His description establishes Briar not as a homely place, but a derelict house where the darkness, draughtiness and dankness reflect the dispositions of its brittle inhabitants.

54 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 218.

55 Cf. Farrin Chwalkowski. *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture*, 256. The title of Ruskin’s second lecture, “Lilies: Of Queen’s Gardens”, which is about the role and duties of women, draws on the lily symbolism.

56 Lucie Armitt. *Twentieth-Century Gothic*, 131.

on a woman's grave"⁵⁷. The lily's associations with death arguably hint at Maud's death-in-life situation at Briar and might be read as signifying the end (or 'death') of her childhood. Briar as both the name of the house and in the shape of the plant in Mr Lilly's emblem foreshadows Maud's imprisonment and isolation and bears testimony to her corruption.⁵⁸

Maud's first impression of Briar constructs it as a Gothic place of danger and gloom.⁵⁹ The first part of the house she sees is its front door, "split down the middle into two high, bulging leaves", which "are tugged from within and seem to tremble"⁶⁰. While the leaves evoke the natural world, hinting at the (unlikely) possibility that Briar might turn out to be a place for a child after all given the prevailing connection between children and natural spaces in the Western imagination, the impression of trembling doors seems to reflect the child's bewildered inner state. As soon as Maud is led inside the house by Briar's steward Mr Way, Gothic elements abound. The darkness filling the interior of the mansion appears as an animate presence, "lap[ping] at [...] [her] buff gown"⁶¹, and is gradually closing in on her when the doors are shut behind her, eliciting notions of being absorbed, swallowed and consumed by the house.⁶² Similar to Mary Lennox in Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), Maud arrives at a manor house that "seems awful to me – the ceilings high, the walls [...] filled with portraits, shields and rusting blades, creatures in frames and cases"⁶³, whose

57 Vivian A. Rich. *Cursing the Basil and other Folklore of the Garden*, 58.; cf. Henry Phillips. *Floral Emblems*, 254. On the (white) lily as symbol of purity and modesty, cf. also Robert Tyas. *The Sentiment of Flowers: Or, Language of Flora*, 201. Eckart Voigts-Virchow implicitly also draws this connection between the lily and death when he claims that "[t]he family name, Lilly, invokes death and (ironically) also purity". Eckart Voigts-Virchow. "In-Yer-Victorian-Face.", 118.

58 Mari Hughes-Edwards observes that the imprisonment trope is prevalent in Waters' neo-Victorian novels. She maintains that her novels contain "literal prisons", such as "local houses of correction, national penitentiaries, and the lunatic asylum", and forms of "metaphorical imprisonment", where "familial incarceration and the incarceration of professional servitude" are dominant manifestations. Even though "Maud is not literally locked in" at Briar, "she is coercively kept there as a pornographic clerk" in the library, which constitutes a metaphorical prison. Mari Hughes-Edwards. "'Better a prison... than a madhouse!'", 134, 144. For a reading of Briar as a place of imprisonment and incarceration, see *ibid.*, 143–145.

59 Throughout the text, Briar is, as Mitchell observes, "rendered as a gothic stronghold" and, as Armitt suggests, presented as "a traditional Gothic house" whose "interior [...] is [...] reminiscent of the sterility of Poe's 'The House of Usher'". Kate Mitchell. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 135.; Lucy Armitt. *Twentieth-Century Gothic*, 130, 131. For a reading of Briar in the context of the Gothic, see *ibid.*, 129–137.

60 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 183–184.

61 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 184.

62 Elsewhere in the text, the house is even personified: it is said to be "creaking, settling down as the maids went up", to have "opened its mouth, and is breathing" before it is seemingly "holding its breath". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 149, 221, 222.

63 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 184.

potential for eeriness is increased by the gloom and quietness in the house, the latter of which is only broken by the regular chiming of the Briar clock and the servants' bell. The house's interior make-up with its many staircases, "dark passages and labyrinthine topography", as Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga suggests, "evokes a sense of loss and fear"⁶⁴. Maud's perception of her own rooms, which formerly belonged to her mother, complements her overall impression of the house as an unhomely and eerie place: "The windows rattle as if battered by fists. They are chill rooms even in summer, and it is winter now. I go to the little fire [...] and stand and shiver"⁶⁵. The violent and noisy rattling of the windows and coolness of the semi-dark rooms contribute to Maud's sense of unease and dread and foreshadow the overall lack of concern for her physical and emotional wellbeing at her uncle's house.⁶⁶

In *Fingersmith*, Briar is first and foremost a place of patriarchal rule and domination, where both women and children are subjugated and coerced into obedience. Maud's uncle repeatedly uses the seeming transgressiveness and presumed lunacy of Maud's mother to force the child into submission. According to Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben, the portrait of Marianne Lilly, which Maud was given in the asylum as soon as she was "old enough to reason"⁶⁷, serves this purpose. They argue that "the young Maud Lilly is made to wear the miniature portrait of her supposedly lunatic mother to instil discipline and obedience forcibly and continuously remind her of the punishment that awaits female rebellion against her uncle's punitive regime"⁶⁸. The crystal glass and the napkin ring used during dinner are employed in a similar fashion and function as mementos and explicit warnings of female transgression: "I am served it [wine] in a crystal glass engraved with an M. The ring of silver that holds

64 Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga. *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, 156.

65 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 185.

66 The small fire and coldness of her rooms qualify as a form of neglect that is only ameliorated when Sue comes to Briar and "has Margaret bring extra coals for my fires, from Mr Way. Such a simple thing to do! – and yet no-one has thought to do it before, for my sake; even I have not thought to do it; and so I have gone cold, through seven winters". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 253.

67 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 180.

68 Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. "Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters.", 23. Before long, however, Maud starts to "keep her portrait in a little wooden box beside my bed" and 'kisses it goodnight' by whispering "I hate you", projecting her hatred onto the picture of her mother, which, as Nadine Muller argues, was evoked by the "continually present fear" of inheriting her mother's madness. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 197.; Nadine Muller. "Not my Mother's Daughter.", 114. The idea of hereditary mental illness can also be found in Victorian novels; in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Mr Rochester explains Bertha Mason's alleged madness with her family history: "'she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!'" Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*, 290.

my napkin is marked a tarnished black with the same initial. They are to keep me mindful, not of my name, but of that of my mother; which was Marianne”⁶⁹. Maud is also compelled to take care of her mother’s grave, “a solitary grey stone among so many white” standing “in the loneliest spot of all that lonely park”⁷⁰, whose position, colour and plainness emphasise Marianne’s marginal position in the Lilly family and serve as a constant physical reminder of her premature death in the asylum. Throughout Maud’s childhood, the ‘absent presence’ of her mother in the form of objects and places and the narrative of her presumed lunacy are used as reminders and scare tactics. They contribute to establishing Briar as “the embodiment of the patriarchal system that makes women wholly dependent on and victims of their male relatives”⁷¹ should they defy patriarchal rule.

At Briar, Maud also experiences a more palpable form of subjugation that comes in the shape of punishments and severe physical abuse. Her uncle, who has set his mind on training Maud to become his amanuensis, forces her to wear white kid gloves, which later on “are intended to prevent Maud’s ‘coarse fingers’ from touching her uncle’s books” and come to “denote her physical encasement in the role of secretary [...] and imply passivity”⁷². In *Fingersmith*, the gloves Maud is made to wear thus symbolise female confinement, defeat and submission. As soon as Maud leaves the asylum, she is provided with a pair of prickly wool gloves by Mr Lilly’s housekeeper Mrs Stiles, which she tears from her hands soon afterwards, defying her uncle’s orders and updating her *W-world*.⁷³ When she is taken to her uncle’s library, *the* place and arguably even the centre of patriarchal power and control at Briar, with ungloved hands after her arrival, her uncle reprimands and punishes Maud. Claiming that this is “[a]n unhappy beginning”, he explains that the gloves are meant to soften her hands and demonstrates “‘how we make children’s hands soft, that are kept out of their gloves’”⁷⁴. In a violent scene where Mrs Stiles holds Maud’s arms by the wrist, her uncle takes out “a line of metal beads, bound tight with silk”, which are used for “keeping down springing pages” of books, and “brings it smartly down upon my dimpling knuckles”⁷⁵, leaving the eleven-year-old child weeping. Notably, the item used to whip Maud’s hands to ensure that she “‘shan’t forget the gloves in future’” is connected to books and in particular the collection of pornographic texts her uncle keeps in the library, pointing towards the engagement that is to

69 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 196.

70 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 196.

71 Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga. *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, 158.

72 Claire O’Callaghan. “‘The Grossest Rakes of Fiction’.”, 562–563.

73 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 183.

74 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 186.

75 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 187.

follow once Maud has been “‘made quite tame’”⁷⁶. Mr Lilly’s first interaction with his niece at Briar, who, instead of being welcomed, is physically chastised, initiates the series of punitive measures that come to dominate Maud’s childhood and turn her into a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD.

However, the more severe and usually disproportionate physical punishments are carried out by the servants, who are Maud’s inferiors within the social hierarchy, and especially Mrs Stiles. Instead of comforting Maud after her uncle struck her hands with the metal beads, the housekeeper pinches her to stop her crying and continues pinching her throughout her childhood.⁷⁷ On her day of arrival, Mrs Stiles subjects her to further forms of physical punishments, including twisting her arm or stitching the kid gloves at her wrists.⁷⁸ These punishments usually occur as a response to Maud’s attempts to (re-)claim a (monstrous) form of agency, either through provocations or resistance, and hence her attempts at (re-)actualising her *W-world*. They consist of “repeated beatings, punishing straight-lacing, threats of starvation, and public humiliation”⁷⁹, which are sanctioned and approved of by Mr Lilly and part of his “brutal disciplinary regime”⁸⁰. Maud appears to vividly remember her deeds and the attendant punishments, which are “each fiercer than the last”⁸¹ and point towards their traumatic nature:

I am bound about the wrists and mouth. I am shut into lonely rooms, or into cupboards. One time – having overturned a candle and let the flame lap at the fringes of a chair until they smoke – I am taken by Mr Way into the park and carried, along a lonely path, to the ice-house. I don’t remember, now, the chill of the place; I remember the blocks of grey ice – I should have supposed them clear, like crystal – that tick in the wintry silence, like so many clocks. They tick for three hours. When Mrs Stiles comes to release me I have made myself a kind of nest and cannot be uncured, and am as weak as if they had drugged me.⁸²

These punishments, which are carried out for “perhaps a month [...] though to my childish mind it seem[ed] longer”⁸³, range from physical confinement to actual physical abuse. The episode in the ice-house illustrates the extreme forms of punishment Maud is exposed to at Briar, hinting at the possibility that her

76 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 187.

77 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 187, 196.

78 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 189.

79 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 137.

80 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 192.

81 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 192.

82 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 192.

83 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 192.

prolonged imprisonment in the ice-house and an untimely release could also have proven fatal and thus turned her into a MURDERED CHILD.

Besides being physically chastised, Maud is also subjected to psychological torments during her first night at Briar. Not only does Mrs Stiles scare the child with a lie about the allegedly sullen maid next door, who will “listen in the night” and has a “very hard” hand should Maud misbehave, she also leaves her without a light in “an awful darkness”⁸⁴, causing her to be gripped by fear.⁸⁵ As Maud recounts, she was lying “in an agony of misery and fear, [...] wide awake, sick, hungry, cold, [and] alone, in a dark so deep the shifting black of my own eye-lids seems the brighter”⁸⁶. The details with which Maud reconstructs her feelings and miserable state highlight the intensity of the nightly experience and the lasting effects on the child, whilst her fear of the dark, a common emotion in (small) children, reinforces her childlikeness and makes her a pathetic child. In the seemingly impenetrable darkness, her imagination begins to blend her current fear with her time at the asylum, intensifying her terror. She starts to consider the possibility that the maid next door might be “herself demented, and will come and throttle me with her hard hand”, before she “imagine[s] a thousand skulking figures with their faces at the curtain, a thousand searching hands” belonging to the “lunatics”⁸⁷ she believes are kept at Briar. Maud’s psychological terror is eventually ameliorated by Barbara, the maid next door, who must have become aware of the child’s increasing agitation and comes in with a lamp. She is the only servant at Briar who comes close to a motherly figure, comforting instead of hurting the child on her first day. She has “a kind face”, speaks “softly” and affectionately “strokes [...] [Maud’s] face” with her hand until the child “grow[s] calmer”⁸⁸, reinforcing that the *K-world* Maud was equipped with by Mrs Stiles does not correspond with the state of the TAW. Barbara even joins Maud in bed when the child confesses that she is afraid of the dark and of being lonely.⁸⁹ Young Maud immediately seeks physical contact and holds on to the ribbons of Barbara’s nightdress with her gloved hands as soon as the housemaid falls asleep, which she believes to be “the ropes that will save” her when she “tumb[le]s into the perfect darkness”⁹⁰ of the room. The comforting presence of Barbara stresses Maud’s need for love and affection she will not otherwise receive at her uncle’s

84 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 190.

85 Being left in the darkness without a light during her first night gains further significance when Maud, aged seventeen, sees that her uncle, similar to herself later on, sleeps with a light. Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 289.

86 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 190.

87 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 190.

88 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 191.

89 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 191.

90 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 191.

manor and throws Mrs Stiles' abusive behaviour and harsh punishments into sharp relief.

Most notably, at Briar, Maud also experiences a form of sexual abuse at the hands of her uncle, who has been modelled on the Victorian collector of erotica Henry Spencer Ashbee (1834–1900).⁹¹ Mr Lilly's library, a place "associated with darkness, obscurity, shadows, and secrecy" as well as "with masculine authority and masculine desire"⁹², becomes the place of Maud's corruption and mental defilement. As Maud finds out in due course, the bookshelves lining the sunless room house her uncle's expansive collection of pornographic and erotic texts to be indexed in "his *Universal Bibliography of Priapus and Venus*"⁹³ – a title that already points to the sexually explicit and licentious subject matter of his books. The Briar library thus constitutes "the centre of pornographic knowledge, a discourse of male power of which Maud [...] [becomes] the victim"⁹⁴ when she is forced to undergo a "'grooming process'"⁹⁵ and is initiated into her position as secretary at the age of thirteen. Yet, even prior to her exploitation as child secretary, the library becomes the place of Maud's 'education' and reflects the tension between (sexual) innocence and experience/knowledge.

The extent of Maud's corruption is already hinted at during her first visit to the library, which is used to establish Maud's sexual innocence. When first stepping into the library on the day of her arrival, Maud has a limited *K-world* about books and "know[s] only two books, and one is black and creased about the spine – that is the Bible. The other is a book of hymns thought suitable for the demented [of the mental asylum where she grew up so far]; and that is pink"⁹⁶. Accordingly, in her childlike innocence, she projects her knowledge about books onto the pornographic texts in the library when her uncle takes one book down from the shelf: "The cover is black, by which I recognise it as a Bible. The others, I

91 In the 'Notes', Waters explains that "[t]he index upon which Christopher Lilly is at work is based on the three annotated bibliographies published by Henry Spencer Ashbee under the pseudonym Pisanus Fraxi: *Index Librorum Prohibitorum: being Notes Bio- Biblio- Iconographical and Critical, on Curious and Uncommon Books* (London, 1877); *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum: being Notes Bio- Biblio- Iconographical and Critical, on Curious and Uncommon Books* (London, 1879); and *Catena Librorum Tacendorum: being Notes Bio- Biblio- Iconographical and critical, on Curious and Uncommon Books* (London, 1885)". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 549. As Onega observes, "Mr Lilly's Catholic background and his association with Henry Spencer Ashbee help characterise the depraved librarian as the first Victorian collector of pornography created for the exclusive consumption of gentlemen and catering for their misogynistic, pederastic, and sadomasochistic tastes". Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 10.

92 Kaye Mitchell. "'That Library of Uncatalogued Pleasure'.", 175.

93 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 201, original emphasis.

94 Barbara Schaff. "On Not Being Mrs Browning.", 70.

95 Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga. *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, 152.

96 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 186.

deduce, hold hymns. I suppose that hymn-books, after all, might be bound in different hues, perhaps as suiting different qualities of madness"⁹⁷. While she "feel[s] this, as a great advance in thought" at this moment, it is only later that she realises that not all black books are bibles and is able to revise her naïve belief that "all printed words [...] [are] true ones"⁹⁸. As Susana Onega puts it, in time she is able to move away "from accepting the received notion that the sexual practices described in Mr Lilly's books reflect universal and unalterable human behaviour", i. e., truths, to arrive at "the shock[ing] realisation that they are only crude metaphoric representations of patriarchal fantasies of domination and subservience"⁹⁹ meant to titillate and gratify 'gentlemen' like her uncle, which means that her *K-world* is expanded.¹⁰⁰

The library's close link with transgression and (sexual) experience is already signified by the brass hand with the pointing finger set in the floor. On the day of her arrival, Maud has to stand in close proximity to the door with Mrs Stiles' "hands like claws upon my shoulders"¹⁰¹, which seem to preserve her innocence with a firm grip by preventing Maud from stepping past the brass hand she has not yet noticed. Her uncle draws her attention to the hand shortly afterwards when Mrs Stiles has left the room and declares that it "'marks the bounds of innocence'"¹⁰². He explains that it was set in "after consultation with an oculist" to prevent curious eyes and "'ordinary gazes'" from looking at what he euphemistically refers to as the "'uncommon books'"¹⁰³ in his library. In this respect, the hand functions as "a permeable boundary", being "simultaneously a guardian of innocence and the gateway to knowledge"¹⁰⁴, and "underlines the

97 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 187–188.

98 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 186. It is striking that whilst Maud mistakes her uncle's black books for the bible due to a lack of knowledge, her uncle is convinced that his index of pornographic texts "'will be a veritable Bible'" for the students of the field, a blasphemous statement that signifies his moral depravity. *Ibid.*, 211.

99 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 16.

100 At the end of the novel, when Sue finds Maud in the library at Briar, she reads exemplary passages from one of her uncle's books to make Sue aware of their contents, which allows conclusions about her involuntary reading material when she was still a prepubescent child: "'How delicious,' she read, 'was the glow upon her beauteous neck and bare ivory shoulders, as I forced her on her back on the couch. How luxuriously did her snowy hillocks rise against my bosom in wild confusion-' [...] 'I scarcely knew what I was about; everything now was in active exertion – tongues, lips, bellies, arms, thighs, legs, bottoms, every part in voluptuous motion.' [...] 'Quickly my daring hand seized her most secret treasure, regardless of her soft complaints, which my burning kisses reduced to mere murmurs, while my fingers penetrated into the covered way of love-'" Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 544–545, original emphasis.

101 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 186.

102 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 188.

103 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 188.

104 Sarah Gamble. "'I know everything. I know nothing.'", 48, original emphasis.

duplicitous artificiality of ‘the bounds of innocence’ that paradoxically designate the child’s defilement”¹⁰⁵. According to Kohlke, the hand’s pointing finger gains a more sinister meaning in the context of Christopher Lilly’s perverted desires. She suggests that it can be read as “a phallic pun or substitute for the male member that, while never shown to physically penetrate the child, violates her symbolically and psychologically”¹⁰⁶ in later years.

Maud’s unfeminine education commences once she starts to submit herself to the “viscid, circular currents”¹⁰⁷ of Briar life. In the library, as she reflects, she is “not taught as other girls are”¹⁰⁸ and does not acquire the typical female accomplishments girls of her age and social position are taught by governesses. She is instructed by her uncle, who puts a special focus on teaching her “to recite, softly and clearly”, which he will later exploit to satisfy his and other ‘gentlemen’s’ desires, and on schooling her “in the hides with which books are bound”, “inks”, “the cutting of pens”, “the uses of pounce” and “the styles and sizes of founts”¹⁰⁹. Her lessons, however, consist “chiefly of copying pages of text, from antique volumes, into a leather-bound book”¹¹⁰ at her desk in close proximity to the brass hand she is not yet allowed to cross to practice neat handwriting. Once the book has been filled, Maud has to quietly erase the tediously covered pages to use the sheets again. According to Kaye Mitchell, “[t]he futility of the endeavour [of copying the texts and then erasing the transcript] underlines the extent to which she is merely an instrument of the archive”¹¹¹ or rather her uncle, who moulds her according to his wishes. In making her work in the library, he puts her under surveillance and monitors her progress; he punishes her for what he considers unacceptable behaviour, such as fidgeting, coughing or sneezing, which entail being finger whipped with the string of metal beads, while also giving her little ‘rewards’ in the form of clothes and the permission to join him for dinner in the dining-room.¹¹²

Once Maud is sufficiently ‘educated’, she is introduced to her uncle’s books and his index of pornographic texts. In her new position as his secretary, she is now placed among his books to assist cataloguing and indexing his salacious collection that, in turn, “‘will guide others in [...] [the] collection and proper study’”¹¹³ of the materials.¹¹⁴ Strikingly, her uncle uses poison imagery to des-

105 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 192.

106 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 194.

107 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 194.

108 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 195.

109 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 195.

110 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 195.

111 Kaye Mitchell. “‘That Library of Uncatalogued Pleasure’.”, 176.

112 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 195–196.

113 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 199.

ignite the child's (ongoing) psychological sexual defilement and corruption, and suggests that Maud's initiation is part of his act of poisoning and tainting, the child. Fully aware of the books' obscene contents, he introduces the books as poisons and himself as their curator, who is already immune to their toxic, harmful effects due to prolonged exposure but in need of an assistant as his eyesight is waning.¹¹⁵ Maud, whose occupation as assistant to her uncle is framed as part of her "‘vocation’"¹¹⁶, turns out to be "a commodity, not bought but rather endured for the material benefit and assistance she can provide to her uncle"¹¹⁷. The pornographic world of the library, which is to be her "‘proper sphere’", is, as he explains to Maud, not "‘the ordinary world’" where "‘men who handle vitriol and arsenic must do so with their flesh guarded’"¹¹⁸, but a special, even deviant, place where Maud has to take off her gloves when handling the books. As Gamble posits, touching the books with ungloved, bare hands "giv[es] her a physical connection to the explicit texts her uncle makes her read"¹¹⁹, seemingly enhancing the sexual gratification Mr Lilly derives from the private readings he forces her to participate in on a regular basis.

Unbeknownst to Maud, her corruption and defilement already commenced prior to her authorised transgression into the library. As her uncle explains, he has "touched [...] [her] lip with poison"¹²⁰ – a highly sexualised image – before her 'official' initiation when he compelled Maud to stand in front of and read to the gentlemen he occasionally entertains at Briar. Maud recounts these readings in the following way:

I read from foreign texts, not understanding the matter I am made to recite; and the gentlemen [...] watch me strangely [...]. When I have finished, at my uncle's instruction I curtsy. [...] The gentlemen clap, then come to shake or stroke my hand. They tell me, often, how rare I am. I believe myself a kind of prodigy, and pink under their gazes.¹²¹

114 David Amigoni observes that "Maud's position echoes that of Romola, the eponymous heroine of George Eliot's historical novel (1862–3) set in fourteenth-century Florence. In the same way that Romola assists her blind father with his scholarly labours, Maud assists her cruel, ageing uncle with his scholarly endeavours", which are, however, of a very different kind. David Amigoni. *Victorian Literature*, 179.

115 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 198–199. According to Onega, Mr Lilly thus eventually not only "transform[ed] her [Maud] into a sexual object for himself and his guests" but also into a "continuator of his life task as 'a curator of poisons'". Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 15.

116 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 198.

117 Mark Llewellyn. "Breaking the Mould?", 203.

118 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 199.

119 Sarah Gamble. "'I know everything. I know nothing'.", 48.

120 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 199.

121 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 198.

As Kohlke maintains, Mr Lilly and his “bibliophile guests [...] are clearly aroused by Maud’s embodiment/performance of corrupted innocence, a staple figure of both Gothic and pornographic discourse”¹²², and by “what may justifiably be called her child ‘sex work’”¹²³. Maud’s limited *K-world* (her lack of the knowledge of the languages she is made to read and recite and the nature of the books) prevents her from understanding the texts’ contents and results in her erroneous assumption that she is a “prodigy”. Only when her *K-world* is adjusted and expanded in the library and she actually holds one of her uncle’s books – Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti Mirabeau’s *The Curtain Drawn Up, or the Education of Laura* (1786) – in her hands, does she begin to comprehend what she has been reading to her uncle and his guests and interprets their gestures and praise in a different way.¹²⁴

In *Fingersmith*, Maud’s transformation from (sexually) innocent to experienced child is used to comment on Victorian legal definitions of the child. In forcing a thirteen-year-old to recite and read pornographic texts in front of grown men and making her an object of sexual desire, “Waters draws attention to ongoing debates surrounding the legal age of sexual consent”¹²⁵. Around 1857, the year Maud must have been thirteen, the legal age of consent for girls was, as stipulated by the Offences Against the Person Act of 1828, twelve years before it was first raised to thirteen in 1875 and then to sixteen in 1885. Despite being legally considered a woman, Maud is, as Claire O’Callaghan asserts, “physically still a child, a point she emphasizes by commenting, ‘I have not yet begun to bleed as women do’”¹²⁶ or “[m]y cheek is as round a child’s, and my voice is high”¹²⁷. Maud’s emphasis on being a prepubescent child maximises the impact of her abuse narrative for today’s readers, for whom a thirteen-year-old is far from being a consenting adult, and criticises the shockingly low female age of consent in mid-century Victorian England. Maud underscores her childlike (sexual) in-

122 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 137.

123 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 192. Kohlke further suggests that “[t]he child Maud becomes a fulcrum of desire for readers inside and outside the text precisely because she is *made to embody* the alluringly transgressive combination of child purity/ignorance and intense sensuality/sexualisation”. Ibid., 193, original emphasis.

124 As Waters states in the ‘Notes’ section of her novel, “[a]ll of the texts cited by Maud are real” and “include: *The Festival of the Passions*, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, *The Curtain Drawn Up*, *The Bagnio Miscellany*, *The Birchen Bouquet*, and *The Lustful Turk*”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 549. While Waters as a writer of historical fiction “underlines the accuracy of her detail and places the strength of her ‘truthfulness’ on the existence of these and other texts”, their existence also affords readers with the opportunity to understand the full extent of Maud’s psychological sexual abuse, as they could have a look at the texts that are only mentioned by title in Chapter Seven. Mark Llewellyn. “Breaking the Mould?”, 205.

125 Claire O’Callaghan. “‘The Grossest Rakes of Fiction’.”, 564.

126 Claire O’Callaghan. “‘The Grossest Rakes of Fiction’.”, 564.

127 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 198.

nocence further by likening her introduction to the pornographic texts, which signify her loss of innocence, to the withering of a white flower (“So white blooms blush, before they curl and tumble”¹²⁸), whereby the colour signifies innocence and purity and the withering evokes the notion of a woman’s deflowering. Maud’s childlikeness is further evoked by being silenced by her uncle, who, like a paedophile, swears the thirteen-year-old into secrecy, which first and foremost serves to preserve his own ‘respectability’: “‘Keep this from others. Remember the rareness of our work. It will seem queer, to the eyes and ears of the untutored. They will think you tainted, should you tell. You understand me? I have touched your lip with poison, Maud. Remember’”¹²⁹. He rhetorically renders the child, who is now to receive “‘the larger dose’”¹³⁰ of ‘poison’ in the library, complicit in her own defilement, just as he before made her the “victim of her *own* desires”¹³¹ in claiming that she must want to be harmed and “‘must like to be struck’”¹³² by her uncle and his servants.

Among the immediate ramifications of Maud’s psychological sexual abuse via the reading and cataloguing of her uncle’s pornographic texts are her sexual/rape fantasies. Maud’s initial reaction to the texts reinforces that her uncle “is indifferent to her age, the effects of the materials on Maud, or, indeed, how they will shape her future”¹³³, fostering the child’s sexual precocity for his own benefit. Being exposed to the materials and required to overcome feelings of shame and modesty, Maud explains that

[t]he books fill me, at first, with a kind of horror: for it seems a frightful thing, that children, in becoming women and men, should do as they describe – get lusts, grow secret limbs and cavities, be prone to fevers, to crises, seek nothing but the endless joining together of smarting flesh. I imagine my mouth, stopped up with kisses. I imagine the parting of my legs. I imagine myself fingered and pierced... I am thirteen, as I have said. The fear gives way to restlessness[.]¹³⁴

128 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 198.

129 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 199. As Letissier suggests, “[w]ith Lilly, Waters offers her readers a peep through the keyhole of Victorian respectability to lay bare the double standard maintained by some would-be eminent gentlemen. Christopher Lilly is the chief agent of the subversion of the Victorian ideal of the sanctity of home”. Georges Letissier. “More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.”, 386. Richard Rivers even identifies Maud’s uncle as “the worst kind [of villain], for he keeps to his own house, where his villainy passes as an old man’s quirk”. Among his servants, Mr Lilly undoubtedly is seen as a gentleman, as is evident when Maud uses the word “‘cunt’” to refer to Barbara’s vagina, claiming to have learned the word from her uncle, and Barbara accuses her of lying on the grounds that Mr Lilly is “‘a gentleman’”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 224, 200.

130 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 199.

131 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Perverse Nostalgia.”, 192, original emphasis.

132 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 193.

133 Claire O’Callaghan. “‘The Grossest Rakes of Fiction’.”, 564.

134 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 200.

Clearly, “[t]he words ‘fingering and piercing’ imply physical penetration, but here Maud describes emotional and spiritual penetration”, which can be regarded as another “marker of the loss of childhood innocence”¹³⁵. In contrast to Sugar’s childhood abuse in Michel Faber’s *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), who was turned into a prostitute at the age of thirteen by her own mother and sexually abused by a “fat old man with [...] hairy hands” who “poked and prodded between her legs” with his fingers and left her with “inflamed genitals”¹³⁶, Maud’s penetration is symbolic.¹³⁷ Unlike other (neo-Victorian) texts, *Fingersmith* “never transgresses so far as to imagine actual incest by the abuser or his pimping of Maud to others”¹³⁸. Instead, as Kohlke suggests, “[t]he narrative’s visual elision” of child sexual abuse “conscripts the reader into thinking the unthinkable – vicariously violating the taboos of both rape and paedophilia – as the text performs the neo-Victorian’s simultaneous fascination and consternation with their transgression”¹³⁹. In this context, the ellipsis in Maud’s narrative following the words “fingering and piercing” points to other paedophilic forms of penetration, rape and abuse that occupy Maud’s imagination and which are left for the reader to imagine.

The fact that Mr Lilly refrains from sexually defiling his niece through actual penetration is in and of itself remarkable, given that incest or procuration “would constitute a logical development in line with criminological understandings of patterns of habitual abuse as well as prevalent storylines of Victorian pornographic texts”¹⁴⁰. Rather, he seems to keep Maud in different states of purity to satisfy his paedophilic desires. When he mandates Maud’s transfer to Briar, he keeps her unblemished in mind and body by declaring the space beyond the pointing finger forbidden territory until Maud is thirteen and ‘ready’/sufficiently ‘educated’ to enter the library.¹⁴¹ Once she is permitted to fully enter the library, an act that signifies transgression and results in Maud’s psychological sexual abuse, he maintains her sexual purity by keeping her virginal. In abstaining from committing a reciprocal act of transgression and experiencing a one-time ‘pleasure’ by penetrating her, Mr Lilly keeps her bodily pure for a prolonged

135 Claire O’Callaghan. “‘The Grossest Rakes of Fiction’”, 564.

136 Michel Faber. *The Crimson Petal and the White*, 580, original emphasis.

137 Cf. Eckart Voigts-Virchow. “In-Yer-Victorian-Face.”, 118.

138 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “‘Abominable Pictures’”, 161.

139 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “‘Abominable Pictures’”, 162.

140 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “‘Abominable Pictures’”, 161.

141 The gloves Maud is forced “to wear both night and day with an almost fetishistic persistence” already point at Mr Lilly’s endeavour to keep her in some form of purity. While they “showcase [...] the corrupting substances with which they come into contact, such as ink, blood and food”, they also protect Maud’s hands and keep them pure, from environmental influences (such as cold and warmth) and from direct contact with surfaces. Sarah Gamble. “‘I know everything. I know nothing’”, 48.

tillation and sexual gratification he apparently attains from the friction of virginity and mental corruption.

Maud's explicit descriptions of her abuse reinforce the novel's revisionism, give the depiction of her childhood a particularly neo-Victorian outlook and set *Fingersmith* apart from its predecessors of Gothic and sensation fiction. As Terentowicz-Fotyga observes, "[t]he abuse and violence that in the Victorian gothic is suggested yet rarely imagined in detail, [...] is depicted in all its cruelty and with a modern psychological sensitivity"¹⁴² in Waters' text. Even though Collins' *The Woman in White* also draws on tropes of mistaken/swapped identities and incarceration, "[n]either the rigid routines of Limmeridge House, nor the abominable behaviour of the tyrannical Sir Percival would have prepared the reader for the revelations of the pornographic context of Maud's secretarial work in her uncle's house"¹⁴³. In all its explicitness, Maud's account draws attention to the fact that privileged children "prove most at risk while ensconced within the purported safety of their family homes", which was "a conclusion the Victorians liked to reserve for children of the working poor, the criminal and the destitute classes"¹⁴⁴. It simultaneously addresses present-day discourses about child abuse in familial environments that often go unnoticed. The NSPCC (the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the UK) explains on their website that they "don't know exactly how many children in the UK experience child abuse", because it "is usually hidden from view"¹⁴⁵. In *Fingersmith*, the walls of Briar likewise conceal Maud's abuse. The family home is the place where Christopher Lilly "'can do what he likes'"¹⁴⁶, including inflicting upon Maud severe physical punishments and subjecting her to neglect and emotional mistreatment until she is "eventually bent into obedience" and "hide[s] her hatred and rage under a façade of meekness and imperturbability"¹⁴⁷, before submitting her to psychological forms of sexual abuse in entertaining his circle of gentlemen connoisseurs with book readings of the pornographic kind. Through the depiction of Maud's exploitation by Mr Lilly and his 'friends', whose *W-worlds* are updated during their visits at Briar, *Fingersmith* thus also invites "a reflection on problematic issues, which are more openly discussed nowadays but still require

142 Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga. *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, 157.

143 Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga. *Dreams, Nightmares and Empty Signifiers*, 163.

144 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 137. Various other neo-Victorian middle- or upper-class children experience severe physical, emotional or sexual abuse, among them Bernard Taverner in *Journey to the River Sea*, Juliana Farrow in Linda Newbery's *Set in Stone* (2006) and Sophie Rackham in *The Crimson Petal and the White*, which are written for a children's, a YA and an adult audience respectively.

145 NSPCC. "Statistics on Child Abuse.", n.p.

146 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 185.

147 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 17.

solutions (such as the new forms of pornography and paedophilia practised by unsuspected citizens in the age of the Internet)¹⁴⁸.

Maud's retrospective account of her childhood stresses that she is situated in extreme positions on the childhood scale. Early in life, she becomes a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD under the care of the asylum nurses and exerts power and control over the adult female inmates. This form of negative empowerment widely contradicts the innocence paradigm associated with childhood in the Western cultural imagination and reinforces that Maud, similar to the Carter twins Beatrice and Gwendolyn in *Journey to the River Sea*, is still a child in body size and lack of knowledge of the world but not in her actions. However, upon involuntarily moving to Briar, Maud's monstrous empowerment is promptly taken away and she is immediately turned from a perpetrator into a victim, first into a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD and later into a SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD. She has to endure various forms of severe punishments and abuse by her uncle and his servants, who prevent her from (re-)claiming agency, a step that children in neo-Victorian children's literature often achieve. Her *W-world*, which is spelt out towards the end of the chapter and predominantly revolves around her wish to escape from Briar, remains unactualised throughout her childhood.¹⁴⁹ Her consistent lack of the agency required to update this world implies that Maud, as a child, is bound by constraints that do not leave any room for autonomy and self-determination. Her situation thus changes radically once she leaves the asylum. With Maud's rapid shift from one type to the other, *Fingersmith* stresses that there is only a fine line separating these two categories where the child is the victim or the perpetrator of monstrous/murderous deeds and highlights that in Waters' text adults (and adult intervention) largely determine Maud's position on the childhood scale, firmly placing the child under adult authority and control. So even the initial monstrous empowerment is only made possible by adult authority.

148 Mariaconcetta Constantini. "'Faux-Victorian Melodrama' in the New Millennium.", 30.

149 The extent of her *W-world* is reflected in her childhood walks along the river that flows past Briar and turns out to be the Thames. Upon seeing a slightly overturned punt, she "remember[s] the Bible story, of the child that was placed in a basket and was found by the daughter of a king" and muses that she "should like to find a child. I should like it, not to keep it! – but to take its place in the basket and leave it at Briar to grow up to be me". When Maud is older, her longing for freedom is captured in her position at the windows to "gaze at where [...] [she] know[s] the water flows": "I stand at my own casement, for many hours at a time. And in the yellow paint that covers the glass of the windows of my uncle's library I one day, with my finger-nail, make a small and perfect crescent, to which I afterwards occasionally lean and place my eye – like a curious wife at the keyhole of a cabinet of secrets. But I am inside the cabinet, and long to get out...". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 204.

Although Maud is growing up eventually, her uncle seeks to imprison her in her childhood self by keeping her in childlike dresses and perpetuating the psychological sexual abuse via book readings under the male gaze in improper, girlish dress. Even before Maud's arrival at Briar, her uncle determined her dress by sending "his housekeeper with a suit of clothes" to the asylum "to dress [...] [her] to his fancy"¹⁵⁰, and has done so ever since. Accordingly, she has to wear gloves, is put into "a hateful, girlish gown, cut to the calf, and stiffened from the shoulder to the waist with ribs of bone"¹⁵¹. At night, she is "lace[d] [...] tight in a girlish corset" that is meant "to give [...] [her] the figure of a lady"¹⁵² and contributes to the sexualisation of the child. When Maud leaves her childhood days behind and outgrows her clothes, her uncle "instructs Mrs Stiles to cut me new gowns to the pattern of the old" even if they are improperly short for her age – something Sue comments on when she sees Maud's unseemly "odd and short and girlish"¹⁵³ gowns during her employment at Briar. The "short doll-like skirts"¹⁵⁴ Maud is made to wear by her uncle add "to the sexual frisson afforded by her readings, emphasising her enforced simulated childlikeness"¹⁵⁵ and hint at her uncle's paedophilic tendencies, who seems to consider Maud "an *ageless child*" who still leaves his library to " '[g]o and play' "¹⁵⁶ at the age of seventeen. The Romantic image of the child is evoked to satisfy the elderly man's perverse taste.

In accordance with the example(s) set for her, Maud appears to have developed a somewhat disturbed relationship with innocence, a result of her own childhood abuse. During her time at Briar and while fulfilling "Mr Lilly's wildest whims and often painful demands", Maud "has learnt to adapt her behaviour according to her relative position in the social scale: dominant with her servants and compliant with her uncle and his male friends"¹⁵⁷. Her dominant, even abusive behaviour towards the servants is detailed in her treatment of fifteen-year-old Agnes, her new lady's maid. Maud introduces Agnes as an innocent adolescent, "small, and slight as a bird"¹⁵⁸ and naïve in considering both Maud and her uncle kind, before she begins to draw parallels between herself and her new maid: "She reminds me of myself, as I once was. She reminds me of myself as

150 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 183.

151 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 183.

152 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 189.

153 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 202, 72.

154 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 17.

155 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "'Abominable Pictures'.", 161.

156 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 206, my emphasis.

157 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 17.

158 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 203.

I once was and ought still to be, and will never be again. I hate her for it”¹⁵⁹. Acerbated by her own involuntary and irreversible corruption at the hands of her uncle, Maud begins to abuse Agnes in various ways, for instance by pricking her knuckles with a needle, by hitting her for being clumsy or slow and “beat[ing] her the harder, the more [...] [she fancies] the resemblance”¹⁶⁰ between their tear-stained faces. She thus follows an abuse pattern where the abused becomes the abuser – a position she already occupied as a child in the mental asylum. It seems that Maud derives a “secret pleasure [...] from her sadistic treatment of those under her” and displays an “absolute lack of moral scruples and empathy”¹⁶¹, especially towards Agnes, which climaxes in her becoming involved in Agnes’ sexual defilement by Richard Rivers, hoping that this will enable her to escape from Briar and her uncle. Knowing that they “‘must get rid of Agnes’” for their plan to work, Richard intends to visit and abuse her at night while Maud is not to intervene “‘if she cries out’”¹⁶². Maud’s awareness of Richard’s intentions and her role as passive witness in the adjoining room make her complicit in the sexual assault of her maid, which she even begins to imagine in more detail as soon as Richard enters Agnes’ room before she “stop[s] up [...] [her] ears”¹⁶³ as if to ignore what is happening next door. While she realises only later “that Rivers had opted for a less irreversible, though equally traumatic form of ‘shaming’ the terrified teenager away”¹⁶⁴, i.e., oral sex, Maud realises that she would have permitted the rape of her own maid, humiliating her and turning her into a fallen woman.

Her abusive treatment of Agnes during adolescence reflects Maud’s perverted *obligation-world* (or *O-world*). According to possible-worlds theory, *O-worlds* usually comprise social norms, rules and values and “are determined by a social consensus”¹⁶⁵; however, Maud’s *O-world* is bent and does not correspond to the moral principles accepted by society. Unlike her seemingly incorruptible Victorian literary forbears, most notably Oliver Twist, who follows a distinct set of moral and ethical values – even if their origins remain obscure and seem to elide explanation –, Maud completely lacks a moral compass. Similar to the Bloomfield children in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847) or John Reed in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, whose corruption seems to primarily derive from parental

159 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 203.

160 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 203.

161 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 17.

162 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 237, 238.

163 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 239.

164 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 17.

165 Marion Gymnich. “Possible-Worlds Theory as an Approach to the Dynamics of Hans Christian Andersen’s Fairy Tales.”, 210.

indulgence and lack of intervention, Maud's twisted *O-world* is a result of her upbringing. She has been brought up in corrupted and/or corruptive environments (the asylum and Briar), and neither her uncle nor the asylum nurses have fostered the development of an *O-world* that conforms to socially accepted moral values.

The extent of Maud's (childhood) corruption is further evident in her claim of having become a part of her uncle's pornographic collection of texts by considering herself one of his repulsive books. She emphasises this resemblance in a conversation with Gentleman and highlights the sense of alienation and otherness that derives from her mistreatment and abuse at Briar, which surfaces in her uncle's peculiar attitudes towards his books:

'He will call us poisons; he says we will hurt unguarded eyes. Then again, he names us his children, his foundlings, that have come to him, from every corner of the world – some rich and handsomely provided for, some shabby, some injured, some broken about the spine, some gaudy, some gross. For all that he speaks against them, I believe he likes the gross ones best; for they are the ones that other parents – other bookmen and collectors, I mean – cast out. I was like them, and had a home, and lost it –'¹⁶⁶

Her comment not only reinforces the severity of her psychological sexual abuse in that her uncle must have made her read the filthiest and grossest pornographic texts of his collection, but also marks him a paedophile, who derives pleasure from his book-‘children’. While Mr Lilly seems to regard himself a saviour by providing outcast books (as “foundlings” and “children”) with a home, his intentions are not heroic but unsavoury. He collects the books as functional objects to satisfy “the lust of the bookman”¹⁶⁷ and turns Maud into one of his perverted/poisonous ‘children’ to enhance the pleasure deriving from the texts and turning an otherwise solitary reading experience into a performance and spectacle.¹⁶⁸

Maud's understanding of herself as a book also appears to shape and determine her sense of belonging to Briar. As Maud explains to Sue, she is “‘not meant to be taken, and touched, and liked’” but “‘meant to keep here, in a dim light, for ever!’”¹⁶⁹, which, as Mitchell suggests, reflects Maud's literal and symbolic imprisonment at her uncle's house.¹⁷⁰ She even supposes that her un-

166 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 218–219.

167 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 199.

168 As O'Callaghan maintains, “Maud is little more than an object created exclusively for men's needs and pleasures and thus represents the ideology of sexual objectification”, which arguably finds expression in the conflation of her own body with inanimate objects containing pornographic fantasies and her assertion that her uncle merely “‘considers me a sort of engine, for the reading and copying of texts’”. Claire O'Callaghan. “‘The Grossest Rakes of Fiction’”, 563.; Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 269.

169 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 124.

170 Cf. Kaye Mitchell. “‘That Library of Uncatalogued Pleasure’”, 176.

cle's emblem, the phallus-shaped lily surrounded by briar, "must be pasted upon my own flesh – that I have been ticketed, and noted and shelved – so nearly do I resemble one of my uncle's books"¹⁷¹. This idea expresses her sense of belonging to the library and signals her uncle's claims of ownership. Under her uncle's supervision, Maud has acquired a vast amount of 'forbidden' knowledge that is deemed improper for a woman of her social position and made her, as she believes, "as worldly as the grossest rakes of fiction"¹⁷², but simultaneously did not provide her with knowledge of the world and widely keeps her from leading an ordinary life beyond the confines of Briar.

Unsurprisingly, when Maud eventually manages to leave Briar with Richard Rivers' help, she attempts to destroy the site of her psychological sexual abuse. Shortly before her nocturnal escape, Maud stealthily enters her uncle's bedroom, takes the velvet-bound key to the library and her uncle's razor. In the library, she attempts to liberate herself by destroying part of her uncle's collection "in a carefully calculated act that is both malicious and erotic"¹⁷³:

I cross to my uncle's shelves and unfasten the glass before the presses. I begin with *The Curtain Drawn Up*, the book he gave me first: I take it, and open it, and set it upon his desk. Then I lift the razor, grip it tight, and fully unclasp it. The blade is stiff, but springs the last inch. It is its nature to cut, after all. Still, it is hard – it is terribly hard, I almost cannot do it – to put the metal for the first time to the neat and naked paper. I am almost afraid the book will shriek, and so discover me. But it does not shriek. Rather, it *sighs*, as if in longing for its own laceration; and when I hear that, my cuts become swifter and more true.¹⁷⁴

In selecting the book that marked the beginning of her sexual abuse, Maud identifies her actions as motivated by retribution for her blighted childhood. At this moment, she is, as Chi-Yun Shin maintains, "finally able to express her anger at the very thing that has defined her life – a secretary to the library of erotica"¹⁷⁵. In "[u]sing none other than her uncle's razor, Maud here is severing the link with him, breaking off from the life she had been forced to lead"¹⁷⁶, even if it initially takes effort to destroy the books. Moreover, "[t]he personification of the sighing book turns the cutting into a symbolic murder" whereby "Maud is killing her own enslaved body, which had been violated by the domestic rituals she was forced to accomplish"¹⁷⁷. Read in this way, the book appears to be an externalisation of her own feelings and underlines the liberating effects of the act.

171 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 218.

172 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 203.

173 Kaye Mitchell. "'That Library of Uncatalogued Pleasure'.", 177.

174 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 290, original emphasis.

175 Chi-Yun Shin. "In Another Time and Place.", 9.

176 Chi-Yun Shin. "In Another Time and Place.", 9.

177 Mariaconchetta Constantini. "'Faux-Victorian Melodrama' in the New Millennium.", 35.

Yet, despite having symbolically severed her connection with her uncle prior to her departure, Maud eventually returns to Briar and turns to writing lesbian pornographic texts after her uncle's death. This ending of *Fingersmith* has often been discussed in neo-Victorian criticism and appears to be ambivalent.¹⁷⁸ While Constantini, for instance, reads Maud's authorship of pornographic texts in the context of a liberation that is "achieved by gaining control over writing, which was the instrument of her physical and mental oppression"¹⁷⁹, Llewellyn suggests that Maud "tak[es] on the mantle of her uncle's occupation" in writing pornographic texts herself, which "could be considered a backward step"¹⁸⁰. By contrast, Kohlke argues that Maud, who "[p]resumably draw[s] on her own knowledge of child suffering from life and literature to spice up her productions, [...] not only commodifies sexual abuse – literally turning it into texts and cash – but likely contributes to the continuing discursive circulation and consumption of the abused child trope"¹⁸¹ in her writings. The ending also implies that Maud cannot entirely free herself from her uncle and her upbringing. Her assertions that she is the product of "'what he made me'" and that she "'shall always be that'"¹⁸², draws on the Wordsworthian notion that "The Child is Father of the Man"¹⁸³ and identifies childhood as a formative phase of life, during which she was exposed to a quantity of pornographic and erotic texts that still impact her adult life.¹⁸⁴ Maud's return to the library, the dominant place of her childhood abuse, and her occupation as writer of pornographic texts, in which she also expresses her feelings for Sue, can be regarded as an act of liberation and re-claiming to a certain extent, which is also reflected in her attempts to transform the place. While Maud has already removed the paint from the windows, cleared the shelves of most of the books and prised the pointing finger from the floor, "its threat persists"¹⁸⁵ and both the library as a place and Maud remain connected to pornographic discourse. In this respect, the text seems to offer a compromise regarding (the lack of) her childhood agency: in her authorial position, which is seemingly necessitated by a lack of viable alternatives, she at least is no longer an

178 The meeting at Briar, as Palmer argues, "echoes [...] the revised ending of *Great Expectations* that, though leaving their future uncertain, portrays Pip and Estella reunited in the ruins of Satis House". Paulina Palmer. *Queering the Uncanny*, 89.

179 Mariaconcetta Constantini. "'Faux-Victorian Melodrama' in the New Millennium.", 35.

180 Mark Llewellyn. "Breaking the Mould?", 205.

181 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Perverse Nostalgia.", 193.

182 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 546.

183 William Wordsworth. "'My heart leaps up when I behold'.", 246, l. 7.

184 This idea is consolidated by Maud as a narrator, who interrupts the account of her childhood experiences in Chapter Seven, legitimising its *raison d'être* (to understand her as an adult) in a direct reader address: "I am telling you this so that you might appreciate the forces that work upon me, making me what I am". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 191.

185 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Perverse Nostalgia.", 194.

object of the male gaze and has developed her own (narrative) voice. She has appropriated the system, or rather the means of her childhood exploitation, to make her own voice heard.

8.2. Sue: The Commodified Child

While Maud grows up in a genteel, though abusive environment at one end of the social spectrum, Sue grows up among a group of London thieves at the other end and is part of the (criminal) working class. Her childhood experiences open Waters' novel and are not only significantly shorter and more fragmentary than Maud's, but initially seem to suggest that Sue had a comparatively comfortable childhood under the loving care of Mrs Sucksby, the owner of the baby farm on Lant Street, where both Sue and Maud were born. Yet, as it turns out, "Mrs Sucksby has made them both the goods and currencies of her very own transaction"¹⁸⁶, exploiting the children and raising Sue for her own ends. This subchapter argues that Sue was turned into a commodity by the changeling plot agreed upon by her biological mother Marianne Lilly and her surrogate mother Grace Sucksby, whose surname "encompasses a range of meanings, both nurturing and exploitative"¹⁸⁷, and that she lived a commodified childhood in the house on Lant Street, even though she did not perceive it as such at the time. It further highlights that "the world of Sue Trinder references Dickens's early, melodramatic foundling story"¹⁸⁸ *Oliver Twist*, which is mentioned on the first page already and is variously drawn upon explicitly or implicitly in Waters' text. The chapter starts with a closer look at the contract agreed upon by the two mothers and the ramifications for Sue's childhood before it turns to an analysis of the house on Lant Street as both a baby farm and a fence's den. The occupations of Mrs Sucksby (baby farmer) and Mr Ibbs (receiver of stolen goods) impact Sue's childhood experiences considerably and highlight Waters' intertextual indebtedness to *Oliver Twist*.¹⁸⁹

Similar to Maud, the new-born Sue is turned into a commodity in the scheme forged between Marianne Lilly and Grace Sucksby. In the story recounted by the latter, Sue's biological mother had been duped by a gentleman, who made advances while he already had a wife and a child and "“had given [...] [Marianne]

186 Nadine Muller "Not my Mother's Daughter.", 118.

187 Diana Wallace. *Female Gothic Histories*, 183.

188 David Amigoni. *Victorian Literature*, 179.

189 *Oliver Twist* not only serves as an intertext in *Fingersmith*, but also, as Elizabeth Rees aptly demonstrates, in Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*. For a reading of Dickensian influences on Faber's text, see Elizabeth Rees. "Dickensian Childhoods.", 104–128.

up as ruined’”¹⁹⁰, leaving her a pregnant ‘fallen woman’ in 1844. According to Onega, “[h]is absconding sealed Marianne’s destiny, as in the utterly patriarchal Victorian world, even a lady with her own private fortune could not fend for herself without the protection of male relatives and friends”¹⁹¹ and was likely to be forced by her family to give away her illegitimate child.¹⁹² To save herself and her child, Marianne ran away from Briar when she was seven months pregnant and arrived at Lant Street, where she prematurely gave birth to Sue only one week later. Persecuted by her father and brother, who “‘seemed likely to just about kill her’” and take the baby to “‘make her theirs’”¹⁹³, Marianne frantically attempts to find a way to protect her daughter. Even though she first comes up with the plan to go to France as a widow and make a living as seamstress, which would entail social descent and a life in poverty, to conceal her disgrace and raise the child on her own, she hastily proposes the baby swap when her male relatives are about to arrive at Lant Street.¹⁹⁴ This scheme, in which “each [mother is] hoping to save her daughter from the perils of poverty (Maud) or an abusive uncle (Sue)”¹⁹⁵, still makes both children the “victims of motherly abandonment”¹⁹⁶ and marks the beginning of the commodification of the girls’ childhoods.

A class reversal is among the immediate results of the swap and leaves Sue with a criminal life that should have been Maud’s. In seeking refuge at Mrs Sucksby’s, where the children’s fates are decided, Marianne already crossed “the geographical and class boundaries separating Briar House, her ancient family mansion in Buckinghamshire, from the Lant Street baby farm in the poverty-stricken London area of Southwark”¹⁹⁷. While she could only transcend these boundaries temporarily and is restored to her male relatives soon afterwards, Sue’s crossing initially appears to be of a more permanent nature that is anticipated by the name she is given prior to the swap. Claiming “‘that she would sooner see her girl live low but honest, than give her back to the world of money she come from’” and convinced that being a lady does nothing “‘except let you be ruined’”, Marianne decides to have “‘her named plain, [...] like a girl of the

190 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 326.

191 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 6.

192 The latter is the case in Newbery’s *Set in Stone* (2006) and Susan Hill’s *The Woman in Black* (1983), in which Juliana Farrow and Jennet Humfrye, as mothers of illegitimate children, are forced by their relatives to give away their sons.

193 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 326, 328.

194 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 328, 333.

195 Lauren N. Hoffer and Sarah E. Kersh. “The Victorian Family in Queer Time.”, 205.

196 Barbara Schaff. “On Not Being Mrs Browning.”, 67.

197 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 6.

people’”¹⁹⁸ and names her child ‘Susan’, after a servant who once showed her kindness. Marianne thus “explicitly distances her child from the family identity by choosing a name from outside of her social class” and “rejects the structuring principle of the patronym”¹⁹⁹, so as to “protect her daughter from the hypocrisy and oppression of the genteel class”²⁰⁰. This form of protection can, however, only be achieved by the actual swap of the children that is to follow immediately afterwards and is constructed as an expression of motherly concern for Sue’s well-being, as is evident in the contract between Marianne and Mrs Sucksby. In this contract, which has been made “*in defiance of my father and brother*”, Marianne stipulates that Sue is “*to know nothing of her unhappy mother, but that she strove to keep her from care*”²⁰¹ until she turns eighteen, when she will also receive the promised half of her biological mother’s personal fortune. Although Marianne is presented as a loving and affectionate mother, kissing the “‘child [that] was everything to her’”²⁰² before committing her into Mrs Sucksby’s care, she subjects her daughter to a rough life in the Victorian criminal underworld, which finds its physical manifestations in the house on Lant Street and deprives Sue of her true identity. Yet, her decision to leave the child with Mrs Sucksby reveals the degree of her desperation: she prefers giving her child to a baby farmer, where she will be beyond reach of “the clutches of her vindictive and pervert brother”²⁰³ and be spared a life at Briar, which is implicitly characterised as an inherently dangerous, threatening and patriarchal environment.

As a result, Sue grows up in a house that serves as a baby farm – a place that traditionally evokes notions of exploitation, commodification and infanticide, especially for readers familiar with texts like *Oliver Twist*. In the Victorian era, ‘baby farming’ was an infamous practice that described “the placing of unwanted children with paid foster mothers”²⁰⁴, who “did not serve as wet-nurses, but fed the babies bottles or pap”²⁰⁵. It was fostered in particular by Victorian society’s stigmatising of illegitimacy and extramarital sexual relations, often forcing unwed (working-class) mothers to leave their illegitimate children temporarily or permanently in the ‘care’ of baby farmers. These farmed children, as an 1871 committee “appointed to inquire into the best means of preventing the destruction of the lives of infants put out to nurse for hire by their parents” found,

198 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 228, 332.

199 Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 39.

200 Hatice Yurttas. “Masquerade in *Fingersmith*.”, 111.

201 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 532, original emphasis.

202 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 327.

203 Susana Onega. “Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.”, para. 7.

204 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 69.

205 Mary Lyndon Shanley. *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850–1895*, 88.

were often exposed to and suffered from “improper and insufficient food, opiates, drugs, crowded rooms, bad air, want of cleanliness, and wilful neglect”²⁰⁶. The substandard living conditions and severe forms of bodily and emotional neglect experienced by these very young children were, as they suggest, “sure to be followed in a few months by diarrhoea, convulsions, and wasting away”²⁰⁷ and were extremely likely to result in the infants’/children’s premature death. In the inhumane baby-farming business, children were “reduced [...] to economic pawns in adult transactions” and turned into “dispensable and substitutable objects of exchange, whose humanity could be readily disregarded as far as the baby-farmer was concerned”²⁰⁸.

Despite having been a commonplace practice throughout the Victorian era, baby farming only became a subject of increased public awareness and legislative action in the second half of the nineteenth century. The “various baby-farming scandals from the 1860s onwards, murder trials of baby-farmers [...], the founding of charities opposing the practice [...] and subsequent, though largely ineffective, parliamentary regulation via the first Infant Life Protection Act (1872)” reflect this awareness and contributed to linking baby farming “with child murder” – sometimes even large-scale infanticide – “in the Victorian popular imagination”²⁰⁹. The Victorian press was an essential instrument in making baby-farming scandals public knowledge. Even though baby farmers had often used newspapers to publicly advertise their services, with the advertisement’s meaning “impossible to misunderstand”²¹⁰, this medium also increasingly reported baby murder cases that resulted from the infant’s improper care and permanent starvation on the baby farm.²¹¹ These newspaper reports not only

206 Anon. “Baby Farming.” *The Daily News*, 27 July 1871, 2.

207 Anon. “Baby Farming.” *The Daily News*, 27 July 1871, 2.

208 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 139.

209 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 139. Drawing on mortality statistics in the medical journal *Lancet*, Mary Lyndon Shanley exemplifies that “[i]n Marylebone Vestry district between 1843 and 1858, 516 of 1,109, or 46 percent of infants born out of wedlock, died before they reached the age of twelve months” and that “[i]n Sheffield during the mid-1870s, children born out of wedlock died at a rate of 582 per 1,000 live births, while 162 per 1,000 of children born to married couples died”. Mary Lyndon Shanley. *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850–1895*, 87.

210 Anon. “Baby Farming.” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 September 1867, 1077.

211 Reports on the atrocious treatment of children on baby farms were first published in (scholarly) journals: for instance, the popular *British Medical Journal* published an article in 1868 in which the terms “baby-farming and baby-murder” are regarded as “frequently convertible” and condemns the practice as “destructive to life, utterly immoral, and not uncommonly felonious”. Anon. “Baby-Farming and Child-Murder.” *The British Medical Journal*, 25 January 1868, 75. Newspapers also reported on individual cases of child murder at the hands of baby farmers. For example, on 25 September 1867, *The Pall Mall Gazette* reports that Mrs Jagger (from Tottenham), who believes that she “had from forty to sixty [infants in her care] within the last three years”, was responsible for the deaths of numerous

“uniformly treated baby farming as a national shame”²¹² and a serious problem, but also contributed to increasing its publicity, which eventually resulted in legal action, such as the above-mentioned Infant Life Protection Act and later the 1908 Children’s Act.²¹³

The baby farm as a notorious place where children were starved, beaten and neglected or died prematurely was inscribed in the Victorian literary imagination by authors such as Charles Dickens and George Moore. In Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, the eponymous protagonist spends a considerable time of his childhood – the first nine years of his life – “under the parental superintendence” of the elderly baby farmer Mrs Mann, who, as the heterodiegetic narrator ironically remarks, “had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself”²¹⁴ and misappropriated a large portion of the money intended for the care of the children. The baby farm is introduced as a place of starvation and infanticide, where the child that “had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either [...] sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident” before it “was usually summoned into another world”²¹⁵. For those malnourished children who survived the cruel regime of

children. The passing of three children within a short amount of time led to a coroner’s inquest, which revealed that the third child “had been badly fed” and died of starvation (“[t]he stomach was nearly empty, and there was no trace of fat on the body”). Anon. “Baby Farming.” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 September 1867, 1077. Three-months old Agnes Anderson likewise died of severe malnutrition in 1871, as *The Birmingham Daily Post* reports. She was in the ‘care’ of a Mrs Baker, who “lived in [...] [a] front kitchen, which was damp and unhealthy, and totally unfit for the habitation of any human being”. When Agnes was taken to the infirmary, she “looked ghastly pale and was shockingly emaciated”, weighing merely “4lb. 9oz.” (approx. 2 kilograms), and died shortly afterwards “from want of food”. Anon. “Extraordinary Case of Baby Farming.” *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 Sept. 1871, 8.

212 Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 150.

213 Cf. Claudia Nelson. *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 150.

214 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 5.

215 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 6. In *Esther Waters* (1894), Moore also employs the baby farm as a place of deliberate infanticide, rendering both the baby farmer and the children’s mothers complicit in the babies’ premature, often agonising deaths. In his story, the titular protagonist has to give her illegitimate one-month-old baby boy into the ‘care’ of a baby farmer, who lives “in a battered, tumbledown little street” in Wandsworth, London, to work as a wet nurse and earn enough money to keep herself and her son out of the workhouse. When she is informed by the baby farmer Mrs Spires that her child has “‘[a] little cold’” and finds that her employer Mrs Rivers does not permit her to see and care for her son, she leaves her employment and finds that Mrs Spires not only misappropriated the 10 shillings given to her by Mrs Rivers to have the child see a doctor to “‘get my husband’s supper’” but has also starved the baby, who looks “‘thinner than when I [Esther] left him; ten days ’ave made a difference in him’”. She eventually offers Esther to take the boy permanently off her hands for five pounds, which the greedy and scheming Mrs Spires has offered to other young mothers in Esther’s position. Where these other mothers seem to have accepted the offer, Esther, who loves her son dearly, declines it immediately, knowing that this is the price to

starvation, as does the titular Oliver, the baby farm turns into a place of abuse, where children are regularly beaten and battered, are “locked up [in the coal-cellar] for atrociously presuming to be hungry”²¹⁶ and dosed with gin when they are sick. On Mrs Mann’s baby farm, which serves as an exemplar of the numerous baby farms in the Victorian era, the children are immediately turned into DIS-EMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILDREN, suffering from severe forms of physical and emotional neglect and mistreatment that sometimes even turns them into SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILDREN.

In Waters’ novel, Mrs Sucksby’s baby farming, which is not extensively elaborated on but nevertheless pivotal for Sue’s childhood experiences, appears to follow a similar trajectory. The baby farm on Lant Street is presented as a place where “a baby is just as liable to perish as to survive or to be packed off in one way or another”²¹⁷. Even though, as Kohlke suggests, “Mrs Sucksby is never explicitly depicted doing away with the numerous infants in her care – only dosing them liberally with gin to keep them quiet – the threat of their premature disposal hangs over the Lant Street household”²¹⁸. Her indifference towards the ‘farm’ infants is reflected in her permitting Maud to follow through with her threat to murder one of her babies and in her ruthless transactions with “‘people that want infants, for servants or apprentices, or for regular sons and daughters’”²¹⁹, regardless of how they will treat the child. While the infants in her care are not shown to suffer from starvation and occasionally even seem to experience minor motherly gestures, which Letissier reads as a display of Mrs Sucksby’s “distorted version of biological and sentimental maternal love”²²⁰, she tends to prefer them dosed to “‘[k]eep it nice and quiet’”²²¹ in the house and minimise her expenses. Through references to Mrs Sucksby’s baby farm – detailed neither by Sue nor Maud in their respective accounts – *Fingersmith* foregrounds “the intrinsic dangerousness of what should be a paradigmatic nurturing place”²²², marking it

have her child murdered, and accuses the baby farmer of “hav[ing] been trying to get me to give you up my child to murder as you are murdering those poor innocents in the cradles”. As an affectionate mother, Esther decides to take her child and leave Mrs Spires’ baby farm, even if this means committing herself to the workhouse. George Moore. *Esther Waters*, 141, 147, 153, 157.

216 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 7.

217 Georges Letissier. “More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.”, 382.

218 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Neo-Victorian Childhoods.”, 139.

219 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 326.; cf. *ibid.*, 316.

220 Georges Letissier. “More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.”, 382.

221 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 357.

222 Georges Letissier. “More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.”, 382.

as an environment where childhoods are commodified or blighted before they have even begun.²²³

Despite the Victorian baby farm's immediate associations with deprivation, neglect and infanticide, Sue recounts her childhood as a comparatively pleasant time. Unlike *Oliver Twist* and presumably many other infants under Mrs Sucksby's 'care', who are either "claimed by their mothers, or [find] new mothers, or [perish]"²²⁴, she is not turned into a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD or a SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD. In fact, she "comfortably survive[s] in Mrs Sucksby's care"²²⁵ due to the extreme value assigned to her by her foster mother, who "raises [...] [her] solely with the intention to utilise her as a currency to be exchanged for Maud and Sue's own share of Marianne's fortune"²²⁶. Even though Sue is aware of her special position and treatment in the Lant Street household, her *K-world* is extremely limited, if not comprised of deliberate falsehoods in some places. Given that her *K-world* does in some respects not and in others only partially correspond with the TAW, she grows up "believ[ing] that Sucksby is better than a mother, and that she raised and looked after her out of loyalty and genuine love"²²⁷. Accordingly, she presents and seems to interpret her foster mother's

223 Other neo-Victorian texts, such as Mary Hooper's YA novel *Velvet* (2011) or Caitlin Davies' *The Ghost of Lily Painter* (2011), depict the horrors associated with baby farming more blatantly. In the former, Velvet Groves visits the baby farm of the fictionalised Amelia Dyer, whose notorious real-life counterpart was arrested and hanged for infanticide in 1896, to steal an infant and is horrified when she sees the drugged, comatose babies: they are lying in "rough wooden crates, such as vegetables came in at the market", do not wear napkins and are "lying in [...] [their] own mess on straw or newspaper, apart from one, the smallest, who was swaddled around so tightly that it looked like a Russian doll". Some of them have "gummed-up eyelids, cradle cap or bloodless lips" and were, as a fictional newspaper article puts it, "suffering from malnutrition, sores and scabies". Mary Hooper. *Velvet*, 256, 257, 273. In Davies' text, the titular Lily Painter gives birth to an illegitimate child in a 'lying-in' home (i.e., a baby farm), which is run by the fictionalised Amelia Sach and Annie Walters, whose real-life counterparts became known as the 'Finchley baby farmers' and were both hanged for infanticide in 1903. In addition to descriptions of Lily's new-born but neglected child ("she was yellow [...]. In the folds of her skin was a white greasy curd and in other parts the skin was red and inflamed, and she shone from the lard that the washing had not removed"), this text also describes the dead body of a child poisoned with chlorodyne, whom Annie Walters attempts to dispose of. As inspector William George asserts in his journal, he "was totally unprepared for the sight. For there before me was a baby boy in a nightgown, his pitiful body just a few hours old, his jaws and hands tightly clenched, his tiny toes turned completely inwards, his tongue badly swollen and his lips partly blue". Caitlin Davies. *The Ghost of Lily Painter*, 153, 176.

224 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 12.

225 Eckart Voigts-Virchow. "In-Yer-Victorian-Face.", 118.

226 Nadine Muller "Not my Mother's Daughter.", 118.

227 Lina Varotsi. *Conceptualisation and Exposition*, 142.

actions and interventions as unfeigned expressions of affection and maternal concern for her well-being.

The childhood memory that opens Sue's retrospective account consolidates this impression. In this memory, Flora, who is presumably twelve or thirteen years old, pays Mrs Sucksby "a penny" to take the then fair-haired, five- or six-year-old Sue "begging at a play" at "the Surrey, St George's Circus"²²⁸. However, instead of sitting on the steps to beg for money, Flora takes Sue to see the play – a theatrical adaptation of *Oliver Twist* – to pick the pockets of unwitting spectators. Unaware of Flora's intentions, Sue thus "operates as a child accomplice to an older child pickpocket"²²⁹, just as Oliver is implicated in the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates' pickpocketing of Mr Brownlow. Yet, seeing the violent scene in which "Bill Sykes [*sic*], the fancy man", beats Nancy to death, thus horrifying and infuriating the audience, leaves the young child "gripped by an awful terror"²³⁰ and brings Flora's thieving venture to a premature end. Unable to console the child, Flora takes her home, where she is slapped and reprimanded by an enraged Mrs Sucksby for returning Sue "'like this, turned blue with screaming'"²³¹, whereby the child's state emphasises the prolonged horror derived from the experiences at the theatre and "provid[es] evidence for the tenderness of Sue's heart"²³². While Mrs Sucksby soothes Sue on her lap, she beats Flora again for the presumption that she "'should have had more [stolen goods], [...] if [...] [Sue] hadn't started up with the sterics'" and forbids her to take Sue out for pickpocketing again, suggesting that she should "'take one of [...] [her] other babies'"²³³, who are evidently deemed less significant, instead. In this instance, Mrs Sucksby is introduced as a caring surrogate mother, who appears to intervene on the child's behalf and has been betrayed by Flora herself, when she is in fact partly responsible for Sue's emotional anguish by having turned her into a commodity and renting her out for begging.

As soon as Flora is gone, Sue's memory seems to dwell on the caring and affectionate gestures Mrs Sucksby displays to ensure the child's physical and emotional well-being. After rebuking Flora, Mrs Sucksby takes Sue, unlike the other children in her care, "to *her* [Mrs Sucksby's] bed – first, rubbing at the sheets with her hands, to warm them; then stooping to breathe upon my fingers, to warm me"²³⁴ – and enquires about her emotional state. When Sue claims that

228 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 3.

229 Lucie Armitt. *Twentieth-Century Gothic*, 129–130.

230 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 4.

231 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 4.

232 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 7.

233 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 5.

234 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 5, my emphasis.

she is still afraid of Bill Sykes, Mrs Sucksby even changes Nancy's fate by 're-telling' part of *Oliver Twist*, blurring "[t]he boundary between fiction and actuality"²³⁵. To calm and "alleviate the concerns of the young Sue"²³⁶, she tells her that she "'had her [Nancy] here an hour ago. She was only beat a bit about the face'" and that she "'had come to her senses at last, and left Bill Sykes entirely; that she had met a nice chap from Wapping, who had set her up in a little shop selling sugar mice and tobacco'", whereby the sugar mice must have a particular appeal to any child and come to represent "the good side"²³⁷ (as opposed to the bad side, to which Bill Sykes belongs). She also attempts to ease Sue's fear of Bill Sykes, who, according to Mrs Sucksby, is "'a Clerkenwell man. He don't trouble with the Borough. The Borough boys are too hard for him'"²³⁸, and aims at reinstating Sue's feeling of security. Mrs Sucksby thus temporarily alters Sue's *K-world* regarding the contents of *Oliver Twist* to a version that no longer corresponds with the TAW. This alteration, which is reversed some years later when Sue's *K-world* regarding Nancy's fate is updated, anticipates – for readers familiar with Waters' story – the revelation of the fantasy of Sue's own identity, but is here perceived as concern for the child. The revision of Dickens' story is followed by a smoothing of Sue's fair hair, another maternal gesture, before Sue is left in her foster mother's room. Yet, in contrast to Briar's merciless housekeeper Mrs Stiles, who makes Maud sleep in utter darkness and with a terrifying nightmare during her first night at Briar, Mrs Sucksby leaves Sue in semi-darkness with the door partly open, so as to be alert to any emotional turmoil the child may be experiencing until she joins her for the night.²³⁹

Mrs Sucksby further increases Sue's impression of being her favourite by providing her with a fabricated story of origin of her being a farm child, which invites a comparison to the other farmed children, rather than claiming and raising her as her own. The story she tells Sue repeatedly is that her biological mother was a bold, clever and pretty thief, who was, as she allegedly told Mrs Sucksby, wanted by the police and left Sue in the paid care of the baby farmer for "one last job [...] that would make her fortune"²⁴⁰. However, one man was killed during the job by her mother's knife, which led, after a betrayal by her accomplice, to her imprisonment and subsequent death by hanging.²⁴¹ In telling Sue that her mother intended to come back for her, Mrs Sucksby circumvents possible abandonment issues and turns her decision to allow Sue to stay on into an

235 David Amigoni. *Victorian Literature*, 179.

236 Claire O'Callaghan. "'The Grossest Rakes of Fiction'.", 566.

237 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 5, 6, 7.

238 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 5.

239 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 6.

240 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 11.

241 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 11.

act of kindness. While this story prefigures Mrs Sucksby's own death at the end of Waters' narrative and is thus translated from fiction to reality, telling the story of Sue's surrogate (Mrs Sucksby), though not that of her biological mother (Marianne Lilly), it serves as another example of how the adult manipulates the child and increases the distance between Sue's *K-world* and the TAW. Sue thus believes that Mrs Sucksby kept her for "seventeen years" when "[s]he had been paid to keep me a month"²⁴² and considers her decision an act of (motherly) love. She is aware that Mrs Sucksby could "have passed me on to the poorhouse" or "left me crying in a draughty crib", which would have been likely to eventually result in her death; instead, she kept her, treated her like a "jewel" and "prized me so"²⁴³. In 'retelling' Sue's orphan origins, Mrs Sucksby manipulates and increases the child's affective reaction by further underlining her preferential treatment vis-à-vis the other farm children while effectively veiling that "Mrs Sucksby's self-sacrifice was not motivated by altruism or motherly love, but greed"²⁴⁴. Not following Marianne's example and passing Sue off as her own child allows Mrs Sucksby to maintain a certain emotional distance that eventually enables her to give her up for the deceitful plan that results in Sue's incarceration in a private mental asylum in the countryside.

Sue's special position among Mrs Sucksby's farm children is especially evident in comparison to the orphaned John Vroom. Growing up in the same household, John does not experience any of the motherly care and affection Mrs Sucksby displays towards Sue, because he does not hold any (long-term) monetary value for the baby farmer. As a baby, John was "a queer-looking child", so "no-one would take him off Mrs Sucksby's hands"²⁴⁵, and he was permitted to stay *temporarily* on the baby farm. When he was four or five years old, Mrs Sucksby repeatedly attempted to get rid of him: she "put him on the parish", but John kept "running back from the workhouse"²⁴⁶ to the baby farm and was found asleep on the step of the shop door. At one point, Mrs Sucksby placed him with the master of a ship, who took him as far as China, yet John still returned to Mrs Sucksby and the baby farm, where he was eventually allowed to stay and help Mr Ibbs while running "mean little dodges of his own"²⁴⁷. When the actual story opens, John is

242 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 12.

243 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 12.

244 Susana Onega. "Pornography and the Crossing of Class, Gender and Moral Boundaries.", para. 5.

245 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 15.

246 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 15.

247 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 15. In Catherine Marchant's *The Slow Awakening* (1976), which begins in 1850, the baby farmer Ma Bradley eventually also wants to get rid of fourteen-year-old Kirsten MacGregor, who has been staying on the baby farm since she was six and her parents died of cholera. Planning on sending her to the workhouse, she eventually sells Kirsten to forty-nine-year-old tinker Hop Fuller, who makes sure that "'she's never been

an unruly and violent bully of about fourteen, whom Sue believes to be jealous of her treatment by Mrs Sucksby and who therefore displays total lack of concern for her.²⁴⁸ When he, however, utters threats towards a seventeen-year-old Sue, Mrs Sucksby hits him, just as she “hit poor Flora” and the “others, in the years in between – all for my sake”²⁴⁹, reinforcing Sue’s special position and highlighting John’s immediate disempowerment. It seems that John, unlike Sue, who is a protected asset in the changeling scheme and “had never been hit”, was regularly beaten or otherwise punished by Mrs Sucksby, as is evident in his claim that she had “‘been down on [...] [him] since the day [...] [he] was born’”²⁵⁰. When she strikes him again at a later point in the story, she does so with increased intensity (“Mrs Sucksby took two quick steps, and struck him. She struck him hard”) and leaves him with “both his arms to his head”²⁵¹, so as to ward off potential subsequent blows. The treatment John experiences under Mrs Sucksby’s ‘care’ thus positions him as a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD on the childhood scale.

While Sue’s treatment by Mrs Sucksby is a far cry from Oliver Twist’s at Mrs Mann’s baby farm, her involvement in Mr Ibbs’ thievery business references Oliver’s time at Fagin’s more explicitly. Various scholars have noted the inter-textual links between Dickens’ and Waters’ texts in this regard and consider the house on Lant Street “a queered version of Fagin’s den”²⁵², even “a matriarchal version of his male-dominated criminal establishment”²⁵³. It is the place where Mrs Sucksby holds the upper hand and, “like Fagin, combines the paternal image of discipline with the maternal duties of home-maker”²⁵⁴, “represent[ing] both the caring, loving parent and the evil”²⁵⁵ that is reflected in her ambiguous treatment of the farm infants and her occupation as baby farmer as such.²⁵⁶ Mr

broken’” before purchasing her for two pounds from the baby farmer and rape her several months later. Although Kirsten is legally of age, she is repeatedly compared to and still considered a child (e.g., “‘she’s [...] a child herself still’”, “‘She’s hardly more than a child’”) by various characters, which makes the transaction between Hop Fuller and Ma Bradley, who must have been aware of the tinker’s intentions from his inquiries about Kirsten’s virginal state, and her rape all the more horrifying. Catherine Marchant. *The Slow Awakening*, 17, 70, 81.

248 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 14, 15.

249 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 16.

250 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 399, 498.

251 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 498.

252 Georges Letissier. “More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.”, 375.

253 Paulina Palmer. *The Queer Uncanny*, 85.

254 Georges Letissier. “More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.”, 376.

255 Barbara Schaff. “On Not Being Mrs Browning.”, 66.

256 Keith Clavin explains Fagin’s masculine and feminine traits in the following way: “he is clearly male-sexed, but his domestic activities and dress-like gown, hunched over body, constant casting of his eyes towards the floor in a style of submission, and being surrounded

Ibbs, who functions as a kind of foster father to Sue, likewise bears traces of Fagin, principally in his occupation as fence and chief operator of the thieving business on Lant Street. Yet, in contrast to Fagin's precocious boys, who are first trained as pickpockets and then sent out for stealing on a daily basis to earn their keep, the members of Sue's surrogate family are petty thieves, the "kind of thief that rather eased the dodgy deed along, than did it"²⁵⁷. With Mr Ibbs as middleman, their business thus primarily takes place inside the kitchen, where the stolen goods received in Mr Ibbs' locksmith shop undergo a process of transformation, "looking like one sort of thing" when they come in and "looking quite another"²⁵⁸ when they leave.

Although Sue has spent her entire life at a place where illicit transactions are conducted on a daily basis and stolen goods prepared for resale, she seems to have been kept unaware of the nature of the business until she is five or six. In her childlike innocence, she is surprised to find that what she presumed to be a tear in Flora's skirt "turned out to be not a tear at all, but the neck of a little silk pocket that was sewn inside her gown"²⁵⁹, in which the pickpocket hides her loot. On this day, Sue's *K-world* is expanded, just as Oliver's is broadened when he sees the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates pilfer a handkerchief from an old gentleman and "the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels" he saw at Fagin's suddenly "rushed upon the boy's mind"²⁶⁰. From then on, Sue was never as surprised as when she saw Flora take stolen paraphernalia out of her skirt the first time, but continues to consider the dexterous thieves coming to Mr Ibbs' shop "better than magicians"²⁶¹, as they are able to produce various stolen items from among their coats and other items of clothing.

When Sue is old enough, her criminal education begins, predominantly taking place inside the house on Lant Street. Whilst it cannot be precluded that she was trained in the pickpocket business, which children usually "began [...]" as early as

by children reveal a motif of femininity. Fagin is as much mother as father". Keith Clavin. "Fagin's Coin of Truth.", 129.

257 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 7. In *Oliver Twist*, Fagin makes unmistakably clear that he needs the boys to bring home stolen goods for their keep and reproves them sharply when they do not: "Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he would expatriate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed. On one occasion, indeed, he even went so far as to knock them both down a flight of stairs; but this was carrying out his virtuous precepts to an unusual extent". Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 80. Implicitly drawing on Puritan sentiment in condemning idleness and propagating "an active life", Fagin ensures that the boys remain delinquents, by violence if necessary, and deliver the goods he can exchange for money.

258 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 10.

259 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 5.

260 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 82.

261 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 8.

five years old”²⁶², she apparently has not been subjected to serious training and, as Mrs Sucksby’s (future) bartering object, is not permitted “on the prig”²⁶³. Her involvement in the thievery business thus resembles Oliver’s prior to being allowed to join the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates on one of their quotidian pickpocketing trips through London. In Sue’s account of a hypothetical transaction between a thief and Mr Ibbs, which serves to provide an exemplary insight into daily business, she supposes that her surrogate father would ask her to “tak[e] a cloth to these [the candle sticks he just received], and [bring] up the shine” and that she “might have a little go at the fancy work upon these wipers”²⁶⁴, just as Oliver has to take out markers of ownership on the pocket-handkerchiefs that are brought back by the delinquent boys. While occupied this way, Sue believes to have learned the alphabet in a peculiar fashion, “not by putting letters down, but by taking them out”, and came to know what her name looked like “from handkerchiefs that came, marked *Susan*”²⁶⁵. Instead of being instructed in “regular reading”, which both Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs are capable of but which the rest was “never troubled with”²⁶⁶, Sue was schooled in various aspects pertaining to criminal life:

I learned to cipher, though. I learned it, from handling coins. Good coins we kept, of course. Bad ones come up too bright, and must be slummed, with blacking and grease, before you pass them on. I learned that, too. Silks and linens there are ways of washing and pressing, to make them seem new. Gems I would shine, with ordinary vinegar.²⁶⁷

In her surrogate parents’ ‘care’, who implicate the child in their criminal activities, Sue appears to exclusively learn what is relevant to her immediate situation in life. The *K-world* fostered by Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs consolidates her sense of belonging to the criminal working class and does not encourage the crossing of social class boundaries. Sue’s upbringing not only impacted her *K-world* but also her *O-world*, as Mr Ibbs and Mrs Sucksby have not fostered an *O-world* that corresponds with socially accepted norms, rules and regulations. In this case, *K*- and *O-world* are closely intertwined and interact.

262 Jeannie Duckworth. *Fagin’s Children*, 29.

263 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 12. Yet, Mr Ibbs’ business was no less risky than the actual pickpocketing. As Jeannie Duckworth explains, “Isaac (Ikey) Solomon”, a potential model for Dickens’ Fagin, “was married to Ann, the daughter of an Aldgate coachmaster named Moses Julian. She, along with their four children, was transported to Van Diemen’s Land in 1828 for receiving stolen goods, where she was assigned as servant to a police officer. Ikey himself had been tried and sentenced for theft in 1827 but had escaped from the Black Maria on his way to Newgate”. Jeannie Duckworth. *Fagin’s Children*, 26.

264 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 9.

265 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 10, original emphasis.

266 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 10.

267 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 10.

Under Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs' supervision, Sue, as child and adolescent, is kept in deliberate ignorance and with a limited *K-world*. Similar to the naïve Oliver Twist, whom the cunning Fagin extols as “‘a clever boy’”, claiming that he “‘never saw a sharper lad’”²⁶⁸, when he steals a handkerchief during one of the ‘games’ camouflaging Oliver’s pickpocket training, Sue is repeatedly reassured of her ‘sharpness’ and believed herself “sharp enough”²⁶⁹ at the age of seventeen. Whilst she acknowledges that the inhabitants of the Borough and the thieves coming to Mr Ibbs might have considered her slow, she assures the reader that “[y]ou could not have grown up in such a house, that had such businesses in it, without having a pretty good idea of what was what – of what could go into what; and what could come out”²⁷⁰. However, her presumed cleverness turns out to be a fallacy and is readily exploited in the plot to swindle Maud out of her inheritance. As Mrs Sucksby later confesses to Maud, Sue was raised in intentional ignorance: “‘Think how sharp such a girl might have grown, in a house like this one, in a street like ours; then think how hard Mr Ibbs and me have worked to keep her blunt’”²⁷¹. Sue’s foster parents have only extended her *K-world* where necessary and seem to have kept Sue preoccupied and under supervision inside the house, essentially controlling the amount of knowledge and information she receives.²⁷²

Even though Sue’s childhood was determined by the changeling plot, as she finds out later, her account of the early years of her life on the whole conveys the impression that she had a pleasant childhood and considered the Lant Street household her home. This is especially evident in the feeling of homesickness she experiences as a seventeen-year-old during her first evening at Briar, which is the result of the recent separation from her “transnormative family”²⁷³. Not only does she imagine her ‘family’ sitting around the table for dinner, she also lies shivering in bed late at night, “long[ing] with all my heart for Mrs Sucksby, Lant Street, home”²⁷⁴. These emotions highlight to what extent her surrogate mother created a sense of home. During her time in Dr Christie’s asylum, Sue reminisces about her (pleasant) childhood days, which are also inseparably intertwined with

268 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 79.

269 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 14.

270 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 14.

271 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 339.

272 The amount of control Mrs Sucksby exerted over Sue is, for instance, reflected in her chasing potential suitors away, preventing Sue from bearing a child out of wedlock or even marrying one of them: “There was a boy, when I was fifteen, that stole a clasp for me, and said he should like to kiss me. There was another a little later, who used to stand at our back door and whistle ‘The Locksmith’s Daughter’, expressly to see me blush. Mrs Sucksby chased them both away. She was as careful of me in that department, as in all others”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 13.

273 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

274 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 62.

the treatment she received from Mrs Sucksby: she remembers the times her foster mother “had washed and combed and shined my hair”, “warm[ed] her bed before she put me in it, so I should not take chills”, put “aside, for me, the tenderest morsels of meat”, “smooth[ed] my teeth, when they cut; and pass[ed] her hands across my arms and legs, to be sure that they grew straight”²⁷⁵. These details support the impression of an affectionate relationship between the girl and Mrs Sucksby. She also often dreams “of Lant Street, of the Borough, of home” and “of Mr Ibbs and Mrs Sucksby”²⁷⁶, waking in tears from these dreams, which can be read as an externalisation of the intense positive emotions the house on Lant Street as her childhood *home* and Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs as foster parents evoke.

The gap between Sue’s biased perception of her childhood and Mrs Sucksby’s more sinister intentions is reflected in Sue’s position on the childhood scale. The rather fragmentary childhood experiences and memories presented by the adolescent Sue suggest that she generally perceived her childhood as an ‘ideal’ childhood due to the tender love and care of Mrs Sucksby. Even in the memory that opens her account, Mrs Sucksby is still presented as an affectionate mother, who is genuinely concerned about Sue’s (emotional and physical) well-being and intervenes on the child’s behalf, while Flora, in deceiving Mrs Sucksby, is made responsible for Sue’s upsetting experience. In her account, Sue repeatedly and distinctly foregrounds her preferential treatment among the farm children in Mrs Sucksby’s care, which serves to highlight Mrs Sucksby’s perceived maternal qualities and her importance as surrogate mother for the orphan child. However, despite her own impression making her an ‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD, her actual position on the childhood scale is that of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. Mrs Sucksby commodifies Sue’s childhood, not least by renting her out to Flora for money, but also by planning on using her as means of exchange for Maud and Marianne’s fortune. What appear to be acts of maternal love and altruism ultimately serve to keep Sue disempowered and firmly under Mrs Sucksby’s control and supervision.²⁷⁷

The distinct intertextual references to Dickens’ popular *Oliver Twist* in Sue’s childhood narrative are used to play with and subvert reader expectations. In opening the story with a theatrical performance of *Oliver Twist*, Waters elicits a particular (Dickensian) version of Victorian London and grounds Sue’s world firmly within this vision. She evokes, as Armitt suggests, the impression that Sue’s

275 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 433.

276 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 435.

277 The gap between an actual and perceived childhood also informs Clovis King’s childhood in Eva Ibbotson’s *Journey to the River Sea* (2001). For an analysis of the child actor Clovis King, see chapter 7 “Competing Visions of Childhood in Ibbotson’s Neo-Victorian Adventure Novel *Journey to the River Sea*”.

story virtually “begins in Dickensian London”²⁷⁸, raising certain expectations about events and the development of the plot. Hence, much of the initial world building derives from a genuinely Victorian text, whereby Waters foregoes otherwise necessary (lengthy) descriptions for setting the mood and atmosphere. With *Oliver Twist*, Waters also draws on a text in which childhood is a predominant theme, though oftentimes depicted as bleak and precocious, and a (criminal) working-class existence utterly detrimental to childhood experience. The baby farm, the workhouse, the undertaker’s and Fagin’s den are all places in which Oliver is physically and emotionally abused and commodified to varying degrees. Oliver’s childhood experiences therefore set the tone for Sue’s and presumably make readers anticipate a similarly abusive and exploitative childhood on Mrs Sucksby’s baby farm and in Mr Ibbs’ fence’s den. However, Sue’s childhood, as far as it is recounted in *Fingersmith*, bears hardly any traces of Oliver’s hardships, is even perceived by her as a comparatively happy one and is only later revealed to have been subject to a larger scheme. Moreover, in selecting this particular text as an intertext, Waters draws on a fictional child that is subject to extreme idealisation due to his permanent, steadfast innocence and innate goodness and whose cruel treatment at the hands of various characters turns him into a pathetic child, with whom readers readily sympathise. The various references to Dickens’ text and Sue’s near emotional breakdown subsequent to seeing Nancy brutally murdered on stage at the opening of Waters’ story are employed as a means to shift readers’ sympathies towards Sue and initially turn her into an *Oliver Twist*-esque character. Yet, as it turns out, the character who displays the closest resemblance to Oliver is not Sue but Charles Way, the knife-boy at Briar, who is analysed in the subsequent subchapter. With Sue’s childhood narration and the frequently implicit and explicit references to *Oliver Twist*, Waters, as “a writer who excels in narrative deception”²⁷⁹, thus arguably already points to the elaborate narrative play at work in her text, cautioning readers to be careful with premature conclusions, and endows Sue’s relatively short account of her childhood with an additional layer of meaning that derives from the comparison between Oliver and Sue.

8.3. Charles: Between Childhood and Adulthood

On the brink of adolescence, fourteen-year-old Charles Way is a particularly interesting character for an analysis of the novel’s representations of childhood, because he appears to be more childlike than the actual children in *Fingersmith*

278 Lucie Armitt. *Twentieth-Century Gothic*, 129.

279 Sarah Gamble. “‘I know everything. I know nothing.’”, 42.

and in fact seems to blur the line between childhood and adulthood. Throughout Waters' narrative, he remains a character of secondary importance, especially during his employment as a knife-boy at Briar, even if he takes a more active stance in the third part of the novel, where his childlike attributes and behaviour are particularly pronounced. Yet, while Waters endows Charles with a host of childlike qualities and features, evoking the pathetic and suffering child of Victorian literature, specifically the victimised and abused Oliver Twist, she also foregrounds the friction between his comparatively 'advanced' age and his childlike behaviour. The incongruity created by the latter implies a second, albeit more oblique, layer of interpretation, according to which Charles can be read in the context of the theme of homosexuality, thus underlining the novel's neo-Victorian agenda. This subchapter examines Charles as a character dramatising the tension between references to the Victorian and the neo-Victorian critique and suggests that he is a character who defies a straightforward interpretation. Waters' depiction of Charles reinforces that her novels are "written to be re-read"²⁸⁰, as the second layer of interpretation is initially likely to be overshadowed by his childlike qualities. This subchapter sets out with an analysis of Charles' time as knife-boy in Mr Lilly's employment, where he is severely punished by Mr Way, his father and superior, and the central conflict, which motivates his actions in the third and final part of the novel, is introduced, before his actions and behaviour in the final part are examined. It starts by focusing first on Charles' particularly childlike qualities and features and afterwards on his implied homosexual tendencies, which support the contention that Waters blurs the boundary between childhood and adulthood in her depiction of Charles.

At the beginning of the story, Charles lives a working-class life as knife-boy at Briar and is hence a servant in a subordinate, low-wage position, who is entrusted with the care of knives and is employed for other jobs in and around the country house. As employment notices in Victorian newspapers indicate, a knife-boy was often expected to fill different positions simultaneously, such as those of messenger and knife-boy or boot- and knife-boy, whilst "mak[ing] himself generally useful"²⁸¹ around the house.²⁸² Charles is likewise holding multiple jobs at Briar, which range from polishing boots to serving Maud and Mr Lilly during dinner, and frequently traverses the invisible line dividing 'upstairs' and 'downstairs'. However, despite his seemingly continuous presence in and around the house, he, like many servants in Victorian novels, is often only casually mentioned and

280 Sarah Gamble. "‘I know everything. I know nothing.’", 42.

281 Anon. "Advertisements & Notices." *The Freeman's Journal*, 4 February 1859, n.p.

282 Cf. Anon. "Advertisements & Notices." *The Freeman's Journal*, 27 May 1874, 8.; cf. Anon. "Advertisements & Notices." *The Evening Post*, 12 November 1889, 2.

tends to pass unheeded. This is not least due to his infrequent points of contact with Sue and Maud, who narrate the events.²⁸³

The information on Charles' life at Briar in Sue's and Maud's retrospective accounts is closely connected with Richard 'Gentleman' Rivers and largely centres on one specific event, which also initiates the 'Charles plot': Gentleman's return from London and departure from Briar several months later, which concludes his business with Mr Lilly. Even though Gentleman visited Briar at least once before and must have met Charles and the other servants on this or another previous occasion, their first meeting is not recounted in the text and the depiction of their relationship starts *in medias res*. Waters also largely refrains from relating encounters, interactions and conversations between Charles and Gentleman that must have taken place during Sue's employment as lady's maid at Briar. All of this leaves Charles' fascination with and attachment to Gentleman widely unexplained and open to speculation.²⁸⁴

Despite their somewhat enigmatic relationship, Gentleman, who poses as a well-bred London artist at Briar, is the character who largely motivates Charles' actions in the third part of the novel and impacts his *W-world* considerably. During his visit, Charles is spellbound by Gentleman's story about 'exotic' London. As he tells the housekeeper Mrs Stiles, "' Mr Rivers says that, in London, you may see elephants. He says they keep elephants in pens in the parks of London, as we keep sheep; and a boy can pay a man sixpence, and ride on an elephant's back'" ²⁸⁵. His fascination and enthusiasm indicate that Gentleman's story must have kindled his thirst for adventure, which cannot be satisfied in the countryside/at Briar, and awakened his interest to see London, which, unlike Mr Lilly's mansion, turns into a place of opportunities in the eyes of Charles. Gentleman must also have repeatedly promised to take Charles to London if he could, as he explains to Sue when he visits her in the asylum at a later point in the story: "' Mr Rivers used to say to me [...] that he would take me on to man for him, if only he'd the money for a proper man's wages'" ²⁸⁶. Insinuations about taking

283 Despite being a servant herself, Sue predominantly sees Charles during meals and not even for the duration of the entire meal, as she eats her pudding in the company of Mr Way and Mrs Stiles in the latter's pantry. As lady's maid, she spends most of her time attending Maud. Moreover, she and Charles have decided to mutually ignore each other following an early incident (when Sue insulted the servants by greeting them in the wrong order), which limits their points of contact even further: "If I met Charles on the stairs in the morning, then, I looked the other way". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 91.

284 For instance, Gentleman indicates that he has talked to Charles when he explains to Maud that he has received "' the plan of the house, from the little knife-boy' ". His comment that "' [h]e's a good little boy, with a chattering mouth'" indicates that they have talked for some time and probably on multiple occasions. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 132.

285 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 107.

286 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 451.

Charles to London and further, though unrecorded, conversations between the two must have contributed to setting Charles' "heart [...] on going to London as Mr Rivers's man"²⁸⁷, which makes up his *W-world*. Even though Charles has attempted to promote and influence the actualisation of this world by "taking Gentleman his breakfasts, polishing his boots, [and] brushing his fancy coats"²⁸⁸, he cannot actualise this world himself and is dependent on Gentleman's goodwill and financial ability to take him on. However, Gentleman, like the other characters in *Fingersmith*, solely attempts to actualise his own *W-world* and departs, to Charles' bitter disappointment, without him, leaving him behind "sharpening knives and shining glasses in the quietest house in England"²⁸⁹. Here, as elsewhere in the text, the incompatibility of *W-worlds* propels the plot forward and triggers further actions and events.

Besides introducing the central conflict that motivates Charles' actions in the last part, the episode at Briar first and foremost serves to highlight Charles' childlikeness by evoking the image of the victimised, suffering child, a feature of many Victorian literary texts targeted at adults, through references to Charles' punishments. In nineteenth-century texts, as Adrienne Gavin maintains, childhood is frequently depicted as "a vulnerable, often painful, powerless state" during which the child becomes the "victim of adult power" and "emotional or physical brutality"²⁹⁰. Introduced as a childlike character who can still easily be pacified with chocolate, Charles is repeatedly chastised and arguably also abused by his father and superior Mr Way.²⁹¹ When Charles, for instance, "burst[s] out crying at the table" during dinner on the day of Gentleman's departure, "run[s] from the kitchen wiping snot from his chin"²⁹² and refuses to come back when Mr Way demands it, the latter follows him to give him a beating. Even though the actual event is not further detailed, due to the limits of Sue's first-person nar-

287 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

288 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

289 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

290 Adrienne E. Gavin. "The Child in British Literature.", 9.

291 Pacifying Charles with chocolate, i.e., sweets, is one of the earliest instances in the text to point towards his childlikeness and is evident by comparison to the items Sue gives the cook and the maid. As Sue explains, "I gave Charles a bit of chocolate, that I had carried down with me from the Borough and never eaten; I gave Margaret [the maid] a piece of scented soap; and to Mrs Cakebread [the cook] I gave a pair of those black stockings that Gentleman had had Phil get for me from the crooked warehouse" for greeting them in the wrong order. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 91. The link between children and sweets is re-established at a later point in the story, when Sue tricks Janet, a little child, in claiming that she has met her mother, who has just left the house and given her sixpence for her child to buy flour with: "'Know what else your ma said? She said, 'My girl Janet is such a good little girl, tell her she's to have the half-penny left over, for sweets.' Ah. Like sweets, do you? So do I. Nice, ain't they? But hard on your teeth'". Ibid., 465.

292 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

ration, it is nevertheless discernible in the kitchen, where the servants “heard the slap of his belt against Charles’s backside, and [his] yelps”²⁹³. The sounds thus bear testimony to Charles’ suffering, as do the visual traces of physical exertion on Mr Way when he returns to the kitchen (“his face quite purple and his wig at a tilt”²⁹⁴), even if the particulars are left to the readers’ imagination. At a later point in the narrative, when Charles visits Sue in the mental asylum for the first time, he explains that Mr Way whipped him for mourning Gentleman’s departure: “‘He said he would whip me raw, [...] and he did. Lord, how he made me shriek!’”²⁹⁵. Similar to eleven-year-old Maud, Charles is subject to repeated victimisation through adult/parental power at Briar. His excessive punishments, which appear to be a response to arguably trivial actions, render him a particularly pathetic and childlike character for a modern audience, who are bound to consider Mr Way’s treatment of his son child abuse.

This response to Charles’ treatment is enhanced by *Fingersmith*’s deliberate intertextual links with Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, a text in which children are mistreated, abused and commodified.²⁹⁶ In Dickens’ novels, as Rees argues, children are frequently associated “with abuse, privation, neglect, and suffering”, which, despite being “leavened [...] with heavy doses of sentimentality or humour”, are employed to “convey the often degraded position of the child in Victorian England”²⁹⁷ and level social criticism, as is also the case in *Oliver Twist*. In this

293 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

294 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

295 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 450. The text points to similar incidents as well. Carrying Gentleman’s bags across the gallery for their owner’s departure, Charles is rebuked for “rubbing his eyes with his sleeve” – a gesture that points towards recent crying – by Mr Way, who not only “savagely” prompts him to get on, but “kick[s] out with his foot” to lend more weight to his reprimand. While this is only a minor incident, it serves as a prelude to Mr Way’s endorsement of Mr Lilly’s suggestion to whip Charles for “shak[ing] in a sort of convulsion, and run[ing]” from the scene upon seeing Gentleman, Maud and Mr Lilly emerge from one of the rooms. Even though the text does not specify whether Mr Way whipped his son following this incident, which in light of his previous treatment of Charles would have been probable, he whipped him at a later point, as Charles tells Sue in the asylum. Charles is even convinced that “‘Mr Way would skin me alive!’” if he were to return to Briar after running away from his aunt’s, which does not appear as an unreasonable assumption in light of the severity of Mr Way’s previous punishments. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 287, 452.

296 For a reading of child commodification in *Oliver Twist*, see Sharon A. Bickle’s “Twisting Dickens: Modding Childhood for the Steampunk Marketplace in Cory Doctorow’s ‘Clockwork Fagin’ (2011).”, 58–71, especially 59–61. For a reading of *Oliver Twist* as a “textbook of child abuse”, see P.O. Brennan. “*Oliver Twist*, Textbook of Child Abuse.”, 504–505. Brennan argues that, “[i]n terms of standards in Britain in the year 2001, many of the childcare practices described in *Oliver Twist* constitute child abuse” and maintains that Dickens “observes and describes many categories of child abuse, together with risk factors which modern research has identified in abusing parents”. P.O. Brennan. “*Oliver Twist*, Textbook of Child Abuse.”, 504.

297 Elizabeth Rees. “Dickensian Childhoods.”, 105.

novel, the eponymous, initially nine-year-old protagonist is subject to repeated victimisation and physical abuse, especially during his time as parochial orphan: he is ill-used by the baby-farmer Mrs Mann, whose “fist had been too often impressed upon his body not to be deeply impressed upon his recollection”, is “sociably flogged as a public warning and example”²⁹⁸ for asking for more food in the workhouse and has to suffer various insults and physical mistreatment at the hands of Noah Claypole during his apprenticeship to the undertaker Mr Sowerberry. Even though Waters refrains from providing detailed descriptions of Charles’ suffering, the few instances chronicling his mistreatment are likely to evoke the memorable scenes of Oliver’s childhood torments, placing Charles, despite his somewhat more mature age, firmly in the discourse surrounding child abuse both then and now, and serve to highlight his powerless state and need of protection, which is a defining feature of Dickens’ fictional children.²⁹⁹

Although Waters does not elaborate on Charles’ childhood days or the time prior to Gentleman’s visit, the frequency of his punishments and the obviously dysfunctional relationship between him and his father suggest that Charles must also have been abused when he was younger and thus is likely to have shared Maud’s position as a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD on the childhood scale. In presenting Maud and implicitly also Charles as abused children, whose mistreatments vary in form and degree, Waters reveals Briar as a place not conducive to a positive childhood experience, irrespective of whether these children belong to the working or upper class and regardless of their gender. She also suggests that the presence of a biological parent, in this case Charles’ father, does not guarantee a better treatment of the child/adolescent; in fact, Charles has a strained relationship with his father, whom he refers to in non-familial terms as ‘Mr Way’, and by whom he is treated according to his position as underservant in the Briar household. Charles’ abuse might strike readers as less salient than Maud’s, due to its physical rather than sexual nature and the alternating autodiegetic narratives of Sue and Maud (which neither detail his abuse nor present much insight into the boy’s emotions); however, the amount of his suffering suggests that it was an integral, perhaps even dominant, facet of his childhood experience.

Introduced in the depiction of his work at Briar, Charles’ childlike qualities are foregrounded in the third part of the novel, in which he takes a more active stance and claims agency by running away from his aunt’s and helping Sue escape from

298 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 10, 18.

299 Paul Morris, for instance, observes that “Paul Dombey, Little Nell, *Oliver Twist* and a host of other children are compelling figures because of what their separate stories seem to represent about children as literary constructs but also as autonomous individuals uniquely social due to their defining need for care and protection”. Paul Morris. “*Oliver Twist*, the Perils of Child Identity and the Emergence of the Victorian Child.”, 215.

Dr Christie's private mental asylum. In various instances, Waters implies that Charles still possesses a certain childlikeness, manifest in his behaviour and some gestures, his obsession with his blue pea-jacket and arguably also his high moral compass, all of which suggests that he has not yet left his childhood days behind completely. The impression that Charles is still a fairly childlike character is again enhanced by intertextual references to *Oliver Twist* and especially the titular protagonist, after whom Charles is clearly modelled in some respects.

One of the most salient features in the context of Charles' childlikeness and arguably his hallmark feature is his habit of bursting into tears, which principally derives from the non-actualisation of his *W-world* and the failed attempts to actualise this world himself. Charles cries frequently and often inconsolably, like Oliver Twist, who cries multiple times in the course of the novel, but especially at the beginning, where his pathetic state and forlornness are emphasised.³⁰⁰ In the account he gives Sue in the asylum, Charles' bitter crying was the reason for having to leave Briar. As it turns out, he has never recuperated from the non-actualisation of his *W-world*, even some time after Gentleman's departure, and was unable to adequately fulfil the tasks he was given by Mr Way. His "'breaking out crying'" while supposed to push Mr Lilly in his wheelchair, eventually resulted in his being sent away to his aunt's "'to look at her black-faced pigs'"³⁰¹, which were hoped to cure his melancholy, but never did.³⁰² His attempt to actualise his *W-world* on his own accord by running away to the asylum to find Gentleman likewise results in tears. Upon finding out that Gentleman drove on to London, Charles "swallow[s]" and "twitche[s]" before he covers his face with his hands and, "to [...] [Sue's] great astonishment"³⁰³, begins to weep. The detailed description of his emotional reaction reinforces its significance and reflects Charles' repeated disappointment and increasing level of desperation. When he is about to start crying again at a later point during his visit, Sue even perceives his emotional reaction to be at odds with his age and presumed level of maturity ("he

300 For instance, Oliver "sobbed himself to sleep" and "only cried bitterly all day" in the workhouse and cries on his way to the magistrate to be apprenticed as a chimney sweep, where he then "burst[s] into tears" and, as the magistrate observes, "'look[s] pale and alarmed'". He also weeps for being lonely: "Although Oliver did as he was desired, at once; and passed the back of his unoccupied hand briskly across his eyes, he left a tear in them when he looked up at his conductor. As Mr. Bumble gazed sternly upon him, it rolled down his cheek. It was followed by another, and another. The child made a strong effort, but it was an unsuccessful one. Withdrawing his other hand from Mr. Bumble's he covered his face with both; and wept until the tears sprung out from between his chin and bony fingers". Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 13, 17, 26, 33.

301 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 451.

302 The idea that Charles is melancholic establishes a further parallel to Oliver Twist, who, as the undertaker Mr Sowerberry observes, has "'an expression of melancholy in his face'" he seeks to exploit by turning him into a child mute. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 41.

303 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 449, 450.

was far too big a boy to be so tearful”³⁰⁴), which implies that this behaviour is characteristic of much younger children. The various other instances in which Charles weeps further contribute to consolidating this impression. His crying culminates during Mrs Sucksby’s trial, where he weeps “so hard, and [shakes] so badly, the judge declare[s] him unfit”³⁰⁵ and sends him back to his aunt, whereby he places Charles under adult/familial supervision. Whether Charles cries because an actualisation of his *W-world* can no longer be achieved, as Gentleman was stabbed, or because he is just overwhelmed by the situation in court cannot be discerned, but all are likely explanations that have contributed to his emotional breakdown.

Charles also exhibits a distinctly childlike behaviour when he begins to hold Sue’s hand upon reaching London. As Sue recounts, Charles was initially only “sometimes catching hold of the cuff of my sleeve”, but when she takes “his hand to lead him across a street”, Charles decides to “let his fingers stay there”³⁰⁶. This gesture of holding onto Sue’s hand signifies his need for protection and stresses an unease that seems to derive principally from his unfamiliarity with the environment (London), where he could easily get lost. It is also a clear intertextual echo of *Oliver Twist*, in which Oliver is “firmly grasping [...] [Mr Bumble’s] gold-laced cuff”³⁰⁷ when he is transferred from the baby farm to the workhouse and is repeatedly mentioned to give his hand to, hold hands with or being taken by the hand by other characters. For instance, he “plac[es] his little withered hand in [...] [Mrs Bedwin’s], and draw[s] it round his neck” for comfort, holds out his hand for Nancy and “instinctively place[s]”³⁰⁸ his hand in hers at a later point and is taken by the hand by and gives his hand to Bill Sikes.³⁰⁹ The particular childlikeness of the scene where Charles holds Sue’s hand is reinforced by the latter’s comparison to the siblings in the English children’s tale *The Babes in the Wood* (1595), which was popular reading and pantomime material in the nineteenth century. In this story, two very young children, a brother and a sister – which coincidentally is also what Sue in *Fingersmith* and Nancy in *Oliver Twist* temporarily claim as their relation to Charles and Oliver respectively – are abandoned in a wood and go “hand in hand [...] wandering up and down”³¹⁰, before they eventually die of starvation. Sue’s blunt assessment that they “looked like the Babes in the bloody Wood” when she sees herself and Charles “reflected in the

304 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 452.

305 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 516–517.

306 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 469.

307 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 11.

308 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 95, 183.

309 Cf. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 135, 187, 194.

310 Anon. *The Babes in the Wood*, 11.

glass of a great shop window – me in my bonnet, him in his plain pea-jacket”³¹¹, holding hands – expresses her embarrassment and suggests that they look innocent, naïve and possibly also younger than they are.³¹²

Another such instance stressing Charles’ childlikeness occurs shortly afterwards when Sue and Charles share a bed. During a heated discussion between them about Gentleman, Charles, who is still very keen on bringing about an actualisation of his *W-world* and continues to idolise Gentleman, is nearly hit by a stone thrown by Sue and begins to weep almost instantly. When Sue, after having begun to cry herself, puts her arm around him for comfort, Charles immediately seeks solace by leaning against her shoulder and professes that he will be able to go to sleep “‘like a good boy’”, if Sue “would keep beside him”³¹³ and share his bed. Similar to eleven-year-old Maud during her first night at Briar, Charles is thus seeking physical contact/proximity and, like a small child, apparently needs to feel Sue’s presence to be able to fall asleep. The absence of any sexual connotations of this scene evokes the impression that he behaves like a prepubescent child in need of comfort.

Charles’ childlikeness is also foregrounded in the context of the pawning of his pea-jacket upon arrival in London. Up until this point, Sue and Charles have mainly been living off the money Charles brought with him when he ran away from his aunt and now need to find a source of income. As a provisional and short-term solution, Sue decides to pawn his coat to provide them with food and lodgings. Yet, for Charles, who still attempts to bring about an actualisation of his *W-world*, the pledging of his jacket inevitably jeopardises this dream and reduces his chances to achieve an actualisation of this world any time soon. He is convinced that Gentleman will “‘never want a boy in shirt-sleeves!’”³¹⁴ and thus is adamant about getting his coat back, reminding Sue to the point of exhaustion that he wants back his jacket (“‘I want my jacket,’ Charles would say, a hundred times an hour”³¹⁵). While his demeanour is in and of itself reminiscent of the way (small) children frequently utter demands or wishes (“‘I want my jacket’”³¹⁶), his unyielding insistence on wanting *his* jacket also suggests a childlike attachment to a particular item of clothing, which, at least in his opinion, forms the

311 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 469.

312 The latter associations are reinforced by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, according to which ‘babes in the wood’, “with overt or implied reference to the old ballad *The Children in the Wood*” (an alternative title of the tale), refers to “an inexperienced or guileless person”. Anon. “Babe.”, 849.

313 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 478.

314 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 471.

315 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 479.

316 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 474, 479, 480, my emphasis.

prerequisite for actualising his *W-world*.³¹⁷ Sue, who has realised the significance of the jacket for Charles and bound him to herself through the pawning, even fuels his *W-world* after they have briefly observed Gentleman in the street and manipulates Charles to this end: “‘Weren’t Mr Rivers’s whiskers long, though?’ he said. ‘Weren’t they,’ I answered [...]. ‘I’d say he needs a boy to trim them.’ ‘Don’t he just!’”³¹⁸ In spurring his *W-world*, Sue aims at rendering him compliant to actualise her own *W-world* and uses the pawned jacket to exert control over Charles.³¹⁹

Using the pawned jacket as bribery material, Sue exploits Charles’ childlikeness to beg for money shortly afterwards. Even though Waters hardly elaborates on Charles’ physical features, they must inevitably have contributed to the success of their venture. The scant information on his outward appearance provided in the text indicates that he is a fair-skinned, “fair-haired, blue-eyed boy”³²⁰, who, like many Victorian fictional children/orphans, such as Philip (Pip) Pirrip, Jane Eyre or Oliver Twist, seems to be comparatively small for his age.³²¹ The notion of innocence his outward appearance is apt to inspire is drawn upon more extensively during Charles and Sue’s visit to St Paul’s Cathedral, where he is described as quasi-angelic.³²² Sue readily exploits these features and especially Charles’ propensity for crying when she takes him to Whitechapel for begging. Before they set off, she has “Charles brush his hair and put a parting in it”³²³, evoking the impression of respectability and increasing the genuineness of the story she will spin for him. Once they have arrived at their destination, she

317 In *Oliver Twist*, as Morris observes, clothing serves “as the external sign of societal status” and as an indicator of Oliver’s “imposed identities”. Paul Morris. “*Oliver Twist*, the Perils of Child Identity and the Emergence of the Victorian Child.”, 224. In *Fingersmith*, Charles’ jacket is also closely connected to identity and the role he hopes to assume, albeit as part of his self-fashioning rather than an imposed identity.

318 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 474.

319 Sue has manipulated Charles in this way before when they were on their way to London and Charles was thinking about Briar: “‘Mr Way will be polishing shoes,’ said Charles. His lip began to jump. ‘Think of Mr Rivers’s boots,’ I said quickly. ‘I bet they want a polish. London is awfully hard on a gentleman’s shoes.’ ‘Is it?’ That made him feel better”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 463.

320 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 447.

321 This is implied when Sue points out that he runs when she “walk[s] a little faster”, which evokes the impression that the fourteen-year-old must have shorter legs and still be smaller than her. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 464, my emphasis.

322 Sue describes this scene as follows: “Charles came and sat beside me. [...] He had his cap in his hands, and his fair hair shone. His lip was perfectly pink. Three boys in white gowns went about with flames on sticks of brass, lighting more lamps and candles; and I looked at him and thought how well he would fit in among them, in a gown of his own”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 470–471. Not only does the colour of the gowns signify innocence and purity, especially in this religious context, Charles’ pink lips and fair, shining hair also evoke the image of cherubs, which are often depicted as small children.

323 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 478.

pinches his arm to make him cry and beseeches passers-by to have compassion with and help Charles, because he purportedly has “‘come in from the country this morning and has lost his master’” and is “‘all alone and don’t know no-one, don’t know Chancery Lane from Woolwich’”³²⁴. According to Sue, in particular Charles’ tears, which were increased by “the idea of a gentleman giving him money”, contributed significantly to evoking compassion in the passers-by and “were like so many magnets”³²⁵. Within two days, they make seven shillings, which is a sufficient amount to pay for the rented room and supper. In promising Charles that they will use the money to redeem his pawned coat (“‘[t]omorrow. I swear. [...] Just one more day...’”³²⁶), Sue takes advantage of his childlike obsession with the object to ensure his continuous compliance in the act.

Additional features that contribute to the perception of Charles as a childlike character due to the strong parallels between Charles and *Oliver Twist* are his innate goodness and distinct moral compass. In *Oliver Twist*, as Larry Wolff argues, “theft [i]s the criminal fate which menaces Oliver’s innocence”³²⁷ and the context for foregrounding his *O-world*. Upon seeing the Artful Dodger “plunge his hands into the old gentleman’s pocket, and draw from thence a handkerchief” he hands over to Charley Bates before running away, Oliver is horrified and alarmed, “with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire”³²⁸. Likewise, when he realises “well-nigh mad with grief and terror [...] that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition” Bill Sikes and Toby Crackit requested him for, he not only “involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror” but begs Bill Sikes to “‘not make [...] [him] steal’”³²⁹. As in Oliver’s case, Charles’ moral consciousness surfaces in the context of thievery. Even though his facial expression upon Sue’s request to get her a file and a ward key that will enable her to escape from the asylum is not described, her admonition “‘don’t look like that’”³³⁰ upon instructing him to steal such a key, if necessary, already points to his unease in being implicated in criminal activities. On their way to London, Charles even reproaches Sue for stealing after she played “the shabbiest trick there was”³³¹ on a little girl from a relatively poor family by sending her away from

324 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 478, 479.

325 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 479. Charles’ crying in this instance provides an interesting intratextual link with the beginning of *Fingersmith*, when young Sue, frightened during the stage adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, begins to weep and immediately catches the attention of the women next to her, who “put[s] her arms to [...] [Sue] and smiled”. Ibid., 4.

326 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 479.

327 Larry Wolff. “‘The Boys are Pickpockets, and the Girl is a Prostitute’”, 229.

328 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 82.

329 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 199–200.

330 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 453.

331 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 465.

and gaining access to her home to get her hands on various items of clothing, including a wedding-gown, a knife and a pie while rendering Charles, who is to wait by the hedge and whistle should someone approach the house, complicit in her crime. Not only does he look frightened when Sue returns but he also expresses his conscience in identifying her actions as theft (“‘You took them shoes and that gown, without asking’”), which he does again in London (“‘You told a lie to that lady, about having a poor eye. You took that gown and those shoes, and that pie. That pie made me sick’”³³²). Unlike Sue, who grew up in a house in which criminal activity was part of everyday life and has a distorted *O-world*, Charles, like Oliver, is troubled and horrified by the idea of stealing.³³³

The extent of Charles’ *O-world* is especially evident during the series of events that result in Gentleman’s death. Aware that Sue attempts to render him an accomplice in Maud’s murder (“‘You shall come with me, Charles. You shall help’”), Charles refrains from handing Sue the sharpened knife, standing “open mouthed, and [doing] nothing”, only to be taken by “his wrist and led [...] from the room, down the slippery staircase”³³⁴ to Sue’s former home. In the confrontation taking place in the house on Lant Street, Charles is mostly a passive and frightened observer, who, like a child, bites the band of his cap and does not claim much agency until Gentleman is fatally wounded and directly addresses him.³³⁵ As Sue recounts, “[h]e had stood all this time in the shadows, a look of fixed and awful terror on his face”³³⁶ and refrains from approaching Gentleman when he reaches out for him. Frightened by “the bubbles [of blood] at Gentleman’s lips and whiskers” and his “red and slippery hand [that is] gripping the coarse blue collar of his jacket”, Charles decides to run from the scene and expose Gentleman’s stabbing as murder, which eventually brings about the police: “And before we could call to him or go to him to make him stop, we heard him tear open the door then shriek, like a girl, into Lant Street: ‘Murder! Help! Help! Murder!’”³³⁷ Unlike the other participants in this commotion, who respect Mr Ibbs’

332 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 466, 474.

333 This is further reflected in Charles’ reaction upon seeing the watch Sue stole from a woman with a baby on the bus, which Sue describes in the following way: “He looked at it as though it were a snake that might bite him”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 480. The comparison to a snake evokes the biblical story of Adam and Eve and their eviction from paradise, in which Eve, tempted by a snake, eats the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge.

334 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 476, 486.

335 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 489.

336 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 506.

337 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 506. Despite his strong parallels with Oliver Twist, Charles’ words and actions are reminiscent of Charley Bates’, another boy in Fagin’s criminal gang in *Oliver Twist*. When Charley sees Bill Sikes after Nancy’s murder in an abandoned warehouse on Jacob’s Island, where Sikes seeks refuge, he threatens to expose him (“‘if they come here after him, I’ll give him up’”) and cries “‘Murder! Help! [...] Murder! Help!’” before throwing himself at Sikes. Shortly afterwards, when a crowd arrives at the warehouse,

decision not to allow any surgeons in this house and would probably also agree to conceal the murder, Charles immediately exposes the criminal deed and is responsible for initiating the inquest that eventually leads to Mrs Sucksby's conviction and death by hanging.

The innate goodness Charles displays in the final part of *Fingersmith* is thrown into sharp relief by comparison to the morally degenerate and violent John Vroom. Even though he is roughly of the same age as Charles and continuously referred to as 'boy', he appears to have left his childhood days behind some time ago. He is introduced as "a thin, dark, knifish boy" with a broken tooth who always keeps a knife about him and uses swear words on a seemingly regular basis, while Charles flinches upon hearing Sue use the word 'arse' and refuses to write what he refers to as the "'B-word'"³³⁸ ('bitch').³³⁹ In imitation of Bill Sikes and Noah Claypole in *Oliver Twist*, who both exert violence against and subjugate women, John repeatedly hits Dainty, "a great red-haired girl of three-and-twenty, and more or less a simpleton"³⁴⁰ and can be considered a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD.³⁴¹ He is also already fully implicated in the criminal adult world. John not only displays a particular interest in the cunning plan laid out by Gentleman, but also has "a deal with a dog-thief", who provides him with bodies of throttled dogs, the skins of which John has Dainty sew "onto stolen dogs, to make them seem handsomer breeds than what they really were" and "which he was selling as quality breeds at the Whitechapel Market"³⁴². In contrast to Charles, who in most respects adheres to the rules and

Charley continuous to cry for help and advises the people outside to "'[b]reak down the door!'", giving away Nancy's murderer. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 475, 476.

338 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 481, original emphasis.

339 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 14; cf. *ibid.* 470. The way Water's employs the term 'B-word' – i.e., in analogy to F-word or N-word – seems to be anachronistic.

340 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 15.

341 Noah Claypole threatens Charlotte, the former maid of the Sowerberrys, with a kick when they are on their way to London and congratulates himself on having "'kept [her] tolerably well under'". Bill Sikes not only strikes Nancy, who shows Oliver at one point "some livid bruises on her neck and arms", he also "'thought [...] [he] had tamed her'" and eventually cold-bloodedly murders her with a club, which is the scene Waters has chosen for the theatrical performance Sue attends as a child in the opening chapter of *Fingersmith*. Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 398, 183, 418. Letissier also reads Dainty and John "through their meanness" as "oddly reminiscent of Noah Claypole and Charlotte". Georges Letissier. "More Than Kith and Less Than Kin.", 376.

342 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 15. The dog-thief himself obtains the dogs he sells John via cunning theft. As Sue explains, "[t]his man had a couple of bitches: when the bitches came on heat he would walk the streets with them, tempting dogs away from their owners, then charging a ten pounds' ransom before he'd give them back. That works best with sporting dogs, and dogs with sentimental mistresses; some owners, however, will never pay up – you could cut off their little dog's tail and post it to them and never see a bean, they are that heartless – and the dogs that John's pal was landed with he would throttle, then sell to him at a knocked-down price". *Ibid.* Even though Bill Sikes is not a dog thief, he has a dog, which he

regulations of society, condemning (petty) theft and lying, John violates these rules and is eventually – coincidentally in the context of Charles' exposing of Gentleman's murder – convicted for dog-stealing and sent to Tothill Fields prison for six days.³⁴³

The extent of John Vroom's moral degeneracy is especially evident in the context of Gentleman's death and culminates in his false testimony. Exacting his personal retribution for having been abused throughout his childhood, he accuses Mrs Sucksby of Gentleman's murder "without a hesitation"³⁴⁴ when the police officers arrive at the crime scene. Even though "Maud moved, or took a step", as if to confess to having murdered Gentleman, when the policemen ask the assembly who is responsible for this "filthy murder", John, whose "cheek was darker than ever, where he had been struck [by Mrs Sucksby] before"³⁴⁵, identifies the baby farmer as the murderer. He even lies in front of the court when he confirms Mrs Sucksby's intent during the trial, claiming that "[s]he had cried, 'You blackguard, take that!'" after stabbing Gentleman and that "he had seen her with the knife in her hand, for at least a minute, before she did"³⁴⁶, which does not correspond with Sue's version of events. Strikingly, he, like Charles, cries in the courtroom; yet, in light of his previous actions, it can be assumed that his tears are not genuine but serve to convince the jury of Mrs Sucksby's guilt. It seems that he is following in the literary footsteps of Noah Claypole at this point, who rests at the workhouse gate "for a minute or so, to collect a good burst of sobs and an imposing show of tears and terror" and "with well-affected dismay" wrongfully accuses Oliver of murderous intents ("He tried to murder me, sir; and then he tried to murder Charlotte; and then missis. Oh! what dreadful pain it is! Such agony, please, sir!"³⁴⁷). Thus, where Charles runs outside into the streets to uncover the truth about Gentleman's murder, John wrongfully incriminates Mrs Sucksby of premeditated murder and lies to take revenge in the courtroom. In direct juxtaposition to John, Charles inevitably appears more childlike, innocent and naïve.

mistreats severely and wants to drown towards the end of the story. Besides his dog-thieving business, John's treatment of animals is also indicative of his moral degeneracy and puts him in line with cruel Victorian fictional children such as Tom Bloomfield in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*. Not only does John "pour salt on the back of a slug [...] and then laugh to see the slug fizz", he also feeds the bird Mrs Sucksby orders him to get for Maud "the blue heads of matches – he says he plans, in time, to make it swallow a long wick, and then to ignite it". *Ibid.*, 80, 361.

343 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 510.

344 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 508.

345 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 508.

346 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 516.

347 Charles Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, 55, my emphasis.

This reading of Charles as a particularly childlike character points into a very different direction from the second reading proposed here, in which Charles is examined in the context of homosexuality and as an adolescent. Like her second neo-Victorian novel *Affinity*, set in the 1870s, Waters' *Fingersmith* is "situated in a period before the advent of sexology and the proliferation of discourses through which homosexuality would be named"³⁴⁸. The plot in *Fingersmith* is set in 1862, one year after the passing of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act had rendered "the abominable Crime of Buggery, committed either with Mankind or with any Animal" no longer a capital crime penalised by hanging, but by "Penal Servitude for Life or for any Term not less than Ten Years"³⁴⁹. An Act that explicitly targeted *male* homosexual activity was not passed until 1885. The Labouchere Amendment (section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885), which was included as "a last-minute addition" to an Act that was otherwise meant "to formalize ages of consent and dictate harsher punishment for owners of brothels"³⁵⁰, stipulated that "[a]ny male person who, in public or private, commits [...] any act of gross indecency with another male person"³⁵¹ may be imprisoned for up to two years. Notably, the Amendment failed to specify what is meant by "gross indecency", merely elaborating on this term as "[s]uch conduct as is at common law, if public, the subject of indictment"³⁵², and was only effectively repealed by the 1967 Sexual Offences Act.³⁵³ Yet, it was "[o]nly with the

348 Rachel Carroll. "Rethinking Generational History.", 136. According to James Eli Adams, the term 'homosexual' "gained currency in Britain in the 1890s following the translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*" and became popular in the late nineteenth century. James Eli Adams. "Victorian Sexualities.", 133.

349 The National Archives. "Offences Against the Person Act 1861.", n.p., Offences Against the Person Act, 1861, Victoria 24 & 25, chap. 100, § 61. Interestingly, § 62 of the same Act makes the "Assault upon any Male Person" a misdemeanour: "Whosoever shall attempt to commit the said abominable Crime, or shall be guilty of any Assault with Intent to commit the same, or of any indecent Assault upon any Male Person, shall be guilty of a Misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable, at the Discretion of the Court, to be kept in Penal Servitude for any Term not exceeding Ten Years and not less than Three Years, or to be imprisoned for any Term not exceeding Two Years, with or without Hard Labour". Ibid., § 62.

350 James Eli Adams. "Victorian Sexualities.", 133.

351 Frederick Mead and A.H. Bodkin. *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885*, 68, The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, 48 & 49 Victoria, chap. 69, section 11. This Act ignores lesbian homosexuality.

352 Frederick Mead and A.H. Bodkin. *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885*, 68, The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, 48 & 49 Victoria, chap. 69, section 11.

353 The 1956 Sexual Offences Act repealed but re-enacted this section: "It is an offence for a man to commit an act of gross indecency with another man, whether in public or private, or to be a party to the commission by a man of an act of gross indecency with another man, or to procure the commission by a man of an act of gross indecency with another man". The National Archives. "Sexual Offences Act, 1956.", 4, Sexual Offences Act, 1956, Elizabeth II 4 & 5, chap. 69, section 13. Only in 1967 were homosexual acts in private no longer an offence. Cf.

trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895”, who was convicted under the Labouchere Amendment, that “a clear image of ‘the homosexual’ [was] firmly fixed in the public mind”³⁵⁴. Around the turn of the century, “homosexual discourse from both apologists and accusers, from the scientific and medical milieus as well as from the literary one”, as Antonio Sanna maintains, “witnessed [...] [an] explosion”³⁵⁵. With respect to the latter and drawing on various critics, he argues that, “in Gothic novels and short stories, subjects such as (homo)sexuality, sadomasochism, and sexual violence were often alluded to or even explicitly represented”³⁵⁶, and popular (late) Victorian texts, such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) have all been read in this context.³⁵⁷ As in these novels, male homosexuality and male same-sex relationships are mostly implied in *Fingersmith*.

Similar to Charles’ childlike qualities, which are hinted at during the Briar episode but are more prominent in the third part of the novel, hints at his same-sex attraction to Gentleman can already be found at Briar but accumulate in the final part of the novel. Therefore, this section begins again by first looking at the clues pointing towards his sexual orientation and a potential homosexual relationship with Gentleman during his time at Briar, before it proceeds with an analysis of instances implying his homosexuality in the third part of the novel. In this context, it is argued that his homosexual tendencies find expression in his concerns about his appearance and his ‘obsession’ with Gentleman and are consolidated by Gentleman’s behaviour during the only actual encounter with Charles towards the end of the novel. This encounter indicates that Charles’ implied homosexual feelings are not as unrequited by Gentleman as they might initially seem and that certain actions or at least signals on Gentleman’s part might have encouraged the attraction in the first place.

First hints at Charles’ homosexual attraction can be found in the passages chronicling the events taking place at Briar. Like the cook, who “had changed her old wool stockings for the black silk pair [...] [Sue] had given her”, and “[t]he

The National Archives. “Sexual Offences Act, 1967.”, n.p., Sexual Offences Act, 1967, Elizabeth II, chap. 60, section 1.

354 James Eli Adams. “Victorian Sexualities.”, 134. During the Wilde trials, “Wilde’s grotesquely distorted public persona became the face of homosexuality in 1895”, so that afterwards, “‘the desire of Oscar Wilde’ became a euphemism for homosexuality”. Talia Schaffer. “‘A Wilde Desire Took Me’.”, 388, 399.

355 Antonio Sanna. “Silent Homosexuality.”, 22.

356 Antonio Sanna. “Silent Homosexuality.”, 25.

357 Cf., for instance, Sanna’s article “Silent Homosexuality in Oscar Wilde’s *Teleny* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.”, 21–39, and Talia Schaffer’s article “‘A Wilde Desire Took Me’: The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*.”, 381–425.

parlourmaids[, who] had changed their caps, for ones with extra ruffles”, Charles “had combed his hair flat, and made the parting straight as a blade”³⁵⁸ on the day of Gentleman’s return. Like the other *female* servants, he thus smartened himself up *for* Gentleman. When Sue enters the kitchen on this night, Charles is also happily at work *for* him by “rubbing polish into one of Gentleman’s boots”³⁵⁹. Moreover, throughout Gentleman’s stay, Charles takes good care of this particular guest by “brushing his fancy coats”³⁶⁰ or bringing him breakfast and has plenty of points of contact with him, which he might even have established on purpose by volunteering for certain tasks. Although the actual meetings and interactions between the two are omitted from Maud’s and Sue’s narratives, the lack of information on their encounters is meaningful, as it leaves much room for the readers’ imagination of what might or might not have happened between them.

The idea of a homosexual attraction between Charles and Gentleman is conveyed by Charles’ behaviour during and after Gentleman’s departure. While the reading of Charles as a particularly childlike character did not provide an explanation for his fascination with Gentleman or helped in explaining his crying on the day Gentleman departed without him, the assumption of a homosexual relationship between the two does. Charles’ long and extensive mourning after Gentleman’s departure can thus be read as an expression of heartbreak. Such a reading is reinforced by Mr Way, who has been eyeing Gentleman closely and appears to assume that Mr Lilly’s visitor is a homosexual man.³⁶¹ He insinuates that his son has feelings for a man twice his age when Charles runs crying “from the kitchen wiping snot from his chin”³⁶² after Gentleman has departed without him. Mr Way’s assertion “‘Boy your age, fellow like him, I’d be ashamed!’”³⁶³ indicates that Charles’ bursting into tears must have confirmed his suspicion. Charles’ subsequent punishment, i. e., the belting, is thus not merely a response to his refusal to return to the dinner table, but also to his presumed homosexuality. Arguably, his other punishments likewise are not what initially seemed

358 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 107.

359 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 107.

360 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

361 That Mr Way seems to assume Gentleman to be a homosexual man can be inferred from the scene when Maud and Gentleman are about to take a walk on the Briar grounds and Mr Way notices Gentleman’s lavender gloves: “Mr Way observes the gloves, then looks at me [Maud] in a kind of satisfaction, a kind of scorn”, as if aware that Gentleman will not have any sexual interest in Maud. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 265. Mr Way is also, as Sue observes on the day of Gentleman’s return, “the only one” among all the servants “not glad that Gentleman had come”, which indicates that he might have witnessed intimations of a homosexual relationship between Gentleman and his son when Gentleman previously stayed at Briar. *Ibid.*, 107.

362 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

363 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147.

a response to trivial actions but to his attraction to Gentleman, as all of them occur as a response to Charles' mourning of Gentleman's departure and are solely carried out by Mr Way.³⁶⁴

It is only in the third part, when Charles visits Sue in the asylum, that he briefly points to his feelings and same-sex attraction to Gentleman. Explaining to Sue that Mr Way has whipped him for "mop[ing] so long" after Gentleman's departure, Charles also acknowledges that he did not much mind the whipping, which "'was nothing – I should say, a hundred whippings would be nothing! – compared to the smarting, miss, of my disappointed heart'" ³⁶⁵ and confirms that Gentleman's departure has left him heartbroken. This, in turn, also provides a slightly different motivation for his *W-world* and suggests that he does not merely wish to go "'to London as Mr Rivers's man'", but go "'to London as *Mr Rivers's man*'" ³⁶⁶. The actualisation of his *W-world*, which is fuelled by his recent heartbreak, hence would bring him closer to the man he loves.

The idea of a homosexual relationship between the two characters is further consolidated by Charles' preoccupation with Gentleman. As Sue finds out, Charles ran off "'for Mr Rivers's sake'" and hoped to find him in the asylum, which he at first supposed to be "'a great hotel'" ³⁶⁷. Even though he initially claims that he presumed to "'find Miss Lilly here. And – and Mr Rivers'" ³⁶⁸, who is merely mentioned in second place, it is the latter he asked for upon arrival at the asylum gate. During the conversation with Sue, the extent of Charles' *W-world* becomes apparent when he declares that he would work for Gentleman without being paid rather than remaining at Briar, which implies that being around Gentleman, whom he later defends and idolises as "a gem of a man" ³⁶⁹ against Sue's allegations of villainy and devilry, must have a certain appeal to Charles. This is also underscored by the use of suggestive language when Charles insists to "'want Mr Rivers!"' ³⁷⁰ and reinforced by his obsession with his pawned coat. Convinced that Gentleman will "'never want a boy in shirt-sleeves!"' ³⁷¹, Charles is upset when Sue pawns his jacket and can merely think about his appearance

364 Against this background, Charles' "shak[ing] in a sort of convulsion" before running from the scene when Maud, Mr Lilly and Gentleman emerge from one of the rooms while he is carrying the latter's luggage is not, as Maud supposes, a response to "see[ing] my uncle", but to seeing Gentleman who will, as Charles knows at this point, depart without him. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 287.

365 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 450.

366 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 147, my emphasis.

367 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 450, 449. Given that the house is a converted gentleman's house, this assumption is not as far-fetched as it might seem. Cf. *ibid.*, 408.

368 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 449.

369 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 477.

370 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 476, my emphasis.

371 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 471, my emphasis.

when they see Gentleman enter the house on Lant Street. As Sue remarks, Charles did not notice her agitation and “was thinking of his shirt-sleeves. – ‘Oh!’ he still said. ‘Oh! Oh!’ He was looking at his finger-nails, and at the smudges of dirt on his cuffs”³⁷². His dismay and concern about his outward appearance suggests that he had smartened himself up for Gentleman once again when he left his aunt’s and must have picked the coat, which Sue describes as “a good one”³⁷³ and which is not part of his servant’s uniform, deliberately to make an impression on Gentleman. Given Charles’ strong attachment to this particular item of clothing, one could even speculate that Gentleman might have complimented him on this jacket before.

Likewise, Charles’ frequent crying in the third part of Waters’ novel, which has been identified as his hallmark feature above, cannot only be read as a childlike trait that sits awkwardly with his ‘advanced’ age, but also as an expression of his feelings for Gentleman. Sue’s contention that Charles is “far too big a boy to be so tearful”³⁷⁴ when he repeatedly burst into tears during his first visit to the asylum gains a different meaning when considering the contents of their conversation: Charles’ running away from his aunt’s to follow Gentleman to London and his finding out that Gentleman is not where he supposed him to be. The actualisation of his *W-world*, and hence being with Gentleman, cannot be achieved instantly, and Gentleman’s absence turns into a further disappointment for Charles, who must have expected to actualise this world upon reaching the asylum. Likewise, when Sue takes Charles begging in the streets of Whitechapel, where his tears turn into “magnets” and elicit the compassion of the passers-by, “the idea of a gentleman giving him money”, even if it is not his Gentleman, “made Charles cry worse than ever”³⁷⁵. Charles, who constantly refers to Gentleman as ‘Mr Rivers’ and regards him as a gentleman, must be reminded of him.

The first and only actual encounter and conversation between the two in the thieves’ den on Lant Street also contains fairly distinct hints at a homosexual relationship between them. While Gentleman’s winking at Charles upon entering the kitchen, whom he sees and greets before Sue, might just be a gesture of recognition, it might also be employed suggestively, as their subsequent interaction implies.³⁷⁶ When Charles, following Sue’s instruction to prevent Gentleman from leaving the room and calling Dr Christie, moves towards him, Gentleman “put[s] his hand to Charles’s hair” and shortly afterwards even “stroke[s] Charles’s cheek” when he is about to start crying again for having “‘found [...]

372 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 472–473.

373 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 471.

374 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 452.

375 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 479.

376 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 497.

[Gentleman] out a villain’ ”³⁷⁷. This form of physical interaction is striking, because Gentleman has, prior to this encounter, merely been described as acknowledging Charles in the context of work and his position as a servant.³⁷⁸ It also gains significance in the context of Gentleman’s own sexual orientation, as Waters codes him as homosexual throughout the text. This coding is evident in his strategy to get rid of Maud’s former lady’s maid Agnes, whom he shames via *oral sex*, and his attitude towards Maud, whom he will merely marry to get his hands on her fortune. Although he proclaims that he “‘shan’t want her [Maud] about me’ ” after marrying her and is aware that he “‘must jiggle her, once, for the sake of the cash’ ”³⁷⁹, he refrains from consuming his marriage after the wedding. During the actual wedding night, he slices his wrist and smears the drops of blood on the sheet to indicate Maud’s deflowering and does not share a bed with his wife, sleeping in a nearby chair instead.³⁸⁰ In light of these actions, the caressing of Charles’ cheek, which is a fairly intimate gesture, can be read as pointing towards a potential same-sex liaison and suggests that interactions of a sexual nature or at least encouragements of this kind might have taken place at Briar.³⁸¹

A reading of Charles as a homosexual also casts a slightly different light on Gentleman’s stabbing and Charles’ emotional breakdown during Mrs Sucksby’s trial. Assuming that Charles’ *W-world* was spurred by his wish to be with the man he loves, Gentleman’s murder permanently foreclosed the actualisation of this world and leaves Charles utterly heartbroken. Accordingly, Charles’ running outside and publicly announcing the murder can be understood as an act of love, because making his murderer assume responsibility and be convicted for this crime in court is the only way to avenge Gentleman’s death. His emotional breakdown and inability to testify in court due to his copious crying can also be

377 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 497, 498.

378 Maud’s account provides two instances in which this is the case: the first occurs when Gentleman sees his dirt-stained shoes during a walk with Maud in the park at Briar and considers the “‘filthy red [...] earth’ ” on his boots “‘a treat for little Charles...’ ” and the second when he regrets not having brought Charles along to London when he attempts to smooth his creased trousers, sure to “‘arrive at [*sic*] London only to be laughed off its streets’ ”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 267, 296.

379 Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 27.

380 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 293–296. Similarly, as was pointed out above, when Charles shares a bed with Sue (upon his own request), he does not display any sexual interest in Sue and no physical bodily reaction of any kind, which Sue might otherwise have commented on.

381 Interestingly, the text implies during the final confrontation in Lant Street that John might have homosexual feelings for Gentleman as well. When Gentleman stroked Charles’ cheek, “John got to his feet, then looked about him as if he did not know why he had done it” and “blushed”. He also “was weeping and trying to hide it” after Gentleman had been stabbed and does not run from the scene of the murder with Dainty, but remains at “Gentleman’s side”. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 498, 505, 507.

explained this way, as the trial must inevitably conjure up memories of Gentleman and remind Charles of his death. Yet, unlike during his first emotional breakdown, which occurred when Gentleman departed from Briar without him, Charles cannot claim agency and attempt to bring about an actualisation of his *W-world* himself, as no amount of agency can alter the state of the TAW in this respect and bring Gentleman back to life.

As both readings have shown, Charles can be interpreted in different ways and is a more complex character than he appears at first.³⁸² In making him a fourteen-year-old boy, Waters situates him in a transitional period and suggests that he is crossing the boundary between childhood and adulthood, as is reflected in his still childlike attributes and behaviour on the one hand and his sexual interest in Gentleman on the other. Charles' childlikeness is used to distinguish him from the criminal and corrupt(ed) characters and assign him the function of the moral centre of the text. Similar to *Oliver Twist*, whose "character remains spotlessly intact, pure and sinless despite circumstances that almost demand wrongdoings for the sake of survival" and who "maintains a sort of ethereal innocence throughout [...] [Dickens'] novel"³⁸³, Charles seems to be the sincerest character in the debauched world of Waters' novel. This does not mean that he is always within the bounds of the law, as the second interpretation shows, but that he, unlike the other characters, has a pronounced and largely intact *O-world*. In this respect, he fulfils an important function for the reader: in implicitly or explicitly drawing attention to the other characters' bent *O-worlds*, he prompts the reader to question these characters' behaviours and actions and remind them of the rules and regulations that govern the TAW. This function arguably is reinforced by his childlike qualities and features and the distinct intertextual parallels between Oliver and Charles. Drawing on the idealised notion and associations of children with innocence and innate goodness and a Victorian fictional child that is incorruptible and virtuous, Waters thus links morality with childhood by endowing her most honest character with childlike attributes.

As the second reading and the structure of this subchapter indicate, Charles' design partly follows Waters' narrative strategy in *Fingersmith*. Yet, instead of narrating the same events from different perspectives to draw attention to dif-

382 In an interview in *The Guardian*, Waters admitted that she had originally envisaged a "fairly inconsequential [role]" for Charles. Commenting on her characters and her attachment to them, she explains that "some minor characters have proved more likeable or interesting than I'd anticipated, and I have brought them back into the plot when I'd originally meant them to have fairly inconsequential roles: this is true of Zena in *Tipping*, and more especially of Charles the knife boy in *Fingersmith*. I liked him a lot". Sarah Waters. "Desire, Betrayal and 'Lesbo Victorian Romps'." n.p. Her interest in and liking of Charles arguably is reflected in his complexity.

383 Leslie S. Simon. "The De-Orphaned Orphan.", 314.

ferent points of view and interpretations of these events, the interpretation of Charles seems to presuppose such a view, as one and the same event can trigger different interpretations depending on which lens is applied to the text. While Charles clearly needs his childlike features to function as the moral centre of the text and for readers to establish the parallels between Oliver and Charles, he also needs to have reached a certain age for the plot to work and prevent it from becoming too unrealistic in places. A same-sex relationship between Charles and Gentleman, which abruptly comes to an end when Gentleman departs and leaves Charles heartbroken, hence gives him an incentive for claiming agency and following Gentleman to London to actualise his *W-world*. It also explains what cannot or can only be partly explained in the reading of Charles as a particularly childlike character, such as his copious crying, which, after all, is the reason for his being sent away from Briar, or the severity of Mr Way's punishments.

Moreover, in presenting Charles as potentially homosexual and as simultaneously the most morally sound and innately good character of *Fingersmith*, Waters opposes Victorian connections between homosexuality and villainy in the spirit of a neo-Victorian critique. As Helen Davies argues, “[h]omosexuality has typically been conceptualised as the sinister ‘other’ to heterosexuality” and that, in considering them in a binary opposition that privileges heterosexuality, “homosexuality is couched in positively villainous terms: ‘predatory’, ‘contaminating’, threatening to encroach upon the respectable ‘normality’ of heterosexuality”³⁸⁴. In the Victorian era, when homosexuality was a criminal offence, Charles would have been considered deviant and transgressive and would hardly have been presented as a/the ‘good character’ in Victorian fictional texts.

Unlike Sue and Maud's lesbian relationship and self-discovery, Charles' sexual attraction to Gentleman is rendered implicit rather than explicit in Waters' text. The implicit nature of Charles' same-sex attraction is crucial for Waters' repeated blurring of and playing with the boundary between childhood and adulthood. It is also an immediate result of her choice of narrative situation, as neither Charles nor Gentleman are given a narrative voice of their own. The focus is hence not deflected from Sue and Maud, who, as lesbian Victorian women, were doubly marginalised at the time. However, while readers of Waters' neo-Victorian novels can expect a lesbian relationship, they might be pleasantly surprised to find that her last neo-Victorian novel to date also contains an implied male homosexual relationship.³⁸⁵

384 Helen Davies. “‘I raise the devil in you, not any potion. My touch’.”, 236, 237.

385 In *The Night Watch*, Waters also implies male homosexual, or rather homoerotic, relationships in the storyline revolving around Duncan. As O'Callaghan observes, “[t]hrough Duncan, Waters explores the personal injuries and affective feelings arising from discrimination and prejudice to sexual orientation. His story involves two homoerotic relationships: the earliest in 1941 concerns his homoerotic friendship with Alec who commits suicide, the

8.4. Concluding Remarks

In *Fingersmith*, Waters paints a rather bleak picture of childhood. Almost all of her child characters, regardless of age, gender and social class, take more or less extreme positions on the childhood scale: the children who prematurely die on Mrs Sucksby's baby farm due to neglect belong to the category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD, John and Charles, who are both physically abused, belong to the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, and Maud is turned from the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD she was in the asylum into a SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD at Briar. These more or less extreme positions, which are all determined by adult authority, are likely to elicit readerly outrage at the injustices these fictional children (and, by implication, their counterparts in real life) had to experience, often at the hands of those who were supposed to take care of them. They seem to confirm once more that "[n]eo-Victorian childhoods are not to be enjoyed but endured"³⁸⁶, if the children survive infancy. Sue's perception of her childhood as a relatively pleasant time clearly is the exception in this regard, but the nature of her childhood and her special treatment amongst Mrs Sucksby's farm children are determined by the contract between Mrs Sucksby and Marianne Lilly, according to which Sue holds monetary value in that she can be exchanged for Maud and the inheritance.

Interestingly, in Walsh's 2005 eponymous two-part audio-visual adaptation, Sue's and Maud's childhood experiences are subject to revision and, in Maud's case, even purification. Only the first eight minutes (of the series' total of 180 minutes) depict Sue and Maud as children, played by Stephanie Middleton and Tallulah Pitt-Brown respectively. Unlike Waters' text, the adaptation juxtaposes Sue's and Maud's memories of their childhoods in four alternating scenes right at the beginning before shifting towards the experiences of their adult counterparts. Yet, Walsh's choice of material for the depiction of Maud's and Sue's childhoods simplifies the characters and their background stories significantly.

Even though Walsh spends more time on Maud's childhood than on Sue's, her interpretation takes away almost all of its neo-Victorian potential. While "*Fingersmith* dwells at length on Maud's traumatic childhood and her 'grooming' by

second across 1944 and 1947 between Duncan and Fraser". Claire O'Callaghan. *Sarah Waters*, 116. Even though Duncan claims himself that Alec "'wasn't my boyfriend!'", but merely his only and best friend, the textual clues suggest that he is denying his sexual attraction to Alec, as homosexuality was still a criminal offence in the 1940s. Sarah Waters. *The Night Watch*, 432. In Waters' first neo-Victorian novel *Tipping the Velvet*, Waters also addresses male homosexuality when Nancy Astley poses and dresses up as a male renter and serves male customers in the streets of London.

386 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 121.

Mr Lilly”, the adaptation abridges this time of her life considerably and ignores “the novel’s oblique hints at child sex abuse [...] almost completely”³⁸⁷. Similarly, the numerous punitive measures meant to make Maud conform to her uncle’s wishes are compressed into one scene in which Mr Lilly whips her hands with a string of metal beads for not wearing her gloves on the day of her arrival. As Kohlke observes, this scene of “childhood ‘flagellation’ [...] is drastically fore-shortened: the implement used is not clearly depicted, the impact on her flesh is never shown (the camera focusing instead on the girl’s wincing face), and Maud’s intense weeping thereafter is cut from the scene”³⁸⁸. The adaptation thus fails to capture the emotional neglect and the physical and psychological abuse Maud is subjected to as a child at Briar, which, according to her retrospective account in Waters’ text, are crucial for understanding her behaviour and decisions as an adult.³⁸⁹ All in all, the formative aspect of childhood is thus hardly conveyed in the adaptation.

Moreover, in its depiction of Maud’s childhood, Walsh’s rendition even suggests that Maud cannot be assigned to the same categories on the childhood scale as her counterpart in the novel. Although Maud is shown to carry a baton in the asylum, the viewers never witness her striking the asylum’s inmates or abusing them otherwise, whereby her monstrous empowerment is only hinted at. The brief scene in the asylum in fact suggests that her position is rather that of the EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD, as can be seen when she speaks up to her uncle during his visit and refuses to go with him (“‘I won’t go! You shan’t make me! I want to stay with you, Matron. I won’t go!’”³⁹⁰). At Briar, she arguably belongs exclusively to the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, where she appears to receive a one-time punishment for refusing to wear her gloves rather than a series of severe physical chastisements shortly after her arrival and psychological sexual abuse as her uncle’s secretary. As Kohlke maintains, “[a]ll references to the young Maud’s frequent beatings and other ‘punishments’, including physical restraint, [...] disappear entirely from the adaptation”³⁹¹. Her diverging positions

387 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Abominable Pictures.”, 161. Kohlke further notes that the “childish clothes” Maud’s uncle forces her to wear “are replaced by full length Victorian gowns” in the adaptation and that Agnes’ sexual defilement by Richard Rivers is presented as “a romantic tryst [...], with Agnes portrayed as a consenting adult”, which she considers “a further striking sanitisation of Waters’ treatment of taboo subjects, which itself already evinces a degree of self-policing”. Ibid.

388 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Abominable Pictures.”, 161. The impact on Maud’s flesh is displayed, albeit very briefly and not particularly distinctly, when she is about to put on the gloves her uncle holds out to her. Cf. Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part I, 7:39.

389 Cf. Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 191.

390 Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part I, 3:50–3:58.

391 Marie-Luise Kohlke. “Abominable Pictures.”, 161.

on the childhood scale thus disclose the degree of revision and purification at work in Walsh's adaptation as far as Maud's childhood experiences are concerned and reinforce the childhood scale's range of applications in the analysis of both literary and audio-visual texts and especially novel-film adaptations.

In a somewhat similar vein, Sue's childhood experiences have also undergone severe reduction and revision and merely comprise approximately two minutes of screen time. For the opening scenes, Walsh has decided against showing Sue being rented out to Flora and visiting the theatre or making her an active participant in Mr Ibbs' thievery business. Thereby the adaptation loses the implicit and explicit intertextual references to *Oliver Twist* completely, which resonate so strongly in the novel that they create an additional layer of meaning. Instead, Sue is shown to collect the entrance fee that allows people into Mrs Sucksby's attic to observe the hanging, which she insists upon witnessing as well – an aspect that is mentioned more or less in passing in Waters' narrative.³⁹² In addition, Sue appears to not have been corrupted and turned into a criminal child in the Lant Street household. Even though Mr Ibbs is shown to demonstrate how he picks a lock in front of Sue, he does so principally to amuse and not to instruct her.³⁹³ Sue is neither given a try at the lock nor does Mr Ibbs explain how the picking is accomplished. Overall, her childhood commodification is significantly downplayed and her special position among Mrs Sucksby's farm children only verbally hinted at.

The interpretation of Charles in the adaptation is also interesting, as he seems to have lost almost all of his childlikeness. This is not least due to the fact that Stephen Wight (born 1980), who plays Charles, was over twenty when the film was shot and arguably looks much older than fourteen.³⁹⁴ His acting also seems to suggest that Charles has a disability: he is frequently depicted with hunched shoulders, walking slightly bent forward and holding his arms away from his body at various angles.³⁹⁵ This impression is reinforced when he runs, whereby he appears to limp and looks fairly stiff.³⁹⁶ Moreover, the adaptation renders his feelings for Gentleman more apparent in the Briar episode than they are in Waters' text by displaying interactions between the two characters. For instance,

392 Cf. Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part I, 0:36–1:18. In Waters' text, Sue explains that Mrs Sucksby watched her mother die by hanging on the roof of the Horsemonger Lane Gaol and comments: "You got a marvellous view of it from there – the best view in South London, everybody said. People were prepared to pay very handsomely for a spot at that window, on hanging days. And though some girls shrieked when the trap went rattling down, I never did. I never once shuddered or winked". Sarah Waters. *Fingersmith*, 12.

393 Cf. Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part I, 4:33–4:36.

394 Bronson Webb, the actor of John Vroom, who is also supposed to be fourteen years old, was born in 1983 and also significantly older than his character in the novel.

395 Cf., for instance, Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part II, 1:04:58–1:05:13.

396 Cf., for instance, Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part II, 59:43–59:55.

when Gentleman returns to Briar, Charles, while running outside, informs Mr Way by screaming that “‘[i]t’s Mr Rivers! Mr Rivers is back’”³⁹⁷ and excitedly runs towards his carriage. When it comes to a halt and Gentleman dismounts, Charles follows him and confesses “‘I... I’ve missed you, sir!’”³⁹⁸, an utterance that can be read as pointing towards his feelings for Gentleman. In the second part, he is even shown running behind Gentleman’s horse when he is horseback riding, which highlights Charles’ particular taking to Gentleman and brings across the idea that he is, quite literally, running after him. Given that they are shown to be on what looks like a clearing, this scene implies that they just had an opportunity to live out their desires for one another, away from the watchful eyes of the servants and under the cover of trees.³⁹⁹ However, they are never shown to actually do so on screen. The scenes that correspond with the events described in Part Three of Waters’ novel have also been revised; neither is Charles’ jacket pawned nor is he so tearful. He is not shown to share a bed with Sue and they do not hold hands. Walsh’s adaptation thus dissolves the ambiguity that can be found in Waters’ depiction of Charles by focusing more strongly on his implied homosexuality, especially in the Briar scenes, although she refrains from showing Gentleman’s caressing of Charles’ cheek in the final confrontation in the house on Lant Street.

With regard to the adaptation’s treatment of childhood, it is particularly noticeable that Walsh overall avoids showing cases of (severe) child abuse on screen as far as Maud and Charles are concerned. For instance, the scene in which Charles runs from the dinner table and is severely beaten by Mr Way has not been included in the adaptation. Mr Way, in fact, is never shown to punish Charles in any way; his son only mentions that he has been beaten so much by his father that it resulted in his running away from Briar.⁴⁰⁰ Maud, likewise, is only shown to receive a punishment once and has apparently not been forced to read from Mr Lilly’s books as a child, but only in adolescence. Here again, Walsh opts for telling instead of showing and has a seventeen-year-old Maud reflect on her childhood days via a voiceover narration, while she is shown on screen entertaining her uncle and his male guests by reading from one of his pornographic books: “‘A curator of poisons, so my uncle described himself to me. I was twelve years old when he began inoculating me with poison, grain by grain, scruple by scruple, so I should be immune to what I read, be his librarian, and, when he lost his sight, his eyes’”⁴⁰¹. Curiously, Maud neither specifies what the process of inoculation looked like, i.e., what she had to endure, nor explicitly refers to the readings.

397 Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part I, 40:09–40:12.

398 Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part I, 41:03–41:06.

399 Cf. Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part II, 4:31–5:04.

400 Cf. Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part II, 48:42–48:45.

401 Aisling Walsh (dir.). *Fingersmith*, Part II, 1:08–1:29.

Maud's physical punishments at the hands of Mrs Stiles and Mr Way, one of which almost proved fatal, are also kept from the audience. Changes like the ones mentioned above widely reduce the complexity of the characters and arguably diminish the viewers' sympathies for the individual characters. Thus, while the adaptation may be more palatable than Waters' text in its depiction of childhood and does not turn the audience into witnesses of children suffering, it appears to almost turn a blind eye on violence against and the abuse of children. In this way, the adaptation eschews some of the most poignant aspects of the neo-Victorian critique in Waters' novel.

9. Childhood Neglect and Pathological Relationships in Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale*

Dianne Setterfield's debut novel *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006) is a critically acclaimed neo-Gothic and neo-Victorian novel. It has won the Alex and the Quill Awards in 2007 and turned out to be an instant commercial success. According to Ian Herbert North, Setterfield "has been paid £800,000 by UK publishers and a further \$1m from a US publishing house"¹, which is an extraordinarily large sum for a first novel. Upon publication, it "has catapulted to first place on the New York Times hardback fiction list"², leaving novels by other popular writers behind, and was overall much better received in the US than in the UK. Oliver Burkeman observes that "about 70,000 hardback copies have been sold in the US, about a fortnight after publication" whereas, "[i]n Britain, about 600 were reportedly purchased in the first week", a striking divergence that "has been attributed to the power of blogs"³. *The Thirteenth Tale* has been adapted by James Kent and was first televised on BBC Two in 2013, starring Vanessa Redgrave as the enigmatic and reclusive Vida Winter and Olivia Colman as Margaret Lea. Despite its sales and publication success, *The Thirteenth Tale* has not yet received much scholarly attention and has predominantly been analysed in the contexts of intertextuality, neo-Victorianism and the Gothic mode.⁴ While some scholars elaborate on the childhood experiences of the various child characters in their arguments, though with different foci and concerns, an analysis that exclusively focuses on the novel's depiction of childhood, which is after all a central topic in this text, is – once again – still missing.

1 Ian Herbert North. "Teacher Secures £1.3m Advance for her Debut Novel.", n.p.

2 Oliver Burkeman. "A Tale with a Twist.", n.p.

3 Oliver Burkeman. "A Tale with a Twist.", n.p.

4 See Reggie Oliver's "Are They All Horrid?: Dianne Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* and the Validity of Gothic Fiction.", 552–562, Susanne Gruss' "Spectres of the Past: Reading the Phantom of Family Trauma in Neo-Victorian Fiction.", 123–136, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Neo Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999–2009*, 47–55, Heta Pyrhönen's *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and Its Progeny*, 145–150 and, to a lesser extent, Wieland Schwanebeck's *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning*, 151.

In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Margaret Lea, daughter of an antiquarian bookseller, who enjoys nineteenth-century classics, and author of a biographical essay on Jules and Edmond Landier, is asked to write the biography of Vida Winter. Hailed as “England’s best-loved writer” and “our century’s Dickens”⁵, Vida Winter, who “is notorious for her extreme evasiveness”⁶, has given multiple fictionalised and fabricated accounts of her life and has decided, in light of a terminal illness, “to tell the truth about herself”⁷ at last. Once Margaret agrees to take on the project following an initial moment of hesitation, Vida Winter tells the traumatic tale of the Angelfield family, during which Margaret recentres to a *fantasy-universe* (or *F-universe*), and elaborates on “the cataclysmic destruction of three generations bound together, and devastated, by the deadly intensity of sibling love”⁸. She sets out with information on Charlie and Isabelle and focuses in more detail on the childhood experiences of the subsequent generation: Emmeline and Adeline, the copper-haired and green-eyed Angelfield twins, as well as Shadow, their unacknowledged and unnamed half-sister, and finally Aurelius, Emmeline’s baby boy. She begins with the obsessive and incestuous relationship between Charlie and Isabelle, which abruptly ends when Isabelle is taken to a mental asylum, whereupon Charlie suffers an emotional and mental breakdown and commits suicide after Isabelle’s premature death. In between, she introduces the monstrously empowered and seemingly callous twins, tells of the arrival of their governess Hester Barrow and the experiment during which Emmeline and Adeline are temporarily separated from one another. Towards the end of the story, she introduces her former childhood self as a “[c]hild of rape”⁹, abandoned on the premises of Angelfield House as a toddler and kept a secret all her life. Eventually, she also briefly touches upon Aurelius’ birth and his precarious position within the Angelfield household. Throughout the novel, she repeatedly suggests that the childhood experiences of the individual members of the Angelfield family are closely intertwined and their character traits hereditary. This story of the Angelfields’ past is interspersed with moments in the present, bound to and contingent upon Vida Winter’s condition and her willingness to tell a further instalment of the story.¹⁰ Through its dual time frame and episodic

5 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 9.

6 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 48.

7 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 12.

8 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 48.

9 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 394.

10 Structurally, the story Vida Winter tells is an embedded narration with a homodiegetic narrator. Since she also provides information on her own childhood and turns out to be one of the protagonists of the story, the homodiegetic narrator seems to gradually become an autodiegetic narrator and is arguably linked with the reclamation of identity. The *f-universe* created by Vida Winter’s episodic storytelling can be reached through an act of mental recentring (as opposed to Tom Long’s physical recentring in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*) and

storytelling, Setterfield's novel meditates on questions of truth, subjectivity, (un)reliability and memory as well as on the role of biographers and the transmission of personal history.¹¹

Given that Setterfield does not situate her novel in a clearly definable historical period, eschewing the use of dates or other temporal markers, such as (the impact of) wars, a reading of *The Thirteenth Tale* in the context of neo-Victorianism requires some comments. Reggie Oliver claims that the past in Setterfield's novel "is one in which servants and governesses exist", undoubtedly evoking a Victorian/nineteenth-century setting, but that "Setterfield is aiming to cut the reader off from the moorings of contemporary reference in order to concentrate more fully on the inner drama of the mind"¹². Despite this deliberate "blur[ing] [of] historical chronologies"¹³, itself reminiscent of fairy tales (which Vida Winter writes herself), several scholars have argued for a reading of Setterfield's novel as a neo-Victorian text. For instance, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn situate the story of Charlie and Isabelle in the 1890s and the childhood of the twins in the Edwardian period, which is used as a basis for and adopted in this chapter.¹⁴ In addition, Susanne Gruss draws attention to "the pervasive influence of Victorian texts"¹⁵, such as Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories or Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), all of which function as implicit or explicit intertexts of *The Thirteenth Tale* and permit reading the novel as a work of neo-Victorian fiction.¹⁶ Setterfield admits in an interview that these texts, especially *Jane Eyre*, unintentionally "crept in" her narrative, conceding that "they are favourites of mine"¹⁷ and thus are likely to

immersion into the story. In other words, Margaret (re-)created the Victorian and Edwardian eras in her mind, based on the information she is provided with by Vida Winter, while Tom can actually see and 'feel' the Victorian era. The information about the (events in the) past Margaret and readers are presented with, which appear to be in chronological order with only minor jumps in time, are filtered through memory, which is in and of itself reminiscent of the Victorian *bildungsroman*.

11 *The Thirteenth Tale* self-consciously explores the tension between storytelling/fictionality and truth and can hence be regarded as an example of historiographic metafiction as defined by Ansgar Nünning. For an overview of his typology of the historical novel, see chapter 2 "Neo-Victorian Fiction: Features and Developments of a Distinctive Type of Historical Fiction".

12 Reggie Oliver. "Are They All Horrid?", 554.

13 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 252 n.20.

14 Cf. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 252 n.20.

15 Susanne Gruss. "Spectres of the Past.", 135 n.3.

16 Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), though published later, is another striking intertext in *The Thirteenth Tale*.

17 Anon. "An Interview with Dianne Setterfield.", n.p.

have inspired her writing.¹⁸ Interestingly, *The Thirteenth Tale* has also – in all likelihood due to its sensation-fiction inspired twists and resonances – been compared to Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002), which is one of the neo-Victorian novels *par excellence* and further reinforces such a reading.¹⁹

This chapter provides an analysis of the various child characters that are juxtaposed in Vida Winter's story.²⁰ It follows the story-internal chronology and sets out with an analysis of Charlie and Isabelle, reading them as NEGLECTED and MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED CHILDREN and elaborating on their sadistic bond during adolescence/adulthood, from which the twins Emmeline and Adeline seemingly have emerged. It suggests that *Wuthering Heights* is the principal intertext for the depiction of Charlie and Isabelle's childhoods and pays special attention to these intertextual relations. The subchapter on the Angelfield twins examines them in the context of their twinship, and places a focus on the experiment and its immediate and long-term repercussions, making use of Lacan's ideas on the mirror stage and the formation of the ego. The final subchapter introduces Shadow and Aurelius as illegitimate and abandoned children. The analysis of Shadow focuses on the story about her conception, which is presented as a twisted fairy tale, her precarious position as wild/secret child and the agency deriving from the latter position. The part on Aurelius focuses on how he is nearly turned into a MURDERED CHILD due to Adeline's jealousy and explores his (adult) quest for identity. This chapter closes with a look at Kent's eponymous audio-visual adaptation, which has transposed the storyline of Vida Winter's narration to the 1940s, substituting broughams with cars, and situates the present around the turn of the millennium, equipping Margaret with a MacBook and a mobile phone instead of an analogue camera.

Arguably, the centrality of childhood as a topic is already variously suggested in the novel's paratextual apparatus. It is, for instance, inscribed visually on the cover of the 2007 edition, which shows two children dressed in identical white dresses and black shoes from the waist down on the front, one of them with neatly folded hands, the other with limp hanging arms, and one child from the knees down on the back.²¹ This composition of the cover serves as a means of char-

18 She even concedes that “‘[i]t was nostalgic for me to write in th[e] style’” of the British classics. Orion's editor-in-chief Jane Wood also links Setterfield's novel to nineteenth-century fiction, claiming that its structure “‘satisfies the appetite for narrative-driven fiction that has beginnings, middles and endings, like the great novels of the 19th century’”. Ian Herbert North. “Teacher Secures £1.3m Advance for her Debut Novel.”, n.p.

19 Cf. Ian Herbert North. “Teacher Secures £1.3m Advance for her Debut Novel.”, n.p. For an analysis of the childhood experiences in Waters' *Fingersmith*, see the previous chapter.

20 The sparse information on Margaret's childhood will not be taken into account separately.

21 The cover illustration in question can be found on the website of the Blackwell's bookshop: <https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/9780752881676>. Last access: 10 February 2023. Interestingly, Ibbotson and Setterfield employ the same colour symbolism (i.e., *white*

acterisation and foreshadowing that becomes fully apparent once the story has been read.²² The significance of childhood is further suggested by an epigraph featuring a quotation from Vida Winter's *Tales of Change and Desperation*, stating "[a]ll children mythologize their birth. It is a universal trait. You want to know someone? Heart, mind and soul? Ask him to tell you about when he was born. What you get won't be the truth: it will be a story. And nothing is more telling than a story"²³. This quotation not only stresses the dominance of childhood in the narrative that is to follow, but also already foreshadows its meta-fictional engagement with notions of truth, storytelling and the (un)reliability of memory. Finally, the reference to childhood is reinforced by a black-and-white photograph of two pairs of black, buckled children's shoes marking the part entitled 'Beginnings', where readers are introduced to the children Charlie and Isabelle as well as Emmeline and Adeline.²⁴ Unlike *Fingersmith*, which does not dedicate much narrative space to the childhood experiences of Sue and Maud, Setterfield's novel *capitalises* on childhood, making this dominant concern abundantly clear even before the actual story starts by using both visual and textual clues.

9.1. Charlie and Isabelle: Obsession, Sadomasochism and Incest

Charles (Charlie) and Isabelle Angelfield are the first children the reader encounters in Vida Winter's biographical narration. Even though the part about their childhoods and adult life is brief and remains fragmentary, comprising merely one chapter altogether, their story prepares Margaret (and, by implication, the reader) for the one that is to unravel afterwards, the story of Emmeline, Adeline and Shadow. For Vida Winter, who insists on telling the events in chronological order, starting at the beginning means telling the story of Charlie and Isabelle first, because the fate of the succeeding generation is inseparably intertwined with that of the previous one. As she explains to Margaret, "[h]uman lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of

dressess) in their depiction of the twins, who, in both cases, eventually turn out to be a far cry from being innocent, subverting one of the immediate associations the white dresses evoke.

22 Cf. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 178.

23 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, n.p.

24 The overall structure of the story is cyclical. It starts and ends with parts entitled 'Beginnings'. While the first signifies the beginning of Vida Winter's story, which ends with a part entitled 'Endings' and picks up on her predilection for "the right order" of stories, the second signifies a new beginning for Aurelius, who is reunited with his biological family eventually. The corresponding photograph shows snowdrops, a fitting image to suggest what comes after winter, in this case Vida Winter's death, and that life goes on. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 57.

others and laid out straight. Families are webs. Impossible to touch one part of it without setting the rest vibrating. Impossible to understand one part without having a sense of the whole’”²⁵, which is further implied by having the twins enter the narrative at the end of the chapter containing the story of Charlie and Isabelle. As it turns out, Vida Winter heard about the events that unravelled prior to her birth from the servants when she was a child and learned to interpret the “hints, glances and silences”²⁶ of the inappropriate and ‘untold’ parts, which were later confirmed by the aged housekeeper and are crucial to her sense of identity.

This subchapter elaborates on Charlie and Isabelle’s childhood, in particular their troubled/troubling relationship with their father, and maintain that, for this part, Setterfield strongly draws on Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, one of the text’s most obvious intertexts.²⁷ It argues that Isabelle, after a brief time of neglect and a state of semi-orphanhood, is overindulged by her father and even turned into a substitute for his late wife, while Charlie is widely ignored and afforded a monstrous form of agency resulting from neglect. After elaborating on the event that turns Isabelle into Charlie’s conspirator rather than another victim, it proceeds with an analysis of Charlie and Isabelle’s sadomasochistic and incestuous bond during adulthood, which is crucial for an analysis of Emmeline and Adeline. In this context, this chapter explores Charlie’s obsession with Isabelle and the repeated clashing of their *wish-worlds* (or *W-worlds*), whereby the non-actualisation of Charlie’s *W-world* culminates in his raping local village girls and almost in his suicide. It suggests that childhood experience is shown to be deeply formative – an aspect that has already been addressed in the previous chapters – and that the absence of nurturing parental affection, intervention and control fostered their toxic relationship, from which the twins Emmeline and Adeline in all likelihood have originated.

Vida Winter’s narrative about the Angelfield family and the childhood experiences of Charlie and Isabelle commences with a short account of the latter’s birth and state of semi-orphanhood as a new-born. Similar to Maud Lilly’s mother in Sarah Waters’ *Fingersmith*, Isabelle’s mother Mathilde dies during childbirth.²⁸ Regardless of whether the memories of the local villagers, some of whom recalled that the doctor was detained by a flood from arriving in time for

25 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 66.

26 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 67.

27 Like Setterfield’s novel, *Wuthering Heights* is a story about three generations; yet, where Brontë’s text elaborates on the second and the third generations in more detail, Setterfield focuses more extensively on the third generation, telling the hitherto untold story of the twins and Shadow. Strikingly, the story of Charlie and Isabelle bears the strongest intertextual relations to *Wuthering Heights*, picking up on issues such as obsessive love and violence as well as the love triangle between Catherine, Edgar and Heathcliff.

28 For an analysis of Maud’s birth (or at least the story she believes is the story about her birth), see chapter 8 “Blighted Neo-Victorian Childhoods in Waters’ *Fingersmith*”.

Isabelle's birth, while others remembered that Isabelle's umbilical cord was "wrapped round the baby's neck, almost strangling her before she could be born", are true, myth-making or merely used to retrospectively pathologise Isabelle, Vida Winter concedes that "it was a difficult birth all right"²⁹, which leaves the child motherless and her father in an inconsolable state of grief. Bereft of his Mathilde, Isabelle's father, similar to Archibald Craven in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Edgar Linton in *Wuthering Heights*, falls "into a decline" for several months, "lock[ing] himself in the library and refus[ing] point blank to come out"³⁰, neither eating nor sleeping nor permitting any company. In his grief, he hardly notices that "[t]he dog pined away from want of affection"³¹ before dying shortly afterwards and does not display any interest in or cares for his children. As a result of her father's seeming obsession with his late wife, Isabelle spends the first months of her life as a neglected, quasi-orphaned child, lacking paternal affection and arguably belongs to the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, notwithstanding that the servants assure her survival.³²

Isabelle's position as a NEGLECTED CHILD changes when she starts to function as a redemptive child, whereby she joins the ranks of nineteenth-century predecessors such as Cedric Errol in Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), Heidi in Johanna Spyri's eponymous novels (1880–1881) and Eppie in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861).³³ Unlike Eppie, who, as a baby, crawls through the snow to Silas' hut of her own accord, Isabelle is taken to the library, where the Missus "plumped the baby down in George Angelfield's arms without a word"³⁴ and leaves the library again, forbidding the other servants to retrieve Isabelle and maintaining the status quo. Even though George was at first "looking at the baby, with a dull and perplexed expression on his face", seemingly having no use for a child or not knowing what to do, the impact of the child on the father is discernible immediately and he soon displays paternal instincts, "cooing and chuckling in response"³⁵ to her gurgling. To the great astonishment of the servants, he even starts

29 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 68.

30 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 68.

31 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 69.

32 George's obsession with Mathilde and the neglect of his baby daughter are reminiscent of the relationship between Hindley and Frances Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*. As Nelly Dean relates, Hindley "had room in his heart only for two idols – his wife and himself – he doted on both, and adored one". When Frances dies from consumption one week after Hareton's birth, Hindley hardly cares for his son, who "fell wholly into my [Nelly's] hands" and, like Isabelle, is taken care of by (one of) the servants. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 69, 70.

33 For an analysis of the redemptive children in Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden*, see Angelika Zirker. "Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels.", 53–68.

34 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 69.

35 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 70.

singing lullabies.³⁶ Isabelle's presence thus diverts his attention from mourning his late wife and alleviates his grief, prompting him to leave the library. Following this event, he displays a genuine interest in his daughter and nurtures her according to her needs for a short amount of time.

However, his devotion is soon taken to an extreme and he appears to turn Isabelle into a substitute for his dead wife. Taking "personal charge of his daughter", George begins to ensure her physical well-being by feeding and bathing her, moves her crib to his own room, takes her horseback riding, "read[s] to her (business letters, the sports pages and romantic novels), and share[s] all his thoughts and plans with her", considering her rather "a sensible, pleasant companion and not a wild and ignorant child"³⁷. He no longer seems to recognise her for what she is (a baby) and builds another obsessive relationship, during which he indulges Isabelle in every way and prevents her from developing an intact *obligation-world* (or *O-world*). The extent of George's dependence on his infant daughter becomes evident when Isabelle begins to talk. Not only does George find her "preternaturally gifted" but also starts "to consult her on everything, until the household came to be run according to the caprices of a three-year-old child"³⁸. In other words, the household was run according to Isabelle's *W-world*. An immediate result of permitting an infant to effectively take charge of the household, a task usually taken on by the master's wife, is a descent "from eccentricity into chaos"³⁹, which prompts most of the staff to leave Angelfield. George, however, is so taken by Isabelle and happy in her company that the diminishing/diminished number of servants seems to elude his attention.⁴⁰

Isabelle's position as substitute wife is distinctly reflected in George's response to hearing that Isabelle intends to leave Angelfield to marry Roland March as an adolescent. When Isabelle tells her father of her plans, he is unable to cope with the imminent loss of Isabelle and physically abuses her as a result of an impulsive reaction, which is aptly compared to "volcanoes, meteorite strikes and ex-

36 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 70.

37 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 70.

38 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 72.

39 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 72.

40 The text also draws attention to the possibility that Isabelle's appearance, who, similar to Cathy Linton in *Wuthering Heights*, has "inherited her looks from both her parents", might have fostered her father's love: "The ginger hair shared by her father and brother was burnished in the girl child to a rich, glossy auburn. The pale Angelfield complexion was stretched, in her, over fine French bones. She had the better chin from the father's side, and the better mouth from the mother's. She had Mathilde's slanting eyes and long lashes, but when they lifted, it was to reveal the astonishing emerald irises that were the emblem of the Angelfields. She was – physically at least – perfection itself". Charlie, by contrast, has inherited only his father's looks and is "a lumpen, pasty, carrot-topped boy, with heavy feet and a slow expression". Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 70–71, 70.

plosions” inside his head that leave behind “a silent, devastated landscape”⁴¹, hence a wasteland. While the assault itself is not further detailed, its repercussions reflect the violent, aggressive nature of George’s attack, who tears out a lock of Isabelle’s hair, “with a bloodied clod of skin attached at one end”⁴², and leaves her with a bloodshot eye and a red, swollen cheek. His obsession with Isabelle is subsequently symbolised by the continuous “twisting [of] the auburn hair that he had found in his hand”, which he was “twisting and twisting, tighter and tighter around his finger, until it dug deep into his skin, until it was so matted that it could not be unwound”⁴³. During this time, he lapses into a ‘pre-redemption’ state and is once again consumed by grief before he “die[s] from septicaemia, caused by the circle of human hair that was deeply embedded in the flesh of his *ring finger*”⁴⁴. Wearing the matted strand of hair similar to a wedding ring bears testimony to Isabelle’s status as substitute wife and indicates that her father must have regarded her decision to marry Roland an act of betrayal. The imagery of the wasteland evoked during the attack suggests that, with Isabelle’s departure, George has once again lost the woman he loved, irrespective of whether his love contained a sexual component as well. Retrospectively, this father-daughter bond also raises the question whether he might have sexually/incestuously abused his daughter during childhood or adolescence, which is a topic that is addressed in some other neo-Victorian novels, for instance in A.S. Byatt’s *The Children’s Book* (2009) and Linda Newbery’s *Set in Stone* (2006).⁴⁵

The parallels between Setterfield’s novel and *Wuthering Heights* are particularly pronounced in the part covering Isabelle’s childhood. She is clearly modelled on the second Catherine (Cathy) Linton in Brontë’s text, who, like Isabelle, becomes a semi-orphan shortly after her birth due to her mother’s death. The effects of her father’s seemingly unrelenting grief – itself “a subject too painful to be dwelt on”⁴⁶ (unlike in Setterfield’s text) – are evident in Cathy’s neglect, whereby she is turned into a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. Similar to Isabelle, Cathy is at first “[a]n unwelcomed infant”, “might have wailed out of life, and nobody cared a morsel, during those first hours of existence”⁴⁷ and does not experience paternal love and care. Paralleling Isabelle’s father George, Edgar suddenly displays an interest in

41 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 83.

42 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 83.

43 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 83–84.

44 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 85, my emphasis.

45 For an analysis of the incest trope in Byatt’s *The Children’s Book*, see Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 138–151. He also provides a reading of Sarah Waters’ *Affinity* (1999) and suggests that the relationship between Margaret Prior and her dead father can be read along these lines. Cf. *ibid.*, 151–157.

46 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 178.

47 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 178.

and forms a deep attachment to his daughter, who, before she can walk or talk, “wield[s] a despot’s sceptre in his heart”⁴⁸ and is neither scolded nor punished by him during her childhood. Yet, where Cathy “formed to him [Edgar] a distinction from the mother”⁴⁹ whilst simultaneously remaining connected with her, George fails to arrive at this realisation, turning Isabelle into a substitute for his wife.⁵⁰ Even though *Wuthering Heights* contains the idea of substituting one Catherine for another, suggesting that the “process of Edgar’s recovery from his loss of the ‘old’ Catherine’ [...] [is initiated by] his discovery of a ‘new’ Catherine”⁵¹, the relationship and love between father and daughter remains within the bounds of the non-incestuous. By contrast, Setterfield pathologises George’s relationship with Isabelle, implying that he develops a perverted obsession with and fixation on his daughter that eventually culminates in his death. This difference between the Victorian text and the neo-Victorian one is indicative of the neo-Victorian predilection for representing transgressive behaviour.

While Isabelle is subjected to paternal neglect for only a short amount of time during her infancy, Charlie, who is nine years older than his sister, was neglected throughout his childhood and belongs to the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD for most of his childhood.⁵² Even prior to Isabelle’s birth, he did not experience much, if any, parental affection, because his father, preoccupied with his wife, “never thought of Charlie at all”⁵³. Whilst the text hardly elaborates on Charlie’s relationship with his mother, it can be assumed that they did not have an affectionate relationship either, as is suggested by his reaction to her death. Ignoring his baby sister, he “welcomed the changes her arrival introduced to the household”, as before “there had been two parents to whom the Missus might report instances of bad behaviour, two parents whose reactions were impossible to foresee”⁵⁴. Thus, instead of mourning his mother’s death, he seems to relish the increased lack of supervision, because where Mathilde “had been an inconsistent disciplinarian”,

48 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 197.

49 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 198.

50 Notably, Edgar’s interest in his daughter derives from the child’s relation to her mother rather than from being his own biological daughter. Cf. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 198.

51 William Leung. “Re-Reading Edgar Linton and *Wuthering Heights*,” 26.

52 In *Wuthering Heights*, male children are often also subject to neglect, which seems to have fostered the development of cruel behaviour: when Heathcliff joins the Earnshaw family, he becomes “a usurper of [...] [Mr Earnshaw’s] affections, and his privileges” and Hindley, growing bitter as a result, is neglected by his father and starts hitting Heathcliff. Likewise, Hindley and Frances’ son Hareton experiences (physical and emotional) neglect, as is evident in Isabella Heathcliff’s description of the boy as “a ruffianly child, strong in limb, and dirty in garb”, and Isabella and Heathcliff’s son Linton is neglected by his father after Isabella’s death. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 41, 146.

53 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 69.

54 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 71.

“sometimes having him spanked for bad behaviour, at other times merely laughing”, his father often forgot to punish him altogether, merely spanking him when he sees him, “thinking that if it wasn’t actually owed it would do in advance for next time”⁵⁵. Mathilde’s death thus equips Charlie with a means to circumvent his parents’ inconsistent punishments and abuse at the hands of his father altogether by avoiding George and paternal control.

In his semi-orphaned state, Charlie also turns into a MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD and thus occupies two categories on the childhood scale at once. His monstrous empowerment is evident in the physical injuries he inflicts upon the servants, which range from pressing pins into the soap to “removing floorboards at the top of the attic stairs and watching the housemaids tumble down and sprain their ankles”⁵⁶. The text presents him as a ‘mad scientist’, who performs “sadistic experiments” that leave the housemaids with “cuts and bruises, sprained ankles and stomach upsets”⁵⁷, which are further encouraged by the absence of punishments and paternal intervention. His sadistic pleasure deriving from wilfully injuring the servants and “maim[ing] and wound[ing] to his heart’s content”⁵⁸ reflect his distorted *O-world* and perverted *W-world* and put him in line with Victorian fictional bullies, such as John Reed in *Jane Eyre* or Tom Bloomfield in *Agnes Grey* (1847).⁵⁹ However, he appears to be even more malicious than John and Tom, because his wish to hurt his inferiors (and even adults) seems almost compulsive and the injuries much more severe. Charlie’s behaviour towards others thus widely contradicts the innocence paradigm usually associated with childhood and reinforces that he, like Maud in *Fingersmith*, follows a pattern of abuse by turning from the abused into an abuser, transferring the pain inflicted on him onto the servants.

At the age of fourteen, when the Angelfield staff has diminished markedly, he runs out of victims and lays hands on his five-year-old sister, who is physically inferior and therefore seems to be an ideal victim. Knowing that he has to get her away from their father, he uses “promises of magic and surprise” to lure her to an old, damp hovel in the woods, which is described as “a good place for secrets”⁶⁰. Despite the fact that he does not sexually abuse her in this instance – though it cannot be ruled out that he might have had this intention –, *luring* her to a place

55 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 71.

56 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 71–72.

57 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 72.

58 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 72.

59 Similar to Tom, who tortures the birds he catches in his bird traps by feeding them to the cat or “cut[ing] them in pieces with my penknife” and plans to roast the next alive, Charlie seems to have performed experiments on the cats, who, “fearful of Charlie”, prefer to stay outside and away from him. Anne Brontë. *Agnes Grey*, 17.; Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 73.

60 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 73.

where he can inflict harm on her evokes the image of a paedophile. Inside the hovel, Charlie then attempts to hurt Isabelle by placing “a piece of wire, orange with rust, along the white inside of her forearm”, but, to his great astonishment, Isabelle turns out to be a masochist, who displays “something like pleasure” and utters “a sigh of satisfaction”⁶¹ upon being hurt by her brother and even inflicts pain on herself with the wire on purpose.⁶² She almost seems to display vampiric qualities when she cuts herself deeper than her brother and begins to lick “the blood away”⁶³. Isabelle immediately assumes a monstrous empowerment when she incites Charlie to use the wire to inflict harm upon himself and “proves as aggressive as her brother”⁶⁴, who has not found a new victim, but “the strangest of conspirators”⁶⁵, upsetting the power relations Charlie had intended to establish. Given that this event initiates a sadomasochistic bond they carry into their adolescent/adult life, which “is allowed to flourish amid the squalor and neglect”⁶⁶ at Angelfield House, it can be assumed that similar incidents occurred during Isabelle’s childhood, notwithstanding that Vida Winter’s narration does not contain any further instances and continues with what Christine McCrea refers to as their “unnatural bond”⁶⁷ during Isabelle’s adolescence and Charlie’s adulthood.

The slight power imbalance deriving from the wire incident during Isabelle’s childhood grants the girl power over her brother that is uncharacteristic of Victorian gender relations and thus is conducive to a neo-Victorian revision of gender concepts.⁶⁸ This power imbalance finds expression in their clashing *W-worlds* and in Isabelle’s ability to assert her own over Charlie’s, as is suggested by her accepting the invitation to a picnic organised by one of their near-bankrupt neighbours, one of the main events recounted from their adulthood. For twenty-four-year-old Charlie, participating in the picnic means actualising a “dysphoric [state]”⁶⁹, which is why he repeatedly attempts to prevent his fifteen-year-old sister from attending. Despite the fact that Charlie makes various advances

61 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 73, 74.

62 Charlie’s intentions to hurt his sister and derive pleasure from her pain aligns him with Heathcliff, who, as Nelly remembers, “had a delight in dwelling on dark things, and entertaining odd fancies” since his childhood. However, she does not further specify what is meant by “dark things” or the nature of Heathcliff’s “odd fancies”. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 346.

63 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 74.

64 Christine McCrea. “Book Review: *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield.”, n.p.

65 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 74.

66 Carol Birch. “*The Thirteenth Tale* by Dianne Setterfield.”, n.p.

67 Christine McCrea. “Book Review: *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield.”, n.p.

68 The female characters in *Wuthering Heights*, however, are also afforded with power that is uncharacteristic of Victorian women, which underscores the intertextual parallels between Brontë’s and Setterfield’s texts.

69 Marie-Laure Ryan. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, 118.

(“‘Come to the library with me’ [...]. [...] ‘Then come to the deer park’”), even using physical force to make Isabelle comply (“He grabbed her by the arm, dug his fingers in, and pulled her towards the library”⁷⁰), she is able to actualise her *W-world* and attend the picnic after repeated and increasingly emphatic rejections.⁷¹ Having come to know that when Isabelle says “no like that, [...] it meant no”, Charlie eventually accepts the non-actualisation of his *W-world* and attempts to vent his inordinate amount of anger – at least in part evoked by Isabelle’s refusal – by “look[ing] for something to hit”, but comes to realise that “he had already broken everything that was breakable”⁷² and would only inflict harm on himself.⁷³ As Heilmann and Llewellyn observe, “[l]ike his father’s, Charlie’s mental condition and even life are determined by his compulsive obsession with Isabelle”⁷⁴, as is suggested by his repeated attempts to convince her and the fact that he runs after her to the picnic, seemingly unwilling to let her out of his sight.

The sadomasochistic bond between the two siblings must have turned into an incestuous relationship sometime during Isabelle’s childhood/adolescence. Considering that Charlie was an adult and Isabelle an adolescent in the 1890s (following Heilmann and Llewellyn’s temporal location of the plot), their incestuous relationship took place “when incest was not illegal, but rather an immoral offence”⁷⁵. According to Llewellyn, “the period between 1835 and 1908, from the Deceased Wife’s Sister Act through to the Punishment of Incest Act, can be divided into four decades where incest was a question of ethics, morality and issues of legal (mis)conduct”⁷⁶ and was the subject of various discourses. By the end of the nineteenth century, incest “was not [yet] theorised within the range of [...] sexual perversions [...] by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, Richard von Kraft-Ebbing or Sigmund Freud”⁷⁷ and had not been rendered illegal. This

70 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 76.

71 Strikingly, Charlie now makes these advances openly and within the house/home. Due to Isabelle’s complicity, he does not need to lure her away from their father anymore or fear that she might inform him of these incidents.

72 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 76.

73 Unlike in Gothic novels, in which “young women frequently find themselves particularly at risk from the predatory attentions of tyrannical fathers, father surrogates or, indeed, rapacious siblings”, *The Thirteenth Tale* does not present Isabelle as a ‘damsel in distress’ but as the one in power over the male family members, whereby the novel’s neo-Gothic potential becomes apparent. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik. “Keeping It in the Family.”, 115. From the moment she refused to be victimised by Charlie, Isabelle appears to be no longer at risk from his “predatory attentions” in being able to withhold consent and prevent him from actualising his *W-world*.

74 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 51.

75 Lin Elinor Pettersson. “Neo-Victorian Incest Trauma and the Fasting Body.”, 9; cf. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 252 n.20.

76 Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 135.

77 Alexandra Cheira. “Neo-Victorian Sexual De[f/v]iance.”, 145.

changed with the Punishment of Incest Act, which was enacted in 1908 and criminalised incestuous acts between family members, such as (grand)parents and children and among siblings, including half-brothers and -sisters.⁷⁸ Llewellyn sees this Act “as a statutory demarcation of the moment at which the twentieth-century definition of incestuous actions separated from the debates about consanguinity, deceased wives and their sisters, Darwinism, eugenics, and anthropological research that had marked the period from the 1830s onwards”⁷⁹.

The neo-Victorian literary engagement with incest in texts such as A.S. Byatt’s “Morpho Eugenia” (1992), *The Children’s Book* (2009) and Emma Donoghue’s *The Wonder* (2016) is part of “contemporary culture’s continuing fascination with what perhaps still remains the final taboo”⁸⁰. These neo-Victorian texts oftentimes openly address and acknowledge the existence of incestuous relationships and the trauma deriving from incest that were merely hinted at in Victorian texts, such as Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) or George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Following Llewellyn, incestuous encounters in neo-Victorian fiction point towards an “attempt to interpret a revised understanding of the domestic, and desiring, spaces of the (neo-)Victorian family”⁸¹, which can raise issues of family/intergenerational trauma, paternity and illegitimacy (if offspring comes from such a union) as well.⁸² Incest thus widely “destabilizes the idea of the Victorian family”⁸³ and arguably also the notion of the sanctity of matrimony. Llewellyn further maintains that there exists a “structural and conceptual triangulation between ethics, aesthetics and psychoanalysis”⁸⁴ in contemporary/neo-Victorian fiction that links incest to moral understanding and aberration, voyeuristic sensation and the recovery of past and present sexual traumas.⁸⁵ Analysing Byatt’s *The Children’s Book* and “Morpho Eugenia” as well as Waters’ *Affinity*, he contends that the neo-Victorian literary “(re)interpretations of the primal taboo remain deeply divided, particularly in the case of neo-Victorian

78 Cf. Irish Statute Book. “Punishment of Incest Act, 1908.”, chap. 45, § 1–8.

79 Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 144.

80 Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 134–135. For an analysis of the incest trope in Donoghue’s novel, see Lin Elinor Pettersson’s article “Neo-Victorian Incest Trauma and the Fasting Body in Emma Donoghue’s *The Wonder*.”, 1–20.

81 Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 134.

82 Dina Pedro further suggests that the incorporation of incestuous relationships in neo-Victorian narratives is also likely to have “derived from the contradictory conceptualisations of incest during the Victorian era – from both ethical and aesthetic points of view – that we have inherited and perpetuated”. Dina Pedro. “Challenging the Victorian Nuclear Family Myth.”, 86.

83 Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 36.

84 Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 135.

85 Cf. Dina Pedro. “Challenging the Victorian Nuclear Family Myth.”, 86–87.

texts by contemporary women writers”⁸⁶, ranging from an explicit to an implicit engagement. Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale* belongs to the former, addressing incest explicitly by exploring the ethical ramifications and implications of the incestuous relationship between Charlie and Isabelle. While there is, as in Byatt’s “Morpho Eugenia”, a “total lack of description of the siblings’ sexual encounters, which remain tantalisingly beyond the reach of textual depiction”⁸⁷, Vida Winter’s narration leaves no doubt about the existence of such encounters, since these are implied in Charlie’s violent and destructive reactions to Isabelle’s flirtations and meetings with Roland after the picnic.⁸⁸

In response to Isabelle’s frequent absences due to her meetings with Roland and the seemingly continuous non-actualisation of his *W-world*, Charlie turns to other girls to act out the relationship he has had with Isabelle so far. Unlike Isabelle, he is unable to engage in a lasting non-incestuous relationship, even when Isabelle ‘prepares’ Roland’s sister Sybilla for him on the day of the picnic.⁸⁹ Instead of displaying interest in Sybilla as a possible partner, “Charlie vents his frustration by raping village girls”⁹⁰ over the summer, fathering Shadow on one of these occasions.⁹¹ While Isabelle initially “prepared the way for him”, which

86 Mark Llewellyn. “‘Perfectly innocent, natural, playful’.”, 135.

87 Alexandra Cheira. “Neo-Victorian Sexual De[f/v]iance.”, 141.

88 By contrast, in Guillermo del Toro’s *Crimson Peak* (2015), “the incestuous relationship is made fully explicit near the end of the film, when Edith catches the siblings having sexual intercourse”, which Pedro sees in the context of catharsis and a working through past traumas. Dina Pedro. “Challenging the Victorian Nuclear Family Myth.”, 87.

89 Isabelle, who wants to spend time with Roland without her brother, ‘prepares’ Sybilla insofar as she uses a “feathery leaf of a fern”, which she first runs over Sybilla’s lips and neck(line), her ankles and finally up her legs, where “Isabelle replaced the greenery with her own tender fingers”. Explaining that “‘it’s a beau you need [...] [f]or the tickling’” and admitting that she knows because of Charlie, Isabelle draws Sybilla’s attention to Charlie, whom the latter subsequently “regarded [...] with an expression of warm interest”. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 80, 81.

90 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 51.

91 It seems that Setterfield adopted the character constellation of the second generation in *Wuthering Heights* and simultaneously departs from it. The love triangle between Catherine, Edgar and Heathcliff is emulated in the triangle between Isabelle, Roland and Charlie, whereby Edgar/Roland is perceived as a threat and an intruder by Heathcliff/Charlie. However, instead of having Charlie marry Sybilla, which would pick up on the storyline provided in *Wuthering Heights*, in which Heathcliff marries Edgar’s sister Isabella “‘to obtain power over him’” and exploit her “as a strategic economic and psychological tool”, Charlie rapes local village girls. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 162.; Judith E. Pike. “‘My name was Isabella Linton’.”, 354. Thus, while Heathcliff exerts his revenge on Edgar by marrying his sister and abusing her physically, making domestic “life at Wuthering Heights [...] hell on earth”, Charlie, as is implied by Setterfield’s novel, rapes Sybilla, turning her into a fallen woman in the process and ruining her life. Hilary Newman. “Death and its Aftermath in *Wuthering Heights*.”, 215. In comparison to Heathcliff, Charlie thus reverts to more extreme measures while trying to cope with Isabelle’s absence and has a self-centred rather than a strategic motivation for his actions.

makes her complicit in the rape of some of the girls, he soon had “to make his own arrangements” and, after he nearly caused a scandal, “[h]e turned from the daughters of minor aristocrats to those of farriers, farmers and foresters”⁹² on Isabelle’s advice.⁹³ His original choice of victims who belong to the same social class as the Angelfields presumably reflects his obsession with Isabelle since this can be read as an attempt to find a substitute for his sister, who, in occasionally giving “in to his entreaties” and lending “herself to his will”, actualising his *W-world* temporarily, created an “illusion that she was back for good”⁹⁴. Alternatively, his choice of victims might also be a way to punish and get back at Isabelle by proxy. Given that Isabelle does not permanently actualise his *W-world*, Charlie attempts to do so on his own through rape. However, the violent sexual defilement of the village girls, which is alluded to by “[t]he shocked eyes, the bruised arms, the bloodied thighs” Charlie sees during the acts and which are immediately “erased from memory the moment he turned away from them”⁹⁵, does not prove satisfying and does not actualise his *W-world* to the full extent. Charlie’s raping of village girls and his implied sexual relationship with his fifteen-year-old sister, which may have started significantly earlier, turn some, if not all, of his sexual encounters into child sexual abuse/statutory rape, as the age of consent for girls had been raised to sixteen by the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885.⁹⁶

The threat of a permanent non-actualisation of Charlie’s *W-world* resulting from Isabelle’s decision to marry Roland proves destructive and nearly fatal for him. He displays his “existential dependence on Isabelle”⁹⁷ when he tries to commit suicide by shooting himself in response to her absconding from Angelfield, but is unable to pull the trigger and end his life despite raising the gun to his temple several times.⁹⁸ Since he commits suicide once Isabelle has died in the mental asylum several years later, it can be assumed that the hope of winning her back and continuing their relationship prevented him from doing so at this point.

92 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 82.

93 At a later point in her narrative, Vida Winter expands this list, claiming that Charlie gave expression to his non-actualised *W-world* by jealousy violating “[t]he daughters of earls or of shopkeepers, of bankers or of chimney sweeps”, “[w]ith or without their consent [...] in his desperation for oblivion”. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 394.

94 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 82. Unlike Edgar Alabaster in “Morpho Eugenia”, who rapes and impregnates the child servant Amy, Charlie does not rape servants, which reinforces the idea that he is attempting to replace Isabelle, just like his father was attempting to substitute his dead wife with Isabelle.

95 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 82.

96 A neo-Victorian text that presents a case of sibling incest among children is Donoghue’s *The Wonder*. In this text, nine-year-old Anna O’Donnell has been sexually abused by her thirteen-year-old brother.

97 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 51.

98 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 84.

Instead of committing suicide, Charlie begins to harm himself, taking a long needle and scoring Isabelle's name on his shin bone.⁹⁹ In puncturing his bone, he inscribes the yearning for his sister on his body in the form of a "secret tattoo"¹⁰⁰, which, as Margaret speculates in the novel's present, might be inscribed indelibly and might still be visible after death.¹⁰¹ Charlie has thus opted for a way to articulate his longing for Isabelle in a permanent way, even if the puncture marks will have healed to a certain extent until he commits suicide. Through this silent sign of passion and obsession, Isabelle will always be with him figuratively and belong to him to a certain extent, whether she wants it or not. This way of harming himself, while being usually the one who revels in inflicting pain on others, and his wanderings around the house are indicative of his depressive state and emotional numbness.¹⁰² They reflect his increasing sense of desperation whilst hoping for Isabelle's return.¹⁰³

Upon her return to Angelfield several months later, after Roland has died of pneumonia, Isabelle is a widow with twin offspring. It transpires that Isabelle's decision to leave Angelfield in the first place was due to being pregnant.¹⁰⁴ Irrespective of whether she genuinely loved Roland, used him to explore something 'new', as a way to make Charlie jealous or as a display of power, her sudden decision and subsequent marriage are likely to have functioned as a means to conceal/legitimise her state. Like Eugenia Alabaster in "Morpho Eugenia", she

99 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 84.

100 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 89.

101 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 89–90. Already as a child, Charlie "was a slow-witted boy whose mind turned in circles around his few obsessions and preoccupations". Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 71. As an adult, the interest in his possessions has arguably been reduced to one: Isabelle.

102 While wandering around the house, Charlie has the needle in his pocket and fingers its tip, until "[h]is fingertips were a bloody, scabby mess", which suggests that he hurts himself just to feel anything. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 85.

103 When Isabelle is taken to the mental asylum and leaves Angelfield for a second time, Charlie's desperation and the amount of harm he inflicts upon himself increase. Not knowing when or if Isabelle will return, he retreats to the nursery, where he "had been living like an animal" with dirty, mouldy plates and rotting food on the floor, "[a] pile of dried, fly-spotted vomit" on the bedroom rug and "filthy sheets stained with blood and other human vileness" on his bed. On the table, the darning needle he used before is lying next to bloodied handkerchiefs, which implies that he used them multiple times after the first incident. This is confirmed by Shadow, who saw Charlie sometimes disappear to the old hovel, where his and Isabelle's relationship started, to scratch "love letters on his bones with that old needle". His desperation reaches a fatal point when Isabelle dies in the asylum. With Isabelle beyond reach, Charlie is unwilling to continue his life and commits suicide in this hovel, joining her in death. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 229, 230, 239.

104 This is suggested by the fact that she counts the days in her diary before she decides to leave Angelfield and later on by the housekeeper who purses her lips after counting the months of Isabelle's pregnancy. Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 83, 87.

was “a socially deviant and a sexually defiant woman”¹⁰⁵, who had incestuous, extramarital sexual relations prior to her liaison with Roland, which, in turn, poses the immediate question of the paternity of Emmeline and Adeline. While the twins are, as Heilmann and Llewellyn maintain, “officially the offspring of Isabelle’s marriage to Roland March”, bearing his family name, they are “more probably the product of incest (whether brother or father-induced remains uncertain)”¹⁰⁶, though the former appears the more likely choice due to the explicit references to Charlie’s advances.¹⁰⁷

The incestuous, sadomasochistic bond between Charlie and Isabelle seems to have been inspired by and modelled on Heathcliff and Catherine’s in *Wuthering Heights*. In Brontë’s text, Catherine and Heathcliff share a semi-incestuous bond, having grown up as brother and sister, and are obsessed with one another.¹⁰⁸ Even though Catherine eventually marries Edgar, she vows to never “‘consent to forsake Heathcliff’”, even considers herself to *be* Heathcliff, who is “‘always, always in my mind’”, and promises on her deathbed that she “‘won’t rest till you are with me’”¹⁰⁹. Wanting to “‘take him with me’” and claiming that “‘he’s in my soul’”¹¹⁰, Catherine displays a similar obsession with Heathcliff as does Charlie with Isabelle. Catherine’s love for Heathcliff is unabating and seems to continue in her afterlife, as the end of the novel suggests. Heathcliff also repeatedly expresses his obsession with Catherine and is convinced that once she is buried, he “‘shall writhe in the torments of hell’”¹¹¹ in her permanent absence. Like Charlie (and George), he engages in self-destructive acts upon Catherine’s death, refusing to eat, locking himself in and repeatedly “dash[ing] his head against the knotted trunk [of a tree in the garden]; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears”¹¹² – a violent and graphic image that reflects his intense emotional pain, violent passion and slow, symbolic death.

Similar to Charlie, who eventually commits suicide to join Isabelle in death, Heathcliff does his utmost to ensure their reunion in the afterlife. As Hilary

105 Alexandra Cheira. “Neo-Victorian Sexual De[f/v]iance.”, 149.

106 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 51.

107 Other critics suggest that the twins are fathered by Charlie. Cf. Heta Pyrhönen. *Bluebeard Gothic*, 146.

108 In his 1959 note on *Wuthering Heights*, Eric Solomon already proposed a reading of Heathcliff as Mr Earnshaw’s illegitimate son, which would make the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine an incestuous one. He claims that this assumption helps dissolve some of the ambiguities of the text, which never openly acknowledges or elaborates on Heathcliff’s origins. Cf. Eric Solomon. “The Incest Theme in *Wuthering Heights*.”, 80–83.

109 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 87, 88, 135.

110 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 174.

111 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 173.

112 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 181.

Newman assesses, Heathcliff displays an “obsession with Catherine’s physical remains”¹¹³ both immediately after her death and prior to his own. Before her burial, he visits her mortal remains one last time and replaces Edgar’s hair in Catherine’s locket by his own, ensuring that she will take something of his to her grave.¹¹⁴ Whether he also bestowed a kiss upon her during this visit remains open to speculation, but since Nelly sees a “disarrangement of the drapery about the corpse’s face”¹¹⁵, it seems likely that he did. Moreover, when Edgar dies eighteen years after Catherine, Heathcliff gets “‘the sexton, who was digging Linton’s grave, to remove the earth off her [Catherine’s] coffin lid’” and open it, only to leave “‘one side of the coffin loose’”¹¹⁶ and bribing the sexton to do the same with his own once he is buried beside her. This way, his and Catherine’s spirits will be able to leave the confines of their coffins and be joined in death – an image on which the novel ends. Yet, where Heathcliff lives on for several years before he meets his “‘queer’ end”¹¹⁷, being haunted by Catherine and starving himself to death, Charlie is unable to live on without Isabelle and commits suicide shortly after receiving the news of her death, which suggests that his obsessive love for Isabelle proves even more destructive and fatal. Setterfield thus sexualises and pathologises the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff by endowing Charlie with a compulsive, incestuous obsession with Isabelle that cannot stand her permanent absence.

In her depiction of Isabelle and Charlie as both children and adults, Setterfield highlights the formative aspect of childhood, exploring two extremes – child neglect and indulgence – and their repercussions. Charlie’s intimate bond with Isabelle can be read in the context of parental neglect and as an attempt to compensate for parental love and affection. Rather than being innately monstrous, he seems to project what his parents have set as an example. Just like his father, who “had loved [...] his ill-tempered, lazy, selfish, and pretty Mathilde”¹¹⁸ more than anything in his life, Charlie is obsessed with Isabelle and his entire life revolves around his sister. It seems that Isabelle functions as his anchor, as someone who has provided him with love and affection for the first time in his life. This idea of parental influence on Charlie’s development is further reflected

113 Hilary Newman. “Death and its Aftermath in *Wuthering Heights*,” 212.

114 One could even speculate that the idea of using a strand of hair that causes George Angel-field’s septicaemia and death might have been inspired by Heathcliff’s exchange of the lock of hair in *Wuthering Heights*. In both cases, the strand of hair becomes an expression of obsessive/perverted/incestuous love and is linked with death: in Heathcliff’s case one that is willingly bestowed upon the dead and can be read as an attempt to replace the husband, in George’s case one that is manically enforced but unattainable and culminates in his death.

115 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 182.

116 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 307, 308.

117 Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*, 331.

118 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 68–69.

in the fact that he seems to revel in transferring the pain he experienced as a result of his parents' inconsistent punishments and neglect onto those physically or socially inferior to him. This reading of Charlie as a victim of circumstance and upbringing is not meant to vindicate his actions, especially the series of rapes of local village girls, but drawing attention to the fact that his parents did not foster *knowledge- (K-), wish- (W-) and obligation- (O-)worlds* that prevented him from developing in this way. In a somewhat similar vein, Isabelle, who was over-indulged by her father after a short period of neglect, is endowed with a monstrous form of agency in the process. It seems that her overindulgence has created distorted *O-* and *W-worlds*. As a result of her father's excessive devotion, Isabelle is used to actualising her *W-world* on a regular basis, as is later on reflected in her relationship with Charlie, in which she has the upper hand and actualises his *W-world* whenever *she* wants to. In both cases, the lack of consistent parental intervention and guidance contributed to turning Charlie and Isabelle into MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED CHILDREN and seems to have encouraged their sado-masochistic, incestuous bond, which appears to take George's obsession with Mathilde (as well as Heathcliff and Catherine's) to the next level.

With the story of Charlie and Isabelle, Setterfield rewrites parts of *Wuthering Heights*, sexualising, pathologising and psychologising the relationships and characters of Brontë's text. This is most apparent in the topics addressed in Vida Winter's narrative about the second generation of Angelfields, including fatal obsession, sado-masochistic desire, incest and rape. It seems that she endows Charlie and Isabelle, who are modelled on Heathcliff and Catherine (whose bond also started to develop during their childhoods), with additional psychological depth, providing the reader with insight into the characters' psyche, and gives them a neo-Victorian twist. The latter is suggested by her departures from Brontë's text, which are more often than not more extreme in their outcomes. A case in point are Charlie's repeated sexual assaults of local girls, whereby he hopes to find a substitute for Isabelle rather than opting for a permanent relationship, as does his literary predecessor. In endowing Charlie with an excessive amount of obsession, one that even exceeds Heathcliff and Catherine's for one another, Setterfield explores the destructive nature of obsession, which is presented as a hereditary trait throughout the novel and ultimately proves to be the downfall of the Angelfield family, even causing the fiery destruction of Angelfield House and the death of one twin.

9.2. Emmeline and Adeline: Twinship, Neglect and (In)Separability

Similar to Beatrice and Gwendolyn Carter in Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* (2001), Emmeline and Adeline March's childhood experiences are shaped first and foremost by twinship, and their depiction is inspired by Victorian and popular beliefs about (identical) twins.¹¹⁹ As do other texts about twins, *The Thirteenth Tale* presents Emmeline and Adeline's "intense, eerie closeness as an essential part of being a twin"¹²⁰ and picks up on "the uncanny associations that surround twins"¹²¹. The novel also constantly pathologises Emmeline and Adeline, not least by subjecting them to a scientific/'medical' experiment that is doomed to fail due to the unknown but subverting presence of a third child, who turns out to be the twins' half-sister. Setterfield's depiction of Emmeline and Adeline reinforces that "the topic of twins and doubles appears made to order for a psychological reading, with its easy links to the mirror stage, narcissism, the uncanny, separation anxiety, sibling rivalry, the false self, projection of the unconscious, and exteriorisation of inner conflict"¹²², as Hester and Dr Maudsley's joint experiment on the twins suggests. This subchapter analyses Emmeline and Adeline's infant and childhood experiences in the context of notions of twinship, suggesting that they are both NEGLECTED and MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED CHILDREN widely governed by their *W-worlds* due to the absence of parental/adult intervention until Hester arrives. Further, it examines the experiment and its immediate repercussions on questions of identity and the twins' sense of self, before maintaining that Adeline is unable to live a life apart from her sister, as is evidenced by Emmeline's pregnancy and the fire at Angelfield House.

Emmeline and Adeline's infancy is marked by (motherly) neglect and abandonment, which constitutes a recurring topic in Setterfield's novel and signals the children's marginal position within the Angelfield household. They are subject to objectification when Isabelle returns to Angelfield House as a widow, bringing the twins, whom she seems to regard merely as part of her luggage, with her; descending from the carriage, she hands Charlie "a heavy parcel wrapped up in cloth" and "reache[s] into the back of the carriage" for a second before demanding "'a very large brandy'"¹²³. Only after having satisfied her own needs by updating her *W-world*, does she draw Charlie's attention to the parcels he has carried inside the house, revealing to him that they are babies. This callous

119 For an analysis of Beatrice and Gwendolyn in Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea*, see chapter 7 "Competing Visions of Childhood in Ibbotson's Neo-Victorian Adventure Novel *Journey to the River Sea*".

120 Karen Dillon. *The Spectacle of Twins*, 35.

121 Wieland Schwanebeck. *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning*, 140.

122 Juliana de Nooy. *Twins in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, 2.

123 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 86.

treatment of Emmeline and Adeline suggests that they are an unwanted appendage, a remnant from her union with Roland and something that can be stored in the back of her carriage. They are not part of Isabelle's plans for the future, as is reflected in her promise to Charlie that "'[i]t's you and me, now'"¹²⁴, which aims at restoring their relationship to a pre-marriage (and, by implication, pre-twin) state. Isabelle's disinterest in her own children is further corroborated by her having forgotten "her escapade and her husband" on the very next day, feeling "as if her marriage had never been"¹²⁵. As a result of the amnesiac qualities of her home, "the babies themselves would appear to her not as her own children [...] but as mere spirits of the house"¹²⁶, which reinforces that the pregnancy and the twins are immediately forgotten.¹²⁷ While this state of neglect, even abandonment and erasure from memory echoes her own shortly after her birth, Isabelle's disregard for the twins is even more cruel and selfish than her father's. Unlike George, she is not in the process of mourning the death of her marital partner, but focuses on reviving her relationship with Charlie, enjoying the pleasures deriving from their incestuous bond. Emmeline and Adeline thus are DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILDREN at the beginning of their lives and are, considering that Charlie is the twins' biological father, in a state of semi-orphanhood, as were Isabelle (temporarily) and Charlie (permanently) before them.¹²⁸

Following a jump in time of approximately ten to thirteen years, Emmeline and Adeline are introduced as identical twins and polar opposites, displaying a set of complementary traits and modes of behaviour. Where Adeline displays a

124 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 87.

125 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 87.

126 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 87.

127 The twins, in turn, do not regard Isabelle as their mother and are indifferent to her departure when she is taken to the mental asylum: they are "unconcerned", merely "drawing circles with their toes in the gravel of the drive". Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 125.

128 Similar to Emmeline and Adeline, Angelfield House has also fallen into a state of utter neglect and reflects the treatment of the children. When Mrs Maudsley visits the house to talk to Isabelle about the twins, she is shocked to find the house an unsuitable environment: she sees "[t]hree apples on the table, brown and wrinkled and starting to collapse upon themselves, a black dishcloth next to a sink piled high with dirty plates, and the window so filthy that inside you could hardly tell day from night". Amidst disorder and dust, there are "[h]oles in the roof, cracked window panes, pigeons mouldering away in the attic rooms" and, as Hester finds out later, "*fungi growing in some of the rotting floorboards*". Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 117, 122, 356, original emphasis. As in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), coincidentally another story about twins, the state of the house reflects the mental state of its inhabitants and Isabelle and Charlie's disregard for anyone apart from themselves, including their own children. Like the House of Usher, the state of Angelfield House points to the downfall of the family, not least by being destroyed in a fire and rendered uninhabitable at the end of the story Vida Winter tells.

“persistent and merciless aggression” and enjoys tormenting Emmeline, as is reinforced by her hitting and hurting her, even chasing her with “wielding red-hot coals in the fire tongs” and “sing[ing] her hair”¹²⁹, Emmeline is meek, docile and submissive, enduring Adeline’s fits and merely implores her to stop. According to Emily Bernhard-Jackson, “[t]his notion of twins as literary halves of one whole person” already existed prior to the Victorian era, but “lingered on in Victorian literature”¹³⁰, and, as *The Thirteenth Tale* suggests, is drawn upon even in neo-Victorian fiction.¹³¹ In her novel, Setterfield links this concern with genetics and heredity, having in all likelihood been inspired by texts such as Francis Galton’s “The History of Twins” (1875).¹³² She suggests that “Adeline and Emmeline take the previous generation’s sibling pattern to extremes (the former absorbing all of Charlie’s sadistic energies and the latter all of Isabelle’s sensuality)”¹³³, displaying an unbalanced dichotomy and seemingly repressing the set of traits and emotions represented by the respective other twin, as Hester speculates later on. As a result of this ‘distribution’, Emmeline has “the goodness of two children in her, and Adeline the wickedness of two”¹³⁴, a polar split that is reminiscent of Jekyll and Hyde’s in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Just like Charlie, Adeline thus assumes the position of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, seemingly deriving pleasure from hurting and victimising her sister, and appears to vindicate Puritan views on a child’s innate wickedness.¹³⁵

Emmeline and Adeline’s communication in their own, private twin language is another dominant feature of twinship in the popular imagination and is used to foreground their twin bond. Even though the Missus at first does not notice this, due to her age-related hearing impairment, she comes to realise that “[t]hey didn’t talk properly”¹³⁶, thus setting their idiosyncrasy against a perceived norm

129 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 93.

130 Emily A. Bernhard-Jackson. “‘Like Two Pigeons in One Nest.’”, 456.

131 Another neo-Victorian text that draws on this idea of complementarity is E.S. Thomson’s *Surgeons’ Hall* (2019). In this novel, the twin sisters Silence and Sorrow Crowe, one of them deaf, the other blind and both of them already adults, also move “in time with one another, like a single being” at one point in the novel, and “‘see and hear everything’” between them. E.S. Thomson. *Surgeons’ Hall*, 43.

132 The idea of inherited character traits is also at work in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and once again reinforces the intertextual links between Setterfield’s and Brontë’s narratives.

133 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 51.

134 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 93.

135 Using Setterfield’s text as an example, Wieland Schwanebeck observes that the motif of the evil twin, who “is evil *ab ovo* and there is only so much (or, more accurately, *nothing*) that the environment can do” about it, is a recurring one and frequently “resurfaces in popular horror fiction and Neo-Victorian yearns about fatal genealogies”. Wieland Schwanebeck. *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning*, 151, original emphasis.

136 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 95.

(‘proper’ speech, i.e., English). They speak a language she does not recognise as English, nor as the French their grandmother Mathilde used, which Charlie and Isabelle have picked up and sometimes still use when they talk to one another.¹³⁷ Instead, the twins use a private, made-up language of their own that no one seems to understand except for themselves, a linguistic phenomenon usually referred to as idioglossia or cryptophasia (if identical actions are involved as well).¹³⁸ As in other tales about twins, such as Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), the unintelligible twin language isolates them from others.¹³⁹ Yet, where Emmeline, whose use of twin language seems to have entailed a delay in language acquisition, can later on be induced to learn and speak ordinary English – though she falls back on their private language when necessary –, her twin sister exclusively talks in ‘twin language’. For Adeline, twin language appears to be her native language and is a linguistic expression of her absorption in the intimate twin bond with and of her “autistic disregard for anybody apart from her sister”¹⁴⁰, who she is unwilling to share with anyone else.¹⁴¹

Aside from introducing Emmeline and Adeline as twins, Setterfield also capitalises on their monstrous empowerment, which, in Emmeline’s case, is likely to have been a direct result of her intimate bond with her sister, as is suggested by the incident in the topiary garden. In contrast to their half-sister Shadow and many other neo-Victorian child characters, Emmeline and Adeline do not display a neo-Romantic bond with or proximity to the natural world. While Shadow works in and helps cultivating the garden, displaying a reverence for the natural environment and taking care of the plants, the twins seem to display a total disinterest in the flora and fauna surrounding them and merely trample “the

137 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 95.

138 For more information on twins and language development (including secret languages) see Kay Mogford’s “Language Development in Twins.”, 80–95, esp. 90–92.

139 Cf. Karen Dillon. *The Spectacle of Twins*, 39. Setterfield’s novel suggests, however, that their language can, albeit with some difficulty, be understood by other twins as well. After hearing a five-note sequence, “a singsong of inchoate sounds”, upon seeing Adeline (whom she mistakes for Emmeline) as an old woman in the story’s present, Margaret tries to decipher the sounds she has heard. She eventually does so spontaneously during a bath, unaware where the ‘translation’, having “arrived fully formed in my mind”, suddenly comes from. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 53.; Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 314.

140 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 52.

141 Twin language and especially Adeline’s exclusive use of this mode of communication has a historical antecedent in June and Jennifer Gibbons (born in 1963), who were known as ‘the silent twins’. Their twin bond was so intense that they only communicated to one another in their private language and eventually made a “fatal pact”, according to which “[o]ne of them would have to die in order to set the other free”. Marjorie Wallace. “The Tragedy of a Double Life.”, n.p. Yet, where June is able to lead a normal life after Jennifer’s sacrificial death, Adeline is unable to do so when Emmeline perishes in the flames.

plants and [...] [leave] footprints all over the plot”¹⁴² in their attempt to reach the strawberries. Their disregard for their natural surroundings, for others and especially for order arguably reaches its apex in the wilful destruction of the topiary garden, a space that is “the most artificial and unnatural element of a formal garden”¹⁴³ and represents proud tradition and has a special significance for the gardener John Digence (John-the-dig). The malicious force governing the twins’ actions is suggested by the graphic imagery used to describe the vandalised topiary shapes. Entering the garden one afternoon, John sees

[g]reat gashes in the sides of the yews, exposing the brown wood of their *hearts*. The mop-heads *decapitated*, their spherical tops lying at their feet. The perfect balance of the pyramids now lopsided, the cones *hacked about*, the top hats *chopped* into and left in tatters. He stared at the long branches, still green, still fresh, that were strewn on the lawn. Their slow shrivelling, their curling desiccation, their *dying* was yet to come.¹⁴⁴

The choice of words used to describe the wanton destruction of ‘John’s’ garden equates its ravaging with callous murder and a slow, painful death. This image is amplified by endowing the garden with human attributes (heads, hearts, feet), evoking the image of a dismembered human body, which, in turn, suggests that the twins have certain psychopathic tendencies. This is further implied by their “[c]urious and indifferent” gaze towards a completely devastated and despairing John, who has not yet overcome the shock and still sits “white and haggard” in his chair and even “flinche[s] at the sight of them”¹⁴⁵. Even though Hester later on attributes this incident to Adeline, making Emmeline merely a copycat of her sister, Setterfield overall seems to suggest that the twins’ monstrous empowerment in this instance is a result of their twoness. It derives from living in a world of their own principally guided by Adeline’s *W-world*, paired with a non-existent *O-world*. Through deliberately destroying the topiary garden, the twins subvert Romantic/Western beliefs about childhood innocence and sever the connection between children and the natural world.¹⁴⁶

142 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 401.

143 Raimund Borgmeier. “The Garden in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* in the Context of Cultural History.”, 20.

144 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 99, my emphasis.

145 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 100. The effect of the twins’ actions on John is profound: besides immediate physical symptoms (trembling, “star[ing], unseeing, into space” and being unresponsive), it also has a lasting emotional and psychological impact on him, which prevents him from resuming work and ameliorating the destruction wrought by the twins immediately. *Ibid.*

146 Hester arguably draws on the former idea when she explains to Dr Maudsley that “‘ children are capable of great cruelty. Only we do not like to think it of them’ ”, suggesting that the type of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD is not where children are placed by default in the Western imagination. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 186.

Overall, the twins' childhood experiences are widely governed by their pronounced *W-worlds* and the absence of/underdeveloped *O-worlds*, as is implied by their disregard for boundaries and personal property. Increasing their spatial range when they grow older, the twins explore the fields and farms beyond Angelfield House, going "where they wished"¹⁴⁷ and neither thinking about potential consequences of their actions nor whether they cause any (financial) harm. They break into houses, help "themselves to anything tasty in the pantry", sleep in others' beds and take "saucepans and spoons away with them to scare birds in the fields"¹⁴⁸. Even after they have repeatedly been caught in the act by village women, the twins do not desist from further break-ins nor do they apply social protocol by apologising for their deeds. Instead, Emmeline and Adeline laugh upon being scolded, merely seeing how "[a]nger pulled their [the women's] faces all out of shape" and how "their mouths opened and closed so quickly"¹⁴⁹, walking away whenever they please and unable to understand a single word they say. Setterfield uses the twins' inability to understand the women's wrath as a means of bringing across criticism of parenting, especially mothering, and the lack of parental intervention. After all, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Isabelle and, to a lesser extent, Charlie would have been expected to increase the number of servants and at least hire a nursemaid/a governess for the twins, whose *sole* responsibility (as opposed to the manifold responsibilities of the Missus) would have been the upbringing and (moral) education of the twins, including the task of imparting social norms, acceptable behaviour and attitudes.¹⁵⁰ Instead, the twins have widely been left to their own devices at Angelfield House, bar the occasional interaction with John and the Missus, and have never been socialised: Angelfield House was their entire world and their concept of the world for years, which they now project onto the neighbouring farms. In the isolation of Angelfield House, they have only ever seen each other, their actions reflected in their own image, and have never learned to tell right from wrong. In other words, they never developed an *O-world* that corresponds with society's expectations. Accordingly, their interaction with society fails due to internalised behavioural patterns tolerated at Angelfield House (such as eating whenever they want and taking what they need) and transgressions that do not entail consequences or punishments.

Their disregard for property and boundaries arguably climaxes in the theft and destruction of Mary Leigh's (Merrily's) expensive perambulator and the

147 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 103.

148 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 103.

149 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 103.

150 According to many nineteenth-century advice books, the hiring of (domestic) servants was part of the duties of the mistress of the house. See, for instance, Isabella Beeton. *The Book of Household Management*, 13–18.

inadvertent kidnapping of her new-born child. Introduced as “a hardworking and devoted mother” who takes good care of and loves her child dearly, Mary is shocked to find that her baby has been taken from the garden, even though she has “kept an eye on the fine perambulator” and was regularly “nipping outdoors to adjust the hood, tuck in an extra blanket or simply sing”¹⁵¹ while washing the baby’s napkins and vests over the sink. As it turns out, she was spied on through the hedge separating her garden from the fields by the twins, who “were besotted” by the perambulator (or “the vroom”¹⁵², as they refer to it in their secret language). Guided by and in the process of actualising their *W-worlds*, Emmeline and Adeline steal the pram with the infant still inside and physically exert themselves to get it to the deer park, bloodying their hands by pulling thistles and brambles from its spokes and pushing the pram “with their indefatigable energy”¹⁵³ up the longest hill.¹⁵⁴ Planning on using the pram as a toy, they exchange the baby for Adeline before she is pushed down the slope, “shrieking with pleasure”¹⁵⁵, until the pram turns over and Adeline emerges smiling from its crushed remains with a broken arm. Even though the abduction of Mary’s baby is only a by-product, Emmeline and Adeline’s willingness to endanger the child’s life for their own one-time pleasure (which, as Vida Winter suggests, was merely a game for them) reinforces the absence of a moral compass and reflects their monstrous empowerment.¹⁵⁶ Altogether, Setterfield seems to suggest that Emmeline and Adeline’s position as MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILDREN correlates with the state of their *O-* and *W-worlds*, which are the result of a combination of overindulgence and neglect – a pattern that was already introduced in the story of Charlie and Isabelle and is established as a recurring feature of the childhood experiences of the Angelfields.¹⁵⁷

151 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 105, 106.

152 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 106, 107.

153 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 107.

154 Although both of them seem to want to play with the pram, which certainly makes up their primary (and in Adeline’s case her only) motivation, Emmeline also steals the pram because she has a predilection for everything shiny: not only is she “caress[ing] the silver spokes in blind, quiet ecstasy” once they got hold of the pram, she also has a love song for it, “giv[es] it a surreptitious stroke with her fingers from time to time” and “kiss[es] it” while pushing it up the slope. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 107.

155 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 108.

156 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 109.

157 However, the incident with the perambulator not only serves to convey criticism of the twins’ upbringing, but also of the villagers’ belated intervention due to the twins’ perceived abnormality, superstitious beliefs and a divide in social class. Despite the fact that the village women (and hence maternal voices) begin to complain about the twins’ incursions, calling for intervention because the girls have begun “‘to run riot’”, they are met with refusal by their husbands on the grounds that Emmeline and Adeline are “‘the children of the big house’”. It seems that they refrain from taking action because it is not their position to make demands or criticise Charlie and Isabelle as owners of Angelfield House and because they

This pattern is broken when Hester Barrow, the governess employed when the girls are thirteen and Isabelle has been committed to an asylum, arrives at Angelfield House and curbs the twins' *W-worlds* by setting up boundaries and rules. She eventually succeeds – at least temporarily and only to a certain extent – in fulfilling the Missus' hopes to “instil a sense of discipline in the children, and restore manners and sanity to the house”¹⁵⁸. Unlike Agnes Grey in Anne Brontë's eponymous novel, who is “passive and failing to maintain any order or regulation at all” in her posts at the Bloomfields and Murrys and displays an overall “lack of order and method”¹⁵⁹, Hester proves to be firm and determined, with a clear educational trajectory and motivation to establish a “*regime of order, hygiene and discipline*”¹⁶⁰ at Angelfield House.¹⁶¹ Following her “*cardinal rule*”¹⁶² never to run after or persuade children, Hester padlocks the pantry, has shutters placed in front of the broken window and bolts the front door when the twins refuse to come down following her arrival and the Missus' call for supper. When Emmeline and Adeline (or rather Shadow, as the first-person narration suggests) go downstairs around midnight to pilfer food from the pantry, they find it locked and themselves “imprisoned” in the house, unable to “get into one of the cottages for a snack”¹⁶³. It is only when Emmeline starts wailing due to being hungry that

are afraid of Charlie, the strangeness of the house and the “twinness” of the twins. As Vida Winter relates, to the villagers, “the very twinness of the girls had a spookiness about it” and they suddenly begin to remember “all the old ghost stories” when the twins' ‘pilfering trips’ begin, which at first win ground. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 104, 103. As other novels about twins, *The Thirteenth Tale* thus also draws on twins' presumed uncanniness, whereby “the very fact of their twinship render[s] them somewhat suspicious” and other, as is suggested by the villagers' constant pathologising of Emmeline and Adeline (“[t]here was something *not right* about them, everyone agreed”). Wieland Schwanebeck. *Literary Twinship from Shakespeare to the Age of Cloning*, 140.; Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 103, original emphasis. As by-standers willing to indulge the twins' misbehaviour to a certain point, the villagers arguably share part of the blame for events that climax in the kidnapping of the infant. Hence, it is not exclusively the shortcomings in parental control and setting boundaries that permit the twins' transgressions, but also a lack of adult intervention and hesitancy at large.

158 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 167.

159 Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros. “‘Lessons in the Art of Instruction’”, 147.

160 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 356, original emphasis.

161 *Agnes Grey* certainly is one of the most obvious intertexts here. The twins' running wild and lacking order and regularity is reminiscent of the Bloomfield and Murray children in Brontë's novel. Yet, where Agnes was expected to fulfil the role of the ideal governess, which, according to Dara Rossman Regaignon, “make[s] her presence unnoticeable and her influence over the children a perfect extension of their parents'”, Hester was supposed to compensate for Isabelle's absence and shortcomings in setting an example for her children. Dara Rossman Regaignon. “Instructive Sufficiency.”, 85. Setterfield thus presents a slightly different and fairly exceptional constellation that allows Hester, who has never met Isabelle or ever seen Charlie, to assume authority over the household and act of her own accord.

162 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 365, original emphasis.

163 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 171, 170.

Hester appears and meets the ‘twins’, or at least Emmeline, on her terms.¹⁶⁴ She thus exerts a considerable and, to the twins, unexpected amount of adult control, establishing power structures they have not encountered so far. She firmly places herself in the position to actualise their *W-worlds* and, from the children’s perspective, turns out to be a challenge and “force to be reckoned with”¹⁶⁵, who prevails where the Missus had failed. In terms of the strict principles her education is based on, Hester seems to be a Victorian character rather than a modern one.

Unlike Adeline/Shadow, Emmeline immediately shows herself responsive to Hester due to her fondness, even obsessive love of shiny objects. Upon seeing her governess draw the shiny key to the pantry out of her pocket, which was “buffed to a high shine” and “glinted tantalizingly in the blue light”, Emmeline seems to forget the world around her and, to Shadow’s dismay, obligingly “follow[s] the key – and Hester with it”¹⁶⁶. Before long, Emmeline’s responsiveness to the shiny key extends towards Hester herself and she begins to comply with the rules, regularity and order the governess has imposed upon the house. Not only does Hester succeed in accustoming Emmeline to regular meal times, she also seems to take advantage of her fondness for the shiny keys to keep her close and under adult supervision, occasionally allowing Emmeline to play with the keys in her presence. She thus conditions Emmeline through the latter’s desire. Arguably, Emmeline’s obsession even extends towards herself when she begins to develop “a passion for baths”¹⁶⁷ due to the effect her clean self in the mirror has upon her. Not only does she stand open-mouthed in front of the mirror, admiring the clean girl reflected back to her, she also falls “into another of her trances” and is absorbed by the mirror image, “lik[ing] being shiny”¹⁶⁸ herself. Her newly-developed passion, which she carries into adult life, can also be read as an imitation of Hester, who arrives clean and, from Emmeline’s perspective, ‘shiny’ at Angelfield House.¹⁶⁹ Hester’s cleanliness and well-groomed appearance in combi-

164 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 171.

165 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 169.

166 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 172.

167 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 174–175.

168 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 175.

169 As Vida Winter’s narration suggests, all children are fascinated by Hester’s appearance, because she is clean. The description of Hester, which draws on Shadow’s perspective and perception, reinforces this impression: “Every pore in her plain little face was *illuminated*. Something *shone* in her clothes and in her hair. Something *radiated* from her luggage. Something *cast a glow* around her person, like a *light bulb*. Something made her exotic. We had no idea what it was. We’d never imagined the like of it before. We found out later, though. Hester was clean”. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 168–169, my emphasis. The choice of words suggests that she forms a stark contrast to Angelfield House and its occupants. The description and Emmeline’s reaction to her own clean mirror image implies that she must have perceived Hester along similar lines and liked her accordingly.

nation with her access to shiny objects is therefore likely to have contributed to Emmeline's willingness to spend time in her presence and, hence, initiate her socialisation. This is suggested by the fact that Emmeline, trying to gain her governess' approval, is constantly looking for smiles on Hester's face and is delighted when she is smiling at her, which eventually culminates in a reciprocal action when Emmeline "learn[s] to smile back"¹⁷⁰, deliberately interacting with someone who is not her sister.

Where Hester is content with Emmeline's improvement and transformation, she has a more ambivalent reaction towards Adeline and is confused by her seemingly erratic behaviour. Examining the twins' behavioural patterns from an amateur-psychological point of view, she explains to Dr Maudsley that Adeline resists her, the classroom and daily routines whilst displaying aggression and a disregard for those around her. She observes that Adeline "'cannot be stimulated to take an interest in anything beyond the realm of her own wishes, desires and appetites'", hence her *W-world*, and "'is governed by impulses that appear to have no conscious element'"¹⁷¹. Her responses are consistent with the behaviour she has displayed so far, but Hester is convinced that there is a different, repressed side in Adeline, which is referred to as "'the girl in the mist'"¹⁷² and occasionally surfaces when listening to Hester's classroom readings of certain Victorian novels. At this point, Setterfield implicitly conjures up Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as a Victorian intertext and raises reader expectations, implying that Adeline might be a Hyde, repressing her 'good' side, i.e., all those traits exhibited by Emmeline, due to a polar split among the twins, while uninhibitedly acting out the evil side. Yet, as it turns out, Hester's assumptions prove wrong and there is no such duality inside Adeline; it is not an alter ego that surfaces, as is the case in Stevenson's novella, but in fact a *doppelgänger*, her identical-looking half-sister Shadow, who temporarily impersonates Adeline and is unable to fully keep up the pretence.¹⁷³ Never having seen the third child, however, "[i]t is this girl [in the mist] whom the *scientifically-minded Hester*, exceptionally well-read in medical research on twins, proposes to set free"¹⁷⁴ during an experiment in which the twins are separated from one another.¹⁷⁵

170 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 175.

171 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 188, 186.

172 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 190.

173 For a reading of Shadow as the secret child, see the subsequent subchapter. A neo-Victorian children's novel drawing explicitly on Stevenson's novella is Robert Swindells' *Jacqueline Hyde* (1996), which not only acknowledges its indebtedness to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in its title, but also in an epigraph.

174 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 52, my emphasis.

As a result of Hester's influence on Emmeline, both twins, now aged fourteen, experience the experiment-induced separation and the initial feeling of loss to different degrees. While Emmeline is fast asleep and does not wake when she is lifted out of bed and temporarily taken to Hester's room, Adeline is immediately aware of the absence of her sister and "[i]n a flash [...] knew it all, felt it all"¹⁷⁶. Even though she tries to open the door and follow Emmeline at first, she soon "collapse[s] into a little heap against the door, [...] where she stayed all night"¹⁷⁷, indifferent towards cold and pain and numb to any other feeling, which reflects her reliance on the presence of Emmeline and the traumatic nature of the separation. During this night, Adeline arguably dies a figurative death, as is implied by her dead eyes and bloodless, cold skin on the next day when she is brought to Dr Maudsley's, where she is to stay for the time of their separation.¹⁷⁸ The text even draws attention to her corpse-like state, indicating that were it not "for her lips that twitched ceaselessly, repeating a silent mantra that might have been *Emmeline, Emmeline, Emmeline*"¹⁷⁹, she could easily have been taken for dead. Unlike Emmeline, who has shown herself responsive to others and therefore is at first only "mildly surprised" by the absence of her twin and only truly worried about her in the afternoon, which is also when her search for Adeline commences, Adeline is "lost", "[a]bsent", "no one", "just the shell of a person"¹⁸⁰, whose spirit and life force are gone immediately and seem irrecoverable. Their initial reactions to the separation suggest that Emmeline clearly is at Adeline's core of being and identity – much like Isabelle is at the core of Charlie's –, while the reverse appears to be the case only to a certain extent.

Despite initial divergences in the intensity of their feelings of loss and separation, Emmeline and Adeline both break down as a result of being physically kept apart from one another. Realising after a day that her sister is not coming home, Emmeline, too, begins to feel her twin's absence, crying all night and weeping "herself into oblivion"¹⁸¹. Even though it takes Emmeline much longer to realise what has happened, the effect of the separation on the twins is identical: they both "collapse into a pair of lifeless rag-dolls"¹⁸², Emmeline in Hester and the

175 The fact that the fictional medical authorities mentioned in Setterfield's text do not discuss such an inconsistency must have sparked Hester's interest in the matter and increased her willingness to propose such a venture to Dr Maudsley. Before and during the experiment, she does not take the twins' well-being into account and is absorbed by the idea of contributing to the current state of research as Dr Maudsley's assistant.

176 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 204.

177 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 204.

178 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 204.

179 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 204, original emphasis.

180 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 205.

181 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 206.

182 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 207.

Missus' care at Angelfield House and Adeline in Dr and Mrs Maudsley's care at the doctor's house. Separated from one another, Emmeline and Adeline "[a]re in a kind of limbo", are "all but catatonic"¹⁸³, have to be spoon-fed and neither realise what is going on around them nor find repose in sleep, which is not the result Hester and Dr Maudsley were hoping for. Both of them bide their time in separation, unable to live apart from one another. This reaction reinforces the depth of their twin bond and the detrimental psychological effects of the experiment.

Over the course of the experiment, Emmeline gradually begins to leave behind her catatonic state and engages with reflective surfaces, most notably a mirror, which becomes an expression of her longing for her twin sister. Her encounter with the mirror suggests that she seems to regress into the pre-mirror stage, apparently proving unable to distinguish between her sister and her own mirror image anymore. According to Jacques Lacan, infants go through the mirror stage when they are between six- and eighteen-months old.¹⁸⁴ At this point, the child recognises himself/herself/themselves in a mirror for the first time and "apprehends the fact that her body is a distinct and coherent entity unto itself, that there are boundaries between what constitutes herself and what constitutes Other"¹⁸⁵. He argues that, through various gestures in front of the mirror, the infant "experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment" and between his/her/their "own body, and the persons and even things around him"¹⁸⁶, whereby the formation of the ego occurs. If, however, an infant does not go through the mirror stage, as Karen Coats maintains, "then it is impossible to enter into the Symbolic network of relations"¹⁸⁷, the stage succeeding the Imaginary, which comprises the acquisition of language and of verbal communication skills, permitting the child to interact with others in the symbolic order.¹⁸⁸ Having constantly been accompanied by her identical twin

183 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 207, 209.

184 Cf. Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function.", 75–76.

185 Karen Coats. *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*, 19.

186 Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function.", 75.

187 Karen Coats. *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*, 20.

188 Setterfield even seems to suggest that Emmeline has not successfully completed the mirror stage in the first place, because she learns to speak English and properly interact with others belatedly. Prior to the incident in the topiary garden, Emmeline and Adeline, as the Missus observes, live in their own world and "don't know that anyone is alive but themselves", staring at her unblinking in "the way children look at inanimate, moving objects". Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 96, 95. They are unresponsive to their environment and oblivious to the people in it whilst talking exclusively in twin language, which, as in other fictional texts about twins, "further[s] their social isolation and insularity". Karen Dillon. *The Spectacle of Twins*, 39. Only after the incident does Emmeline respond to the Missus and speaks English for the first time: "'Missus sad,' the girl said. It was Emmeline. Startled, the Missus blinked away the fog of her tears and stared. The child spoke again. 'John-the-dig

sister, whom she must have perceived as a mirror image of herself, Emmeline experiences a regression to the pre-mirror stage during the separation from her twin. Dressed in the rags of her absent sister, “she caught sight of herself in a mirror and taking her reflection for her sister, she ran headlong into it”¹⁸⁹. Her “weeping beside the mirror, crying not for her own pain, but for her poor sister who had broken into several pieces and was bleeding”¹⁹⁰, is indicative of her inability to recognise her own mirror image anymore and her obliviousness to pain and wounds, which she transfers upon the fractured and shattered image of her ‘twin sister’. This incident occurs when Emmeline is already fourteen years old and thus highlights the extent to which her life experience has been determined by being an identical twin and the harmful effects of the separation from her twin sister, which arguably causes a relapse into early child development.¹⁹¹

Even before she runs into the mirror, Emmeline uses reflective surfaces to simulate the presence of her absent twin and (unconsciously) undermines the experiment. When the experiment is about to come to nothing and fails to yield the desired effect, Hester suddenly “detect[s] small signs of improvement in Emmeline”, who has begun to hold on to a shiny bauble from which she refuses to be separated from and “whisper[s] to herself in the old twin language”¹⁹² when she is left on her own. As a reflective surface, the shiny bauble allows Emmeline to see her own mirror image, which she, in her pre-mirror stage state, does not recognise as her own but as that of her sister. She, thus, is not merely talking to herself but to the bauble in which she sees her sister, imagining her presence. A portable object, the bauble allows her to take her ‘sister’ wherever she wants and provides her with the temporary joy of seeing Adeline, whilst her firm holding on to and obsession with the bauble reflects her fear of losing her twin once again. In addition to the shiny bauble, Emmeline also looks at the reflecting surface of the window – a detail that is only mentioned in passing and does not strike Hester as relevant. In analogy to Margaret in the story’s present, who also constantly uses

sad’”. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 101. Her two-word constructions, consisting merely of subject and adjective, which children between 18 and 23 months are capable of uttering, point towards her sparse and simple vocabulary and rudimentary grammatical competence, which reinforces the impression that she is still learning her native language at an age by which she should be able to speak English fluently. Cf. Stanford Children’s Health. “Age-Appropriate Speech and Language Milestones.”, n.p.

189 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 210.

190 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 210.

191 Setterfield’s novel, like many Gothic texts, seems to invite psychoanalytic readings and possibly even allows for a Freudian reading, according to which Adeline could be regarded as the id and Emmeline as the ego, while Hester takes the position of the externalised super-ego.

192 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 209, 210.

reflective surfaces to imagine the presence of her dead twin sister, Emmeline is likely to use the faint reflection of herself that is created by the window to imagine the presence of Adeline.¹⁹³ Thus, what Hester believes to be an improvement is, in fact, a regression into a pre-separation state whereby Emmeline, though physically separated from Adeline, is – or rather believes to be – reunited with her sister and resorts to old habits (speaking in their private twin language).¹⁹⁴ This regression then reaches its apex when Emmeline crashes into the mirror and mourns the ‘destruction’ of her twin sister.

Once the experiment comes to an unexpected and premature end, Emmeline emerges with a new understanding of her self and an identity apart from her sister. Reunited at last, Emmeline and Adeline at first enjoy each other’s presence and mend the bond between them. They stay in bed a whole day, “arms wrapped around each other and gazing into each other’s eyes” whilst not saying a word and uncannily “[b]linking in unison”¹⁹⁵. The first two days after their reunion, they are inseparable, following each other at every turn and “playing endless games of now-you-see-me-now-you-don’t, a repetition of their recent experience of loss and rediscovery that Adeline never seemed to tire of”¹⁹⁶. However, Emmeline soon begins to grow weary and suddenly minds what she tolerated in Adeline before.¹⁹⁷ This is due to the fact that both twins have felt the separation and loss of the twin sister differently: where Adeline “had fallen quickly into a state of fugue [...] and had no recollection of the time passed away from her”, her twin does not have “the relief of amnesia”¹⁹⁸. Emmeline “had suffered longer, and she suffered more” and spent the last weeks in agony and pain, whereby overcoming her grief eventually resulted in her “learn[ing] how to exist apart”¹⁹⁹ from her twin sister. She invented (simple) games and found ways to entertain herself, which are in part also due to being neglected by Hester at times and which she is unwilling to discard now that her sister has returned. Accordingly, on the third day after their reunion, Emmeline leaves her sister in the garden to play a card game in the

193 Margaret repeatedly conflates her own twin sister, who died shortly after her birth because she did not survive the operation that was supposed to separate the conjoined twins, with her own reflection, assuming an identical appearance. She sees her “sister’s ghost” in the reflection of a window and mistakes her own mirror image for her sister when she visits the ruins of Angelfield House. She even needs to take a step towards ‘her’ to realise that what she sees is merely a reflection of herself. She keeps up this fantasy after having realised that it is her own mirror image, claiming that “she raised a camera and took a photograph of me” when she is taking a picture of the image reflected back at her. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 39, 149.; cf. *ibid.*, 297.

194 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 210.

195 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 219.

196 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 224.

197 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 224.

198 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 223.

199 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 223, 224.

billiard room and ignores Adeline's 'psychic calls'.²⁰⁰ She thus no longer actualises her sister's *W-world*, but her own, whereby being guided by her own *W-world* becomes the marker of her newly developed separate identity.²⁰¹

Given that Adeline remained in a catatonic state throughout the experiment, she is unable to cope with Emmeline's newly asserted independence. For the time of their separation, Adeline seems to have gone into a coma, perceiving the time as a "blackness" that "might have been a year or a second"²⁰². She seems to have paused and only experienced the separation on a subconscious level, before "she had come to life again"²⁰³ when the experiment eventually came to a close. As a result, she attempts to continue her relationship with Emmeline where they stopped before the experiment and reacts with violence when Emmeline no longer complies and begins to actualise her own *W-world*. Storming into the billiard room, she vents her aggressions and leaves Emmeline, who neither fights back nor cries during or after the attack, bruised and bleeding on the billiard table, which reinforces her position as DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD.²⁰⁴ Adeline's rage and violent outburst align her with the male members of her family: her grandfather George, who hits and bruises Isabelle when she informs him of her decision to leave Angelfield House, and Charlie, who is unable to cope with Isabelle's decision to marry Roland. In depicting Adeline as reverting to violence and aggression when her *W-world* remains unactualised, Setterfield reiterates ideas of hereditary behavioural traits and a destructive obsession, the latter of which is also a dominant trait in the relationship between Charlie and Isabelle and suggests that a similar relationship pattern is at work between the twins.

Adeline's destructive obsession with Emmeline eventually reaches its apogee during their adolescence when Emmeline gives birth to Aurelius at the age of sixteen. During her pregnancy, Adeline was "curiously" affected by the changes in Emmeline and attempted to imitate her twin sister by developing an appetite and "plump curves and full breasts" when she has been "a scrawny bag of

200 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 224–225. This implies that Emmeline and Adeline's bond is also experienced on a subconscious level. Another such instant can be found when "Emmeline, wandering in the woods, raised her head, sniffed the air, and turned directly towards home", knowing that her sister has returned home and immediately joins her in their room. *Ibid.*, 215.

201 In how far Shadow has contributed to Emmeline's more independent self cannot be discerned, as the text does not give any examples of interactions between the two during the separation. Yet, in Adeline's absence, Emmeline and Shadow have developed a friendship and played together, which must have had a considerable impact on Emmeline's socialisation and the formation of a *W-world* distinct from her sister's.

202 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 223.

203 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 223.

204 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 225.

bones”²⁰⁵ all her life, so that even Shadow is unable to tell them apart at times.²⁰⁶ They almost seem to give birth to Aurelius *as twins*: while “Emmeline was huffing and panting”, “snort[ing] and sweat[ing]”²⁰⁷, Adeline is the one to cry in pain until Emmeline’s baby boy is born, whereby Setterfield capitalises on the notion of an innate twin bond between Emmeline and Adeline. However, the baby brings changes with which Adeline, who is jealous of Aurelius and the affection Emmeline bestows upon him, cannot cope. As a result of being “left outside this mother-child dyad”²⁰⁸ and despite having experienced ‘sympathy pain’ while her sister gave birth, Adeline attempts to murder the baby twice.²⁰⁹ Restoring their relationship to a pre-pregnancy and pre-Aurelius state, i. e., a time when “Emmeline’s heart was full”²¹⁰ in the presence of her twin sister, would bring an actualisation of her *W-world*. Her attempts to suffocate the child with a pillow and burn him alive reflect her enduring monstrous empowerment and the life-long dominance of her *W-world* over her *O-world*, both of which were shaped by twinness and by being absorbed by the special bond that exists between twins, which in Adeline’s case was total.

Given that the textual actual world (or TAW) never corresponds with Adeline’s *W-world* due to Shadow’s intervention, her murderous attempts result in the fire at Angelfield House and the death of Emmeline. When Adeline, whose fires “were wild and random affairs that ought not to burn at all”, succeeds in making one, using petrol and torn pages from Victorian novels, it turns into “the fire of a madwoman”²¹¹ and she, as Heilmann and Llewellyn suggest, becomes “a raging Bertha Rochester”²¹². Whilst Shadow, who rescued Aurelius from the fireplace and hid him in the church, is on her way back to the house, the fire is blazing in the library and Emmeline is fighting and retaliating against her twin sister for the first time in her life in order to protect her child.²¹³ Arriving at the inferno, Shadow grabs the twin sister she distinctly remembers to have identified as Emmeline and attempts to guide her out of the room, repeatedly telling her that her child is safe, but finds that “[s]he is bound to her sister”²¹⁴ by an invisible twin

205 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 412.

206 Adeline’s mimicking of Emmeline’s pregnancy could be read in the context of a couvade syndrome, which describes a condition in which men experience the pregnancy symptoms alongside their wives/girlfriends. This is further implied by the fact that Adeline is the one to have dominantly inherited the traits from the male line of the family.

207 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 414.

208 Heta Pyrhönen. *Bluebeard Gothic*, 146.

209 For an analysis of Aurelius and him nearly slipping into the category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD, see the next subchapter.

210 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 410.

211 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 419, 421.

212 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 53.

213 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 423.

214 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 424.

bond that cannot be broken. However, the persistence with which Emmeline is returning to her twin sister suggests that Shadow might have confused the twins, who bear an uncanny physical semblance to one another since Emmeline's pregnancy, in the smoke and is in fact speaking to Adeline. Therefore, telling *Adeline* that the baby is safe does not bring the relief or the (re)actions she hoped for, because her entire *W-world* revolves around her twin sister, who is still in the flames. When Shadow intervenes again, she is only able to rescue one twin sister and can neither "find [...] [her] beloved"²¹⁵ nor Adeline in the face of the woman she rescued.²¹⁶ Eventually, all *W-worlds* remain unactualised and the course of events takes a tragic, even fatal turn that results in the permanent separation of the twins, which is caused once again by a morbid obsession with a loved one.

9.3. Shadow and Aurelius: Identity, Illegitimacy and Abandonment

The story Vida Winter tells in *The Thirteenth Tale* is not just the twins' story, but also, and more importantly, her own. As the "[c]hild of rage. Child of rape. *Charlie's child*", whose "story [...] [is] written in her copper hair and her emerald eyes"²¹⁷, Shadow has no legal identity throughout her childhood and bears neither a proper first name nor a last name. Even though she was nothing "'more than a sub-plot'"²¹⁸ at birth, she turns into a crucial agent in the events that unfold and "gradually takes over the narrative"²¹⁹ until she is the only one left to tell the story of the Angelfield family and to pass on their legacy. As a participant in the events of the past that climaxed in the fire at Angelfield House and the death of one twin, she is also the only one left to restore Aurelius' sense of identity, who, like herself, has grown up as an illegitimate child. This subchapter

215 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 425.

216 While *The Thirteenth Tale* never openly acknowledges the surviving twin to be Adeline, Setterfield implies this at different points in the novel. In describing the "ravaged, unseeing, unknowing" gaze Shadow sees in the face of the surviving twin, Setterfield seems to reiterate Adeline's reaction towards the separation during the experiment, where she also collapsed and loses herself in the absence of her twin sister. As soon as Emmeline has died in the flames, the twin bond snapped and, as before, Adeline is immediately aware of the irreversible separation from her twin, unable to recover this time. Moreover, as an old woman, she digs in the garden with her bare hands, searching for her dead twin sister, while uttering a five-note sound Margaret is able to decipher as "[t]he dead go underground", which turns out to be twin language and seems to pick up on Adeline's exclusive use of twin language. At this point, Setterfield reinforces the strength of the twin bond and Adeline's obsessive love and inability to let go of her sister. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 425, 314, original emphasis.

217 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 394, 393, original emphasis.

218 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 66.

219 Susanne Gruss. "Spectres of the Past.", 129.

analyses Shadow and Aurelius in the context of illegitimacy and abandonment – two topics that are prominent in Victorian and neo-Victorian fiction alike. It sets out with an examination of the titular thirteenth tale, which, like the other twelve tales in Vida Winter's *Thirteen Tales of Change and Desperation*, is a fairy-tale rewriting with an unhappy, tainted ending and chronicles Shadow's origins and her arrival at Angelfield House. It then turns to the immediate repercussions of Shadow's illegitimacy and abandonment and analyses her as a 'wild child' and a "ghost-child"²²⁰, who haunts the story on various levels and is connected with the recovery of trauma.²²¹ In this context, it suggests that through telling the story and working through the traumatic events of her past, Vida Winter reclaims her childhood identity and prevents Shadow from falling into obscurity. By contrast, the analysis of Aurelius predominantly centres on his quest for identity, because he, like many other (neo-)Victorian illegitimate children, "seek[s] to uncover [...] [his] position within the legitimate genealogical record"²²². This subchapter focuses on Mrs Love's story and his 'inheritance', his birth and precarious position in the Angelfield family as well as his happy ending, when he is supplied with a family on the paternal line.

The titular thirteenth tale is a seemingly unfinished, autobiographical story Margaret receives upon Vida Winter's death. Provisionally entitled 'Cinderella's Child' in the accompanying letter, it contains "the story of her [Vida Winter's/Shadow's] conception and abandonment"²²³, raising issues of illegitimacy, victimisation and rape. In this story, Vida Winter draws on and subverts fairy-tale material, presenting not only "a radically revised Cinderella tale"²²⁴ but re-working (elements from) "Little Red Riding-Hood" and, to a lesser extent, "Hansel and Gretel" as well. Like Angela Carter in her fairy-tale collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Vida Winter gives the fairy tales a darker, more unsettling twist, making explicit and elaborating on what is only implied in the traditional tales, and thus provides Margaret with "the story of Cinderella, like [...] [she has] never read it before"²²⁵. In this version, Cinderella does not attend a ball but is raped and impregnated in the woods and, a few years later, abandons the child on the property of her abuser.²²⁶ Unlike many traditional fairy tales and

220 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 405.

221 The name 'Shadow', which was bestowed upon her because 'Mary' (the name chosen by the Missus) "didn't stick" and she "stuck to him [John] like a shadow", also points to her existence in the shadows of Angelfield, the dark corners and hiding places she has found throughout her childhood. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 405.

222 Louisa Hadley. "Illegitimate Fictions.", 43.

223 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 54.

224 Abigail Heiniger. *Jane Eyre's Fairy Tale Legacy at Home and Abroad*, 75.

225 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 447.

226 Whether Cinderella is supposed to be Sybilla, whose parents lost most of their money, is open to speculation. The fact that Cinderella returns home past midnight in Vida Winter's

Vida Winter's attempts to interest Margaret in the biographical project, this tale does not start with the widely employed chronotope 'Once upon a time', a marker for an indeterminate temporal setting and part of the storytelling conventions of this particular genre.²²⁷ This marker is belatedly inserted into the story after three sentences and sets the story in a more mundane reality, where fairy godmothers who intervene on behalf of poor, powerless girls no longer exist: "*Once upon a time there was a fairy godmother, but the rest of the time there was none. This story is about one of those other times*"²²⁸. Throughout the tale, Vida Winter repeatedly picks up on fairy-tale elements only to negate them immediately afterwards. This "*girl's pumpkin is just a pumpkin*" and "[t]here will be no footman at the door with moleskin slippers"²²⁹ the next day. She primes the reader in that she invokes particular images from the story, through which the reader retrieves the fairy tale, to stress her departures and expose the fairy-tale happy ending of "Cinderella" as wishful thinking.

The unhappy ending of Vida Winter's version and Cinderella's falling prey to the predator in the woods aligns her story more strongly with Perrault's version of "Little Red Riding-Hood", even though its provisional title references a different tale. In Perrault's version of this traditional fairy tale, Little Red Riding-Hood, as Jack Zipes observes, "brings about her own rape and violent death because she

version may be due to the significance of 'midnight' in the traditional tale, marking the point in time when Cinderella has to return home and the fairy godmother's spell will end.

- 227 In *The Thirteenth Tale*, both Vida Winter and Margaret apply the fairy tale opening 'Once upon a time' repeatedly to the story told by Vida Winter. To catch Margaret's attention and convince her to participate in the project, Vida Winter makes three attempts, all of which start with these opening words: "'Once upon a time there was a haunted house...' [...] 'Once upon a time there was a library...' [...] 'Once upon a time there were twins-'" . Likewise, Margaret, after having found out about Shadow, retells the beginning of Vida Winter's story more than once, always using the same formula: "*Once upon a time there were two baby girls...* Except that now I knew better. [...] Once upon a time there were two baby girls... Or alternatively: once upon a time there were *three*. Once upon a time there was a house and the house was haunted". She does so again shortly afterwards, thus consciously framing the story as a fairy tale: "Once upon a time there was a house called Angelfield. Once upon a time there were twins. Once upon a time there came to Angelfield a cousin. More likely a half-sister". Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 53–54, 391, 394, original emphasis. In addition, towards the end, when Aurelius is reunited with his family, his niece Emma pretends to tell a story during imaginary play, opening an invisible book, and starts her story in the same way, reinforcing it as an inevitable part of storytelling conventions. Cf. *ibid.*, 444. Setterfield's fondness of this opening is also reflected in the title of her most recent novel *Once Upon a River* (2018), which substitutes 'time' with 'river', whereby it acknowledges its use of fairy-tale elements. One could even argue that the title of *The Thirteenth Tale* alludes to the Grimms' version of "Sleeping Beauty", in which thirteen is the unlucky number and the thirteenth fairy curses the child instead of bestowing well-meaning spells upon her.

228 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 447–448, original emphasis.

229 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 448, original emphasis.

does not know how to behave with dangerous seducers”²³⁰. Yet, where Perrault’s version only implies the child’s rape when the wolf, disguised as her grandmother, asks her to “‘come and get into bed with me’”²³¹, before devouring her, Vida Winter’s version addresses rape and its repercussions explicitly.²³² In the woods, Cinderella becomes the victim of an unnamed rapist, a different kind of ‘wolf’, who, as the story of Charlie and Isabelle suggests, is none other than Charlie Angelfield, and “*crawls home after midnight, blood on her petticoats, violated*”²³³. This graphic image suggests that she had been a virgin prior to the assault and reinforces the brutality exerted upon her that eventually forces the girl to crawl home. The happy ending and poetic justice readers might expect due to the conventions associated with the ‘Once upon a time’ are subverted and denied. Instead, Vida Winter’s version is “[l]aconic, hard, and angry”²³⁴ and turns Cinderella into a fallen woman, ruined for life. Through this story, Setterfield, as many other (contemporary) women writers, thus revises and “question[s] gendered patterns [of traditional fairy tales] that seem immutable (the obedient heroine, the girl and the threatening beast, the ‘happily ever after’ ending)”²³⁵, providing a provocative blend of “Cinderella” and “Little Red Riding-Hood”. She repeatedly alludes to these fairy tales, picking up on and reworking several of their tropes, to provide a story that is not a fairy tale but a thinly veiled and barely fictionalised account of how Shadow was conceived.

Whilst the first part chronicling the rape and impregnation of Cinderella is inspired by “Cinderella” and “Little Red Riding-Hood”, ‘the second part’ of “Cinderella’s Child” appears to adapt and invert the Brothers Grimm’s “Hansel and Gretel”. This latter part elaborates on the abandonment of the unnamed child, who had been raised in “poverty and filth”, before she is taken to the

230 Jack Zipes. “Introduction: The Remaking of Charles Perrault and his Fairy Tales.”, xvii.

231 Charles Perrault. “Little Red Riding-Hood.”, 101.

232 Little Red Riding-Hood even undresses prior to climbing into bed and is “very surprised to see what her grandmother looked like without any clothes on”. Charles Perrault. “Little Red Riding-Hood.”, 101.

233 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 448, original emphasis. The moral of Perrault’s tale suggests that the term ‘wolf’ is merely employed figuratively and denotes men more generally: “Young children, as this tale will show, / And mainly pretty girls with charm, / Do wrong and often come to harm / In letting those they do not know / Stay talking to them when they meet. / And if they don’t do as they ought, / It’s no surprise that some are caught / By wolves who take them off to eat. / I call them wolves, but you will find / That some are not the savage kind, / Not howling, ravening or raging; / Their manners seem, instead, engaging, / They’re softly-spoken and discreet. / Young ladies whom they talk to on the street / They follow to their homes and through the hall, / And upstairs to their rooms; when they’re there / They’re not as friendly as they might appear: / These are the most dangerous wolves of all”. Charles Perrault. “Little Red Riding-Hood.”, 103.

234 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 447.

235 Elizabeth Wanning Harries. “Changing the Story.”, 159.

“grounds of the house owned by her [the mother’s] violator”²³⁶ and abandoned in the garden. Given that the child was raised in poverty for several years, it can be assumed that her abandonment, like Hansel and Gretel’s, was in all likelihood the result of the mother’s precarious financial situation. Upon being left alone in the garden, she is “cold and hungry” and sees “a shed that, to her child’s mind, has the look of a little house”²³⁷. Unlike Hansel and Gretel, who immediately go to the edible house to satisfy their hunger, the child in this tale has to decide whether to go to the house that promises shelter or back through the garden door, hoping that her mother will still be there and wait for her. Even though Vida Winter’s “story ends abruptly”²³⁸ with the child hesitating, still in the process of decision making, Margaret and the reader already know that she picked the house and stayed hungry for some time, merely eating berries and other items of food the garden provides. In contrast to the house in “Hansel and Gretel”, the shed and Angelfield House do not contain a wicked witch, but a gardener and a house-keeper in whom the child eventually finds substitute parents, who nurture and feed her without sinister purposes in mind.²³⁹ Thus, while Setterfield retains the topic of (step-)motherly abandonment and the idea of finding a ‘little house’, which evoke “Hansel and Gretel” as another, more implicit fairy-tale intertext, she does not retain any of the fairy tale elements, providing a more prosaic account and denying the child a happy family reunion and even an immediate happy end.

Throughout “Cinderella’s Child”, Vida Winter blends fiction and reality, using the medium of storytelling and the genre of the fairy tale to tell this part of her own story. While Abigail Heiniger reads Vida Winter’s use of the Cinderella fairy tale as a means that “allows her to access and articulate an unmentionable and relatively unknown past”²⁴⁰, the fairy tale as a genre is simultaneously also employed to *work through* her own traumatic past and her extramarital conception, which turned her into an illegitimate child. According to Louisa Hadley, “[t]he illegitimate child [...] becomes an important site of engagement for neo-Victorian novelists and connects to the more general neo-Victorian concern with recuperating the excluded and/or marginalised aspects of 19th-century fiction” and “destabilizes and undermines the systems of inheritance, genealogy, and identity by revealing the potentially fictional nature of the patrilineal system”²⁴¹.

236 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 448.

237 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 448, original emphasis.

238 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 448.

239 Admittedly, Charlie, the predatory, wolfish villain in this version, still lives inside the house when Shadow is abandoned, but he “never saw the ghost” and was kept unaware of her existence. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 392.

240 Abigail Heiniger. *Jane Eyre’s Fairy Tale Legacy at Home and Abroad*, 75.

241 Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 30, 32.

She argues that neo-Victorian narratives, in contrast to their Victorian predecessors, tend to afford illegitimate (child) characters with a central position “and often present them, or their descendants, as involved in a genealogical process of recovering their family history and identity”²⁴², as is the case in *The Thirteenth Tale*. Since illegitimacy was “both a legal and social transgression”, whereby the offspring “exists as proof of the sin committed by its parents”²⁴³, Vida Winter perhaps also attempts to come to terms with intergenerational trauma, veiling the truth about her conception in fictions and stories as part of working through trauma.

While Margaret is provided with Shadow’s story only after Vida Winter’s death, she receives the details about the immediate repercussions of the child’s abandonment, i. e., her turning into a ‘wild child’ who has to take care of herself, beforehand. Unlike the destructive twins, Shadow is connected with the natural environment and specifically the garden from the start, evoking the Rousseauian image of the ‘child in nature’.²⁴⁴ Yet, instead of playing in the garden upon arrival, as does Tom Long in Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), she is concerned with survival and instinctively does so by stealing strawberries, “[n]eatly, without disturbing a thing”²⁴⁵, and secretly drawing water from the garden tap. She sleeps in the potting shed, where she has made herself a bed of crates and newspapers and, quite literally, lives in the garden.²⁴⁶ When she is discovered by the gardener, who does not consider it a likely scenario that someone would abandon a child in other people’s garden, she is “barely knee-high”²⁴⁷, and either, as Heilmann and Llewellyn suggest, still a toddler or malnourished and stunted in growth.²⁴⁸ From the moment of her abandonment, and perhaps even before, she belongs to the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EX-

242 Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 32.

243 Louisa Hadley. “Illegitimate Fictions.”, 32, 31.

244 The garden is one of the two spaces Shadow is principally associated with (the other is the library). When she is older, she works in the garden ‘for her keep’ and learns how to take care of the topiary garden prior to John’s death. Like Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, she is a gardener, displaying a Rousseauian connection with the natural world: “In the soil potatoes grew swollen under her care; above ground the fruit bushes flourished, producing clusters of berries that her hands sought out under low leaves. Not only did she have a magic touch for fruit and vegetables, but the roses bloomed as they had never bloomed before”. Moreover, similar to Sue Trinder in *Fingersmith*, who learns to read by removing letters from stolen handkerchiefs in Mr Ibbs’ thieves’ den, Shadow too learns to read while working, in her case in the garden and from “‘seed catalogues in the shed’”. She later on even conflates two of her favourite places by reading in the garden. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 393, 405.

245 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 401.

246 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 401–402.

247 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 401.

248 Cf. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 53.

PLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, as her physical state suggests: like *Oliver Twist*, she is a pathetic child, merely “a bag of bones”²⁴⁹, dirt-covered to the point that even her gender is undefinable and she is presumed to be a boy, smelly, sick, flea-bitten and feverish.²⁵⁰ Even though she has been stealing fruit from the garden, she has not been able to adequately sustain herself. It seems that she would, due to the mother’s wilful abandonment, have turned into a SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD in the near future had it not been for the intervention of the gardener, who has to set a ‘trap’ to catch the scared child. Realising that she is starved, exhausted, burning up and has a swollen, sore foot with a thorn embedded in it when he has successfully captured her, he gets the Missus and they immediately start taking care of her.²⁵¹ While this state of being a ‘wild child’ is only a temporary one – though the text does not specify whether she had to fend for herself for just a few days or even weeks –, the child is still too small to take proper care of herself and is reliant on adult care and protection, which turns the mother’s abandonment of her child and her consigning Shadow to her fate into an even more horrific act.

Shadow’s transformation into a ‘wild child’ is reversed when John and the Missus turn into surrogate parents for and take care of the neglected, outcast child. They peel “the stinking rags away”²⁵², which are to be burned, and bathe her, refilling the tub twice to get rid of the encrusted dirt. Afterwards, they remove the thorn and bandage her foot, before “gently rub[bing] warmed castor oil into the crust around her eyes”, “put[ting] calamine lotion onto flea bites” and “petroleum jelly onto the chapped, split lips”²⁵³. They feed her soup and apple slices and ensure not merely her survival but her physical well-being, fostering a speedy recovery and remedying the bodily signs of neglect. When they see that the child’s eyes are “slivers of emerald green” and her hair dries “to a bright red-gold”²⁵⁴, they guess the child’s paternal line and protect her by deliberately keeping Charlie unaware of her existence, not updating his *knowledge-world* (or *K-world*), whilst simultaneously deciding to keep her at Angelfield House. Throughout Shadow’s childhood, they “were her protectors, her guardians”, who “taught her the ways of the house and how to be safe in it”; “[t]hey watched over her”, provided food for her and, “[m]ore than anything else, they loved her”²⁵⁵

249 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 403.

250 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 403–404.

251 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 403–404.

252 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 404.

253 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 404.

254 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 404–405.

255 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 393.

and Shadow loved them in return.²⁵⁶ The latter is implied when she takes on the household duties after the Missus' death and learns how to tend to the topiary garden, the centrepiece of the garden, when John ages, emulating them and conveying the idea of giving something back. Setterfield thus reinforces that choosing or living in a "transnormative family"²⁵⁷ that caters to and satisfies the child's physical and emotional needs is sometimes a better option than the child's biological family, even though both are closely linked and appear to blur in Setterfield's novel.

While Vida Winter provides Margaret (and the reader) with abundant information on her early childhood days once Margaret has unveiled the third sister's existence and identity, information on the rest of her childhood is comparatively sparse. This is due to the fact that Shadow's main position in the story is that of the 'secret/ghost child', who gradually creeps into Vida Winter's narrative and only occasionally takes action. The most notable instance of her taking action revolves around Hester's employment as governess for and the joint experiment on the twins. However, Shadow not only haunts Angelfield House and unbidden guests on a story-internal level, she also haunts the story of the twins, Hester's diary and Vida Winter herself, bridging the gap between past and present and serving as a reminder of a (traumatic) past.

In the story of the twins, Shadow's haunting arguably starts with her arrival at Angelfield House and the gardener and housekeeper's decision to keep her a secret. Despite the fact that Setterfield employs a number of Gothic elements and has Vida Winter tell a "'ghost story'"²⁵⁸, Shadow is not a ghost in the conventional sense. As Margaret finds out later, she is "[t]he child whose very existence was a secret", "[t]he ghost-child"²⁵⁹ whose presence, similar to Tom's in the dreamscape (or *F-universe*) in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, is only known to a select few.²⁶⁰ Like a *poltergeist*, she displaces and sometimes exchanges items, she

256 In contrast to Shadow, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* does not experience the same amount of acceptance and care by Nelly and Joseph.

257 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

258 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 61.

259 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 405.

260 However, one could speculate that Shadow makes her first appearance resembling a ghost in attributing the attack on Mrs Maudsley, which could also have been committed by Adeline, to her, as do Heilmann and Llewellyn. Cf. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 52. When Mrs Maudsley visits the Angelfields and is appalled by the state of utter neglect the house is in, she is hit over the head with a violin when "a slight figure in white" suddenly "ris[es] from the chaise longue". She later describes this figure as "'[a] woman in white'", evoking Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* as an intertext, in which the appearance of Anne Catherick is likened to a ghost when Walter Hartright sees her for the first time at night, clad in white. The connection with ghosts and hauntings is further established by the Missus and John, who claim that Mrs Maudsley "'must have seen a ghost'" and draw

eavesdrops on conversations from the top of library shelves and observes people “from behind curtains and yew trees”²⁶¹. She ‘haunts’ the house “softly”, “[o]n tip toe”²⁶², knows how to move about unseen and where to hide. She has thoroughly explored the house, knows “every creaking board and every squeaky door” and is perceptive of her surroundings, “recogniz[ing] the footfall of every inhabitant of the house”²⁶³. She only appears to those who know of her existence, being simultaneously present and absent, visible and invisible, a state that also reflects her marginal position in the Angelfield family.²⁶⁴

Her ‘ghostly existence’ in the Angelfield household affords her with an uncanny potential, which is realised during the experiment. In this experiment, Hester and Dr Maudsley attempt to coax out what they refer to as “‘the girl in the mist’”²⁶⁵ that Adeline supposedly suppresses in a Jekyll-and-Hyde fashion.²⁶⁶ Seemingly the exact opposite of Adeline, this girl is “interested in her environment and responsive to learning”²⁶⁷, listening to and pretending not to watch Hester’s school-room ‘performance’ of *Jane Eyre*. Since Hester is unaware of the existence of a third child and her *K-world* limited in this respect, she does not know that the experiment is doomed to fail from the start because there exists no such girl inside Adeline. Accordingly, she misreads Adeline’s ‘response’ to and interest in *Jane Eyre* as an instance where Adeline supposedly “‘undermined her

attention to the fact that, according to local superstition, “‘the house is haunted’”. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 120, 123.

261 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 417.

262 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 391.

263 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 392.

264 Her position as secret child is also visually encoded on the cover of the 2007 paperback edition. Where the front cover shows a picture of two identically dressed girls from the waist down, representing the twins Emmeline and Adeline, the back cover shows another girl dressed in a white dress and identical black shoes, which is replicated on the upper part of the spine as well. As Heilmann and Llewellyn maintain, “[i]nitially this might be taken to be one of the girls figured on the front” and “[i]t is only after reading the novel that we realize that the front and back covers perform a similar misdirection as the text does by exhibiting while disguising the third sister”. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 178. That the child on the back is supposed to be Shadow is further suggested by her posture: she is shown from the knees down and the focus is clearly on her feet, one of which she holds askance, expressing a certain discomfort, perhaps even questioning her *raison d’être* on the cover given her liminal position in the Angelfield family and her position as illegitimate child. On the cover as in the story, Shadow is always simultaneously visible and hidden, present and yet not wholly present. Her marginal position in the family and her secret existence arguably echoes Bertha Rochester’s in *Jane Eyre*. The cover illustration in question can be found on the website of the Blackwell’s bookshop: <https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/9780752881676>. Last access: 10 February 2023.

265 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 190.

266 For an analysis of the experiment and its impact on the twins, see the preceding subchapter.

267 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 52.

defences [...] and forgets her show of rejection and defiance’ ”²⁶⁸ when it is in fact Shadow who has temporarily adopted her identity and employs her skills to impersonate her half-sister, eagerly listening to one of her favourite stories.²⁶⁹ Ironically, the rational Hester, who cleans the house and imposes a regime of order and control, is effectively observing nothing and unable to fathom the presence of a third child. She does not realise that it is not “ ‘another Adeline’ ”²⁷⁰ occasionally making her way through the ‘mist’, but another child altogether, who she readily subsumes under Adeline’s identity. As a result, once the enforced physical separation of the twins is accomplished and Adeline safely at Dr Maudsley’s, Hester suffers a shock and nervous breakdown that is induced by Shadow’s unexpected presence. On her way to Dr Maudsley’s, Hester suddenly sees “[t]wo manes of red hair, two pairs of black shoes; one child in the navy poplin that the Missus had put Emmeline in that morning, the other in green”²⁷¹, playing in the fields. Convinced that Adeline must have escaped, “she went to the doctor’s house [...] [a]t a run”, arrives out of breath in a dishevelled state (her “face flushed with exertion, her hair, normally so neat, flying free from its grips”²⁷²), looking like a ‘madwoman’, and enters the surgery without knocking, doing away with politeness and proper social conduct. Upon seeing Adeline in her navy dress in the doctor’s surgery, where she has been under tight adult supervision all morning, Hester fails to find a rational explanation for what she has seen and believes that she “ ‘ha[s] seen a ghost’ ”²⁷³. Shadow’s close physical resemblance to Emmeline and Adeline, which permits regarding her as “the *doppelgänger* of the twins”²⁷⁴, thus undermines and disrupts the experiment. Her uncanny potential is only realised retrospectively once Hester sees Adeline in Dr Maudsley’s surgery and has been reassured by a person of trust that she cannot have been the child the governess has seen outside, leaving her hysterical and doubting her sanity.

During her childhood and while haunting Angelfield, Shadow has assumed knowledge that turns her into an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD, as is evident when she starts mocking Hester for being unable to decipher the clues that point towards her existence. In response to a conversation between Hester and the Missus about the house being haunted, which Shadow is

268 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 189.

269 Heta Pyrhönen suggests that Shadow’s fondness of *Jane Eyre* may derive from the fact that she, like the titular heroine of Brontë’s novel, is “a motherless, unwanted, and neglected child among indifferently hostile relatives”. Heta Pyrhönen. *Bluebeard Gothic*, 149.

270 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 189.

271 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 212.

272 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 213.

273 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 214.

274 Susanne Gruss. “Spectres of the Past.”, 129.

likely to have eavesdropped, she replaces the book Hester was reading with Henry James' horror novella *The Turn of the Screw*, featuring a governess who is likewise coming to an isolated manor house to take care of two children. As it turns out, Hester completely fails to understand the significance of the story, dismissing it as "a rather silly story about a governess and two haunted children" and professing that the author "knows little about children and nothing at all about governesses"²⁷⁵. She neither realises that it confirms the Missus' statement that the house is indeed haunted, nor does she focus on the relevant parts: the ambivalence of whether what the governess claims to have seen is real or imagined, as she does herself when she sees Adeline in the surgery. While Hester believes that one of the twins "has made it a cleverer trick than they can have known", considering the appearance of James' novella on this particular day "a striking coincidence"²⁷⁶, Shadow exchanged the books on purpose and thus outwitted the governess. Shadow's choice of James' novella implies that she is a well-read, intelligent, even cunning child, who delights in mocking Hester, spies on her without ever being found out and outsmarts her at every turn.²⁷⁷

Besides haunting Hester and the story of the twins, Shadow also haunts Vida Winter in the novel's present and functions as an uncomfortable reminder of the past. Like other neo-Victorian writers who have evinced an interest in ghosts, hauntings and the genre of the ghost story, Setterfield reworks and modifies several of the tropes associated with this genre and links ghosts and haunting with the recovery of trauma, another recurring topic in neo-Victorian writing and criticism.²⁷⁸ This connection between haunting and trauma is nowhere more evident than when Vida Winter explains to Margaret that, during her writing career, her "study throng[ed] with characters waiting to be written" and

275 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 380, original emphasis.

276 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 380, original emphasis.

277 Arguably, even Emmeline provides the governess with an unconscious hint through her choice of words. After Shadow has stepped in as a substitute for Adeline and has become Emmeline's playmate, the two seem to spend a considerable amount of time in each other's company, which Emmeline acknowledges in telling Hester "[w]e went to the woods". However, Hester reads "the persistence of the first person plural" in Emmeline's speech as a linguistic peculiarity that may point to the depth of her twinning, making her "resistant to the idea of having a separate identity from that of her sister", or the fact that she may have created an imaginary friend to compensate for her twin's absence, rather than being with another actual person. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 381, 382, original emphasis.

278 In 2010 already, Kate Mitchell maintained that "a great many contemporary historical fictions that return to the Victorian era are preoccupied with images of ghosts and metaphors of haunting, especially positioning the fictional text as medium of the past", stressing the persistence of this trope in neo-Victorian writing. Kate Mitchell. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 35. The sustained neo-Victorian interest in trauma (narratives) is, for instance, reflected in Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's edited collection *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: The Politics of Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering* (2010).

competed for a space in her stories, among them her repressed former self, a girl with “‘[p]ale skin, red hair, a steady, green-eyed gaze’”²⁷⁹ she has ignored for decades though she is responsible for her success as a writer.²⁸⁰ Her childhood/adolescent self has a spectral presence in her mind, reaching out, wanting her – or rather *their* – story to be told. As someone who has supposedly died in “‘the night of the fire as surely as though she had perished in the flames’”²⁸¹ and has been repressed ever since, this child becomes the physical embodiment of the trauma Vida Winter suffered and is inextricably linked with the resurfacing of the past in the present. This “relationship between haunting and trauma”, as Gruss has aptly demonstrated in her reading of John Hardwood’s *The Ghost Writer* (2004) and *The Asylum* (2013) as well as *The Thirteenth Tale*, is a “fruitful [one] for the interpretation of neo-Victoriana”²⁸² and is often linked with the unearthing or recovery of family secrets, in Vida Winter’s case the fire and loss of one twin. Since “trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation”²⁸³, Vida Winter’s “constant fictionalising of her own identity [later in life is] not simply an attempt to perpetuate the glamorously enigmatic reputation of her persona as best-selling author, but also the result of an actual inability to ‘tell the truth’”²⁸⁴. The ‘ghost child’ then contributes to her decision to ‘tell the truth’ by confronting her aged self mentally, reminding her of her presence and the events that took place all these years ago. Remembering, telling and working through trauma eventually allow Vida Winter to die with a ‘clean slate’, having come to terms with the (events in the) past, in her childhood.

Through telling the story, Vida Winter not only ensures that her account is preserved for future generations; she also reclaims her own (childhood) identity eventually. On the night of the fire, after having left Aurelius safely on the doorstep of Mrs Love’s and having returned to the house, Shadow is mistaken for one of the twins and was since known as Adeline March until she went through legal procedures to change her name to ‘Vida Winter’.²⁸⁵ Adeline, in turn, became Emmeline, who died in the inferno, so that “Emmeline’s [death] releases Shadow into life – a legal identity, a name, the right to an inheritance – while sentencing

279 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 129, 130.

280 She implies that this girl is responsible for her successful writing career, because she “‘started a new book five minutes after finishing the last’” to avoid having “‘to look up from my desk’” and “‘meeting her eye’”, which equals confronting her own traumatic past. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 130.

281 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 131.

282 Susanne Gruss. “Spectres of the Past.”, 125.

283 Anne Whitehead. *Trauma Fiction*, 3.

284 Susanne Gruss. “Spectres of the Past.”, 130.

285 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 55, 426–429.

her to permanent emotional purgatory for killing the woman she loved"²⁸⁶. Even though Vida Winter has cast off Adeline's name when she became 'Vida Winter', she arguably only reclaims her identity as Shadow when she tells the story, making Margaret aware of the presence of the secret third child, who stayed invisible for most of her childhood and is now the only one able to pass on the story of the Angelfield family. The idea of a reclamation is further suggested by the physical changes accompanying her storytelling which make her appear more childlike: for instance, when she leaves off her false eye-lashes, "she had the unexpected appearance of a child who had been playing in her mother's make-up box" and "look[s] like a grizzled child"²⁸⁷ once Margaret has cut her hair following her instructions, leaving only occasional white tufts on her scalp.²⁸⁸ The cutting off of her copper hair in particular, which contributed to her close physical resemblance to the twins since it was one of their hallmark features, serves to bring across the idea that she is finally able to let go of her own past. As Heilmann and Llewellyn suggest, "[t]hese stages of naturalization bring about a resurrection of bodily authenticity after a lifetime of impersonation"²⁸⁹ and arguably also a return to her childhood self by acknowledging the ghost child's existence and her place in the story.

Another child whose life has been determined by abandonment and illegitimacy is Aurelius, the son of Emmeline and Ambrose. He belongs to the fourth generation of Angelfields and makes a relatively late appearance in Vida Winter's story, having been born shortly before the fire and still being a baby when the account of past events ends. Even though Margaret encounters Aurelius comparatively early in *The Thirteenth Tale*, the reader gets hardly any information on Aurelius as a child. Notwithstanding, his childhood and adult life have been defined by the events taking place when he was just born and his fate, as the ones in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, has been closely intertwined with those of the preceding generation. Setterfield makes the latter point unambiguously clear in providing Aurelius with an 'inheritance' and Mrs Love's story about the night

286 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 53. At some point during their adolescence, in all likelihood during the experiment, Shadow fell in love with Emmeline and has genuinely loved her ever since. They married symbolically when Emmeline, after finding Shadow hiding in Jane-Eyre fashion in the window seat, "took [...] [her] hand, and slipped something onto [...] [her] finger", which turned out to be a ring. Since Vida Winter never married officially, being referred to as 'Miss Winter' throughout the text, she can be read as queer character, even though this aspect of her identity is not elaborated on. Setterfield's novel thus picks up on another topical concern of neo-Victorianism: the recovery of queer identities, which is a topic that is also at the core of Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* and *Fingersmith*. Diane Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 290.

287 Diane Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 207, 321.

288 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 321.

289 Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism*, 50.

he was found, both of which do not suffice to reconstruct what happened prior to and shortly after his birth. To do so, he needs Margaret as a mediator and the unrecorded information his ‘aunt’ Vida Winter – as a participant in the actual events – possesses to unveil his parentage and make sense of the past. *The Thirteenth Tale* thus reinforces the importance of contemporary witnesses and the transmission of personal history and memory (all of which are constitutive of the *K-world*), suggesting that the past constantly reverberates in and impacts the present.

Among the information Aurelius was given as a boy is Mrs Love’s story, a romanticised tale of his origins in which the child assumes quasi redemptive qualities and which highlights the subjectivity of memory. Internalised and learned by heart by Aurelius, this story reiterates the idea that human lives are connected, as the tale told by Mrs Love starts out as her own, before it becomes “[h]er story, and Aurelius’s and”, as Margaret suggests, “also, perhaps, Emmeline’s”²⁹⁰. Like Vida Winter in “Cinderella’s Child”, Mrs Love employs various fairy-tale tropes, adding to the romanticisation of Aurelius’ origins: the magical number three, the house in the woods and the happy ending all reinforce that the child’s coming into her life was a blessing. The magical number three, which informs many traditional fairy tales such as “Snow White”, “Goldilocks”, “Rumpelstiltskin” and “Cinderella”, functions as a structural device. While the first two times Mrs Love turns a heel, disaster strikes (her husband and her sister die), the third time Aurelius lies “[s]waddled in canvas, mewling like a kitten”²⁹¹, on her porch, reinforcing the proverbial ‘third time’s the charm’. As in George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*, the child appears unexpectedly to enrich and turn around her life after she had “fallen into remembering” and “wasn’t happy”²⁹² for a while, giving her life new direction and meaning. Similar to the story of Shadow’s abandonment, Mrs Love’s story also reworks the idea of the house in the woods from “Hansel and Gretel”, which is, as in Shadow’s tale, not inhabited by a witch, but a caring Mrs Love, who bears a telling name and promptly takes care of Aurelius, catering to his immediate needs.²⁹³ The idea of a romanticisation of Aurelius’ origins is most strongly suggested by its ending. Unlike Shadow’s tale, which appears to stop mid-story, leaving the fate of the child indeterminate, Mrs Love’s ends conventionally and uses the fairy-tale formula “[a]nd we lived

290 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 249.

291 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 253.

292 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 249.

293 As Vida Winter explains, she even supplied the “kindly grandmothers and fairy godmothers in [...] [her] books [...] with her [Mrs Love’s] face” when she observed her as a child/an adolescent, which reinforces Mrs Love’s motherly qualities. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 426.

happily ever after”²⁹⁴, seemingly granting Aurelius what Shadow has never fully been able to achieve. The idea of a ‘happily ever after’ becomes not only an expression of her fondness and appreciation of the child, but may also have served as an attempt to remedy his sense of abandonment, which is so deeply felt that he is still unable to utter the word ‘abandoned’ as a sixty-year-old man in the narrative’s present.²⁹⁵ However, for all its potentially comforting qualities, this story does not provide Aurelius with the pivotal information he requires to find his true identity and uncover his genealogical origins.

In addition to Mrs Love’s story, Aurelius is also provided with more prosaic information on the day of his abandonment in the form of his unusual ‘inheritance’. This ‘inheritance’, which does not consist of traditional heirlooms, is “‘nothing much’” and “[n]ot what people usually mean when they talk about an inheritance”²⁹⁶, as he admits to Margaret, but, nevertheless, material traces of the past that bear the potential to shed light on his origins. Being nothing more than “a pile of discarded junk waiting to be swept into the bin”²⁹⁷ to Margaret and having next to no monetary worth, these items are priceless to Aurelius due to their sentimental value. They include old-fashioned baby clothes, already mended and used before, a page torn from *Jane Eyre*, a pheasant feather, a slip of paper with hardly legible letters, a spoon and a game bag that was, as it turns out, used by his father.²⁹⁸ They seem to have initiated Aurelius’ search for his origins and repeatedly left him frustrated in his attempts to “‘find the thread’”²⁹⁹ that connects them all. For instance, Aurelius believed the page from *Jane Eyre* to contain a secret code when he was a boy, which he tried to decipher using “‘the first letter of every word, the first of every line. Or the second. Then I tried replacing one letter for another’”, overinterpreting the significance of the page and still looking frantically at his boyish attempts, “as though there was still a chance he might see something that had escaped him before”³⁰⁰. The page, which got into the bag due to Shadow’s love of *Jane Eyre* and her anguish at seeing Adeline demolish the books to kindle the fire that destroyed Angelfield House, thus sets him on an altogether false trail. The retrospective interpretation of the items is further aggravated by the fact that they keep changing: they yellow, fade and lose their transient olfactory traces (in this case predominantly the smell of

294 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 253.

295 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 254–255. Mrs Love’s fondness of the child is further evident in the fact that she supplied him with her family name to establish a sense of belonging and legitimise his origins.

296 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 248.

297 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 259.

298 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 259–263.

299 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 259.

300 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 261.

fire), reflecting the inevitable passing of time.³⁰¹ Inextricably linked with personal history and a past Aurelius was too young to remember, these items only reveal their true meaning through Vida Winter's memories, bearing testimony to Aurelius' precarious position after his birth and explaining his abandonment.

As Margaret learns through Vida Winter's story about the events, Shadow had originally intended to assign Aurelius a position similar to her own and turn him into a 'secret child' before he was even born. Having always "envisaged the baby as a difficulty that needed to be resolved", Shadow planned to keep him hidden for a while before passing him off "as the orphan child of a distant member of the family"³⁰², severing any direct family ties but retaining the family relation. This way, she would be able to protect Emmeline, allowing the neighbours "to wonder about his exact parentage"³⁰³ without ever having to reveal the truth. From the start, Aurelius' illegitimacy thus places him between disavowal and belonging, between acknowledgement and the risk of losing respectability within the community. However, Shadow's future plans for Aurelius are thwarted and the events take a different turn.

Shortly after Aurelius was born, his position on the childhood scale changes markedly and he is just in time saved from slipping into the category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD due to Adeline's envy. Unlike Shadow, who finds that she actually loves the baby, not only for Emmeline, but because he is her "flesh and blood"³⁰⁴ as well, Adeline responds with utter hatred to the new-born child. While she could cope with Emmeline's fondness of Shadow and Hester, because "neither of these affections had touched the supremacy of her feeling for Adeline", she is unable to do so with Aurelius, who "usurped all" and immediately becomes "Emmeline's treasure"³⁰⁵. With Emmeline as a loving mother, who even fights back against Adeline's attacks on her child when she never did so before, and Shadow as protector, Aurelius thus briefly had the prospect of leading an 'ideal' childhood. However, perceiving Aurelius as a threat to the special twin bond, Adeline changes his position on the childhood scale by attempting to murder him twice. She does so first by sneaking into the room to suffocate the child with a pillow while Emmeline is fast asleep

301 For instance, the slip of paper with Ambrose's name on it had already been damaged by rain and was hardly legible when Mrs Love found Aurelius. Seeing "'[s]omething like an A at the beginning. And then an S.'" they agree that it must have been Aurelius' name, whose full name Aurelius Alphonse exploits two possibilities of this combination of letters. However, when Margaret looks at the slip of paper several decades later, "the phantom letters that he [Aurelius] could see" remain "invisible to [...] [her] eye" and any traces of ink have vanished completely. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 262.

302 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 416, 415–416.

303 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 416.

304 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 416.

305 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 416, 421.

and then by attempting to incinerate him in the fireplace.³⁰⁶ Shadow's intermediate plans of absconding with Emmeline and the baby, which would mirror the narrative outcome of Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet*, are frustrated and their happy ending denied. Even though she is able to save Aurelius once more and restore him to his original position on the childhood scale by leaving him at Mrs Love's, the attack on his life has broader ramifications, making him both a foundling and an orphan.

These ramifications are still felt in the story's present, in which Aurelius suffers from being deprived of and longing for a family and information on his history, both of which are constitutive of his *W-world*. Not only has he disguised himself as a reporter, requesting the 'truth' from Vida Winter during an interview, which contributed to her decision to tell the story eventually and reflects his level of desperation to obtain information about his past, he also immediately broaches the topics 'family' and 'belonging' during his chance meeting with Margaret in the ruin of Angelfield House. Asking Margaret whether she has a mother, he responds with "[a] curiously intense expression [...] [in] his eyes, a sadness or a longing" upon hearing her affirmation, claiming that he always wanted someone who "'actually belonged to [...] [him]'"³⁰⁷. He even admits that he pretended to have an actual family when he was a child, making up generations of family members to compensate for his lack, and has "'never given up hope'"³⁰⁸ to find his biological mother eventually. As it turns out, Aurelius' presence in the ruin of Angelfield House during their first encounter is no coincidence either; he has been coming to the place since he was a child, convinced that he was born there based on the information Mrs Love supplied him with and perhaps hoping to unearth clues that might help him resolve the question of his parentage or shed light on his birthday, which he, due to being a foundling, does not know either. For decades, he has been "'chasing after [...] [his] story, [...] never quite catching it'"³⁰⁹ and has never been able to actualise his *W-world* of his own accord.

Unlike Shadow, Aurelius belatedly receives a happy ending when Margaret reunites him with his family on the paternal side and updates his *W-world*. Having found out that Ambrose married and had a second child after Aurelius had been born, she tells him that he has a half-sister as well as a young niece and nephew on his actual birthday. The effect on Aurelius is discernible immediately, though it takes him a moment to process the information. Once he does, "a jolt of excitement [...] [brings] his frame to life", "[t]he smile [...] [grows] broad on his

306 Cf. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 416–419.

307 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 155.

308 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 155.

309 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 438–439.

face”³¹⁰ and he is eager to meet them (although he already knows them). With the help of Vida Winter’s story and through her own ‘amateur detective work’, Margaret is thus able to reconnect the family threads, restore Aurelius’ sense of identity by telling him the story of his birth and the traumatic events that followed and arguably also ameliorates the motherly abandonment he must have felt all his life.

Firmly placing both Shadow and Aurelius in the context of illegitimacy and reworking issues such as inheritance and identity, Setterfield stresses her indebtedness to the Victorian sensation novel. She draws on “the wider pre-occupation with the discovery of hidden kinship through illegitimate origins that pervades nineteenth-century literature”³¹¹ and connects, as several Victorian novelists before her, “illegitimacy, secrecy, (buried) memory, inheritance, and identity”, which, as Jessica Cox maintains, are “all key tropes of the sensation novel”³¹², in her depictions of Shadow and Aurelius.³¹³ Even though sensation fiction tends to focus more on adult than child characters, Setterfield’s reworking of these tropes contributes to making *The Thirteenth Tale* a genuine neo-sensation novel and Shadow and Aurelius the direct descendants of characters that can be found in Victorian sensation fiction. Aurelius’ disguising himself as a reporter, Shadow’s impersonation of Adeline, the idea of switched identities, Shadow’s position as a ‘secret child’ and Aurelius’ quest for his identity, family and genealogical roots all rework plots and ideas of Victorian sensational texts, such as Collins’ *The Woman in White*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) and Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), which have inspired much Victorian and neo-Victorian sensation fiction.³¹⁴

9.4. Concluding Remarks

In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Setterfield juxtaposes childhood experiences that cover a broad spectrum. She introduces Charlie and Isabelle as NEGLECTED CHILDREN and suggests that both neglect (in the case of Charlie) and overindulgence (with

310 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 441.

311 Margot Finn, Michael Lobban and Jenny Bourne Taylor. “Introduction: Spurious Issues.”, 3.

312 Jessica Cox. *Victorian Sensation Fiction*, 104.

313 In her statement, Cox refers to Jenny Bourne Taylor’s 2000 article “Nobody’s Secret: Illegitimate Inheritance and the Uncertainties of Memory”, in which she examines works by Christina Rossetti, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in the context of the above-mentioned tropes.

314 In her monograph *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction* (2020), Cox argues that *The Woman in White* constitutes “a key source text” for neo-Victorian writers and returns to Braddon’s and Woods’ novels repeatedly, reinforcing the impact of Victorian sensation fiction on neo-Victorian writing. Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 15.

regard to Isabelle) result in their position as MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILDREN. Setterfield reinforces that too much leeway (Isabelle) and too little adult control and supervision (Charlie) have fostered strong *W-worlds* and underdeveloped *O-worlds*. It seems, at first glance, that Emmeline and Adeline share their parents' double position as DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED and MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILDREN. While this holds true for Adeline, who displays an aggressiveness and proneness to violence like the male members of the family before her, Emmeline's monstrous empowerment appears to be bound to her twin sister's in many cases. Due to Adeline's violent outbursts and physical assaults, which are meekly endured, Emmeline also occupies a more extreme position in the category of the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD. She is unwilling or unable to fight back against Adeline and often seems to be actualising her twin sister's *W-world* to please her when she assumes a monstrous empowerment or has an altogether different motivation for doing so (such as her love of shiny objects when they steal the pram). Unlike her mother Isabelle, who refuses to be placed in this category and to be victimised by Charlie, Emmeline appears to be unable to change her position out of twin love and possibly out of fear of hurting her sister/herself due to their identical outward appearance.³¹⁵ Like Ibbotson in *Journey to the River Sea*, Setterfield stresses that not just parent-child but also child-child interactions can influence a child's position on the childhood scale and in the individual categories for better or, as is the case here, worse and that the positions on the scale are indicative of power relations among children.

With Shadow and Aurelius, Setterfield introduces further perspectives on childhood and fills the positions on the childhood scale not yet occupied by Isabelle, Charlie, Emmeline or Adeline. While Shadow arguably has a position between the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED and the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD when she is abandoned on the premises of Angelfield House as a toddler, she turns into an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD later on. She principally derives her agency and empowerment from her position as secret child, which is contingent upon John and the Missus' complicity and their willingness to care for her. Aurelius has the prospect of leading an 'ideal' childhood at Angelfield House. He is, however, nearly murdered by Adeline and temporarily runs the risk of slipping into the category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD. Due to Shadow's intervention, he survives and is arguably restored to the category of the 'IDEAL(ISED)' CHILD when he is abandoned at Mrs Love's, who takes him in and

315 While Isabelle does not permit to be placed in this category by her brother, she was in this category before: when she was neglected by her father shortly after her birth.

seems to provide him with such a childhood. Still, his immense feeling of loss due to having been abandoned mars his childhood. Throughout *The Thirteenth Tale*, Setterfield thus highlights the importance of good parenting and of the love and affection of both biological and foster parents on the development of the child and in particular on the creation of *O-worlds* that correspond with society's expectations.

Kent's eponymous 90-minute TV adaptation, which has been marketed as "a haunting psychological mystery"³¹⁶, retains the strong focus on childhood, but makes several significant changes on the level of the characters and the plot. Isabelle and Charlie's childhood experiences have been cut from the film and are not elaborated on; they merely feature as adults, having inherited their late parents' estate, who died a "'mysterious, unexplained death'"³¹⁷. Aurelius is just a side character and hardly individualised. His quest for identity, the recovery of his past and the search for his biological mother are not part of the story and his reasons for coming to and camping in the ruin are reduced to his love for the house.³¹⁸ As a toddler, Shadow hardly gets any screen time and her status as secret child of the house has been diminished markedly. Abandoned on the premises of Angelfield House, she is in a state of neglect, but not obviously injured and still well-nourished before she is secretly taken in by the Missus and John. Despite the fact that she is shown eavesdropping on a conversation between Hester and Dr Maudsley later on, evoking the idea of the secret spy, the notions of the secret child and "'the girl in the mist'"³¹⁹, i.e., Shadow impersonating Adeline, have not been picked up. The experiment is merely initiated by Hester's observation that "'certain pairs of twins divide up available emotions and personality traits between them'" and "'that the situation does present a rare opportunity for original research'"³²⁰ rather than an inexplicable temporary shift in Adeline's behaviour and responsiveness to certain stories.

Instead, Kent's reinterpretation concentrates on two aspects with respect to childhood and twinship more specifically: the idea of losing/being separated from a twin and its immediate and long-term repercussions, which feature both in Vida Winter's narration and in memories from Margaret's past, and the notion of the evil twin. In the adaptation, the separation of Adeline and Emmeline occurs in broad daylight and Emmeline witnesses her sister's involuntary departure. As soon as Hester hears the door bell, she locks Emmeline in her upper-floor room, tersely professing that Adeline will be "'back soon'"³²¹. Hearing her

316 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, blurb.

317 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 12:51–12:54.

318 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:11:09–1:11:22.

319 Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 190.

320 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 40:49–40:53, 41:40–41:45.

321 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 42:23.

sister being taken, kicking and screaming, Emmeline runs to the window and pushes against it with her hands – movements that are mirrored by her sister during her frantic attempts to escape from the car – before she begins to cry.³²² This serves to suggest an intimate twin bond between them that has not fully been established before and might strike viewers as fairly inexplicable and unexpected.³²³ In this version, Emmeline misses her twin sister sorely from the start, as is evidenced by her desperate attempts to leave the room. Hearing Emmeline cry out in pain, the Missus unlocks the door and finds that she has been scratching on the door until her fingers bleed, which reflects her level of suffering and externalises her feelings towards the separation, as is further suggested by her appearing to cry all night for her twin sister.³²⁴ In showing “‘the twins [...] missing each other desperately’”³²⁵, as Vida Winter puts it, and repeatedly cutting to the present showing Margaret’s compassionate reaction to the twins’ separation, Kent attempts to foreground the special bond between twins, which even prompts Emmeline to inflict harm upon herself.³²⁶ He raises the viewers’ empathy in making Emmeline, whose bluish-white dress and neatly braided hair arguably visually invoke the innocence paradigm of childhood in Western thought, the twin to display the strongest emotional and physical reaction towards the separation.

This topic is drawn upon again in Margaret’s memories of her twin sister Moira. Unlike in Setterfield’s novel, Margaret has not lost her twin sister shortly after birth during an operation, but in a tragic accident when they were about ten years old. Moira’s death is constructed as an intrusive traumatic memory and Margaret as suffering from survivor’s guilt. The film repeatedly shows the same memory, the one of Moira’s death, revealing more information each time. As it turns out, Moira, who, as it seems, was Margaret’s fraternal twin, had been making up with her for having “‘eaten a bar of chocolate that [...] [Margaret had] been saving’”³²⁷. When she crossed the street upon Margaret’s forgiving “‘[o]h, all right. Come on, then!’”³²⁸, she was hit by a car and, not having survived

322 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 42:41–43:21.

323 For instance, it is suggested that the invention of the twins’ “‘own private language’” is not the result of being twins, i.e., it is not specifically a *twin language*, but of having been neglected. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 16:20–16:23.

324 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 43:44–44:03, 44:34–44:42.

325 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 45:16–45:20.

326 In this reinterpretation, Adeline does not fall into a catatonic state but notices everything that happens around her. She is still more or less responsive and seems to just bide her time at the Maudsleys. In comparison to her sister, she is not shown to suffer much or miss her sister sorely; these ideas are dominantly conveyed through Vida Winter’s voice-over narration.

327 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:08:59–1:09:01.

328 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:09:07–1:09:11.

the accident, was turned into a PREMATURELY DEAD CHILD. It seems that Margaret has never come to terms with the separation, which was amplified by having been accused of being responsible for Moira's death by her own mother all her life, and gradually begins to work through it while listening to the story of Emmeline and Adeline and to Vida Winter's confession that Emmeline was like a twin to her.³²⁹ The importance of the twin bond is underlined by Margaret's identification with them and in her emotional breakdown when she eventually tells Vida Winter her story, admitting to having been 'responsible' for the death of Moira, after having maintained to have no story and no intention to tell her story, which is indicative of a repression.³³⁰ In making Margaret and Moira approximately ten years old when the accident occurs, Kent stresses its traumatic nature, because Margaret is old enough to remember the event, and explores the repercussions of the forced separation of twins into adulthood.

He also picks up on the idea of a polar split among twins by presenting Adeline as the evil, wild twin, responsible for multiple injuries and murders. Adeline's murderous empowerment is arguably already foreshadowed in an alteration of the pram incident. In the adaptation, Emmeline and Adeline kidnap Mary Jameson's baby still lying in its pram to push it down a steep slope.³³¹ While Emmeline at first joins in her sister's excitement and joy, she soon stops laughing and looks worried, seemingly aware of what they just did when the pram is about to hit a bough and tumble over; Adeline, by contrast, continues to laugh and appears to revel in the sight of the baby falling out of the pram, crying.³³² From the start, the twins have a more sinister intention and motivation when they steal the pram. They are not using it as a toy, but endangering the child's life, which Emmeline, as her facial expression suggests, regrets immediately and Adeline enjoys. As in Setterfield's novel, Adeline's aggression is also directed against her twin sister and seemingly used to express her discontent. During one of their lessons, when Emmeline is placidly participating by drawing a picture of "our beautiful Angelfield House"³³³ while Adeline resists, she drives a pencil into Emmeline's calf, making her cry out in pain and is seemingly punishing her for her compliance. She also begins to batter Emmeline upon seeing that she seems to prefer playing cards (when she is calmly and slightly provocatively finishing

329 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:09:34–1:09:36, 1:08:12–1:08:15.

330 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:08:20–1:10:04, 1:06:40–1:06:59.

331 The idea that the twins intended to kidnap the baby is suggested in Vida Winter's voice-over narration. Whilst she refers to this event as "incident of the perambulator" in Setterfield's novel, in which the focus is on the pram, it is "'the day we took Mary Jameson's baby'" in the adaptation. Dianne Setterfield. *The Thirteenth Tale*, 104.; James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 18:05–18:09, my emphasis.

332 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 17:55–18:27.

333 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 34:02–34:05.

her game), rather than joining in Adeline's joy of seeing her twin sister again after their enforced separation. Flying at her, she pulls her hair and hits her multiple times until her nose and lip bleed, as if to beat her into compliance and submission.³³⁴ Altogether, she thus reverts to violence as a means of pleasure (seeing others hurt) and as a means to force her twin sister to bring about an actualisation of her *W-world* by determining their relationship and keeping Emmeline 'in line'.

As an adolescent, she turns into a murderess who is responsible for the deaths of the Missus and John, the ones who took in and ensured the survival of Shadow and must have been something akin to parents throughout her own childhood. Already as a child, "'she was genuinely dangerous'" and "'violence was always her first instinct'"³³⁵, as Vida Winter asserts retrospectively, and it seems that her monstrous empowerment has intensified and turned into a murderous empowerment over the years. Without apparent reason, she callously murders the Missus while she is changing the light bulbs at the staircase.³³⁶ Hitting her with a bough from behind, she makes her tumble over the railing and down to the ground floor before looking, with seeming satisfaction, down at her dead body.³³⁷ Unlike in Setterfield's novel, in which the Missus dies, presumably peacefully, in her sleep, her death is attributed to Adeline, who makes it look like an accident, in the film, where it serves to establish her as a serious threat to Aurelius' life later on. This is further reinforced by stressing that she killed John, who "'was the closest [...] [Shadow] ever had to a real parent'" and whom "'[s]he seemed to think [...] was responsible for taking her away from Emmeline that time'"³³⁸, by tampering with the safety catch on his ladder. During this incident – which is again constructed as an accident –, her murderous intent and psychopathic tendencies are highlighted in showing her watching him fall from a distance, sitting on a swing and enjoying the sight, without the slightest intention of helping him.³³⁹ This is underlined by the use of a low shot of her face, where the camera seems to linger for a moment, to point out her feeling of superiority and triumph. The film makes unmistakably clear that she is a psychopath, who displays neither remorse nor empathy and who has turned Angelfield House into a genuinely dangerous environment for everyone who attempts to prevent her from actualising her *W-world* or threatens her bond with Emmeline.³⁴⁰

334 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 50:33–50:51.

335 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:16:18–1:16:25.

336 It can be speculated that Adeline killed the Missus, who already suffers from dementia at this point, out of fear that she might talk about Charlie's prolonged absence to anyone from the village, which might change the status quo and result in a second separation of the twins.

337 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:16:36–1:16:41.

338 James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:17:30–1:17:36, 1:17:06–1:17:12.

339 Cf. James Kent (dir.). *The Thirteenth Tale*, 1:17:33–1:18:03.

340 Shadow seems to be the obvious exception here. The film does, however, not elaborate on why this is the case.

Overall, Kent's adaptation seems to have replaced the intimacy of the twin bond, at length elaborated on in Setterfield's novel, with a simple good versus evil dichotomy, recycling this well-worn stereotype about twins and taking away much of the complexity of the characters. The film does not provide any indication of twin love and the special bond deriving from it nor build up Adeline's obsession with Emmeline, making several conclusions and (re)actions rather elusive, such as Emmeline's fairly unexpected and intense response towards the separation and temporary loss of her twin sister. It also suggests that Adeline's physical assaults of Emmeline are mere punishments for not complying and actualising Adeline's *W-world* rather than being the result of Emmeline developing a separate identity from her sister's that threatens the relationship and hierarchy between them. It seems that Kent principally picked up on Hester's assumption of a polar split among the twins, reiterating and confirming this idea throughout the film, leaving aside any unexpected twists and turns. Emmeline and Adeline's childhood experiences are thus shown to be determined by this split, which mostly keeps them in the more extreme categories of the childhood scale: Emmeline as both monstrously empowered and victimised child, willing to respond to Hester and lead a different childhood altogether, and Adeline as monstrously and murderously empowered child.

10. Conclusion

Childhood in neo-Victorian fiction for both child and adult readers is an extremely multifaceted and fascinating field. The works selected for discussion – Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), Eva Ibbotson’s *Journey to the River Sea* (2001), Sarah Waters’ *Fingersmith* (2002) and Dianne Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006) – all reinforce the versatility of representations of neo-Victorian children and their childhoods, presenting them alternatively as suffering victims, resilient and plucky adventurers and even as ruthless monsters, capable of tormenting and seriously harming others. Thus, the concept of childhood in the texts cannot be reduced to the legacy of Romantic notions of the child, which continue to inform today’s discourses about childhood and youth. As the preceding chapters have shown, the analysis of fictional children and childhoods also necessarily touches upon a range of other, interrelated topics and tropes, including the family, orphanhood, home, trauma, memory, identity and the natural world – all of which contribute to the particular appeal and allure of the topic in a neo-Victorian context, in which most of these topics are already subject to continuous exploration and receive sustained critical attention.

Among the insights for the two fields of children’s literature and neo-Victorian studies is the childhood scale devised in chapter 4, which provides a first attempt at systematising representations of childhood in neo-Victorian literature by providing a typology of the child in (neo-Victorian) fiction. It is based on the idea of a graded scale using five categories largely defined by power relations and an additional sixth category. The scale permits analysing character dynamics among child characters and invites comparisons of childhoods presented in one and the same text. More importantly, it also offers a point of reference for comparing children from different texts who can be assigned to the same category and will hopefully yield further insights and possibly also reveal recurring patterns or paradigm shifts by future application to other texts and genres.

In the analysis of the four selected texts, the childhood scale has proven its applicability and usefulness. The case studies have shown that most of the child characters can be assigned to more than one category over the course of their

respective stories, which makes it possible to describe a certain dynamic in their character development. Perhaps more importantly, certain clusters and trends are discernible in a comparison of all four texts. The majority of children feature as either abused and/or as monstrously empowered children and can be assigned to the corresponding categories: the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD and the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD. This result ties in with an observation by Adrienne E. Gavin, who claims that “[c]hild characters’ experience of victimization and violence (whether the child is recipient or perpetrator) is [...] a sustained element in writing the child”¹, and neo-Victorian fiction is no exception in this regard. Both categories arguably evoke a similar reader response: shock and consternation at what children are exposed to and have to endure or what they are capable of doing. The former reinforces childhood innocence and the need of protection, the latter questions and challenges these very assumptions, stressing that the contemporary (fictional) child is a highly ambivalent figure.

Child characters featuring as monstrously empowered perpetrators frequently contest and undermine to varying extents the innocence paradigm at the core of Western conceptions of childhood. Clovis King and Beatrice and Gwendolyn Carter in *Journey to the River Sea*, Maud Lilly in *Fingersmith* and Isabelle and Charlie Angelfield as well as Emmeline and Adeline March in *The Thirteenth Tale* have all moved beyond childhood innocence in different ways, contradicting prevailing assumptions about a child’s supposedly innate innocence and vulnerability. Often implying that nurture (and not nature) is responsible for the children’s actions, these texts tend to criticise parenting strategies (or the lack thereof) and the utter neglect of children, the latter of which is especially pronounced in *The Thirteenth Tale*. In neo-Victorian children’s fiction, child characters displaying monstrous forms of agency are often also the characters not meant to emulate, but to dislike, and frequently take on the role of the antagonists, such as Beatrice and Gwendolyn. The child’s position on the childhood scale thus may also give some indication as to the child’s function (hero or villain) in the story. By contrast, representations of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD and the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD highlight that children were in need of protection, from siblings, peers, relatives, parents and other non-family members and still are so today. The family home in particular, which was a highly idealised place in the Victorian era, often turned out to be the place where such abuse takes place and where victims and perpetrators alike are hidden from public view: Angelfield House, Briar, Westwood and the Carters’ bungalow constitute places where child abuse occurs, ranging from repeated beatings and

1 Adrienne E. Gavin. “The Child in British Literature.”, 16–17.

child-on-child violence to punishments nearly costing the child character's life, as the ice house incident in *Fingersmith* implies. In this context, the (un)intentional endangering of children's lives constitutes a recurring topic as well, as not only Maud, but Maia and Aurelius too almost die in their respective stories due to wilful neglect and a simultaneous materialistic preference of collector items (Maia) or an ingrained twin sibling rivalry resulting in various murder attempts (Aurelius). These instances highlight the precarious positions of these fictional children who nearly die at the hands of servants (Maud), foster parents (Maia) and aunts (Aurelius), i. e., adults in close proximity to or even part of the child's biological family.

Notably, in the texts under scrutiny, the majority of children experience physical rather than sexual abuse, as can be seen with child characters such as Maia, Clovis, Maud, Charles, Charlie and Emmeline. Arguably, Shadow's neglect borders on physical abuse, and the forced separation of the Angelfield twins can also be read in this light. While this focus on physical abuse picks up on representations of children in Victorian fiction, the seemingly near exclusive focus on physical abuse is also surprising insofar as child sexual abuse is a recurring topic in much neo-Victorian adult writing.² This is evidenced by novels such as Linda Holeman's *The Linnet Bird* (2004), Peter Behrens' *The Law of Dreams* (2006), Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* (2009), Anthony Horowitz's *The House of Silk* (2011) and Rose Tremain's *Lily: A Tale of Revenge* (2021). The fact that hardly any children examined in this book can be assigned to the category of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD for having been sexually abused thus derives from the selection of a small corpus of texts and not from a lack of representation in neo-Victorian fiction.

In some cases, fictional children turn out to be victims and perpetrators within the same story. Emmeline in *The Thirteenth Tale*, Maud in *Fingersmith* and Clovis in *Journey to the River Sea* all highlight the fine line separating a monstrous empowerment and the utter lack of power. Often, both categories follow in succession, either from victimisation to a monstrous empowerment, as in Clovis' case, or vice versa, as in Maud's. However, sometimes these states can also exist more or less simultaneously as is the case in Setterfield's narrative, in which Emmeline and Adeline commit monstrous deeds together, while Emmeline is also physically abused by her twin sister on a regular basis. Through the prominence of the SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILD, the DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD and the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD, possible childhood nostalgia or nostalgia for the Victorian period are cut short. This is further suggested by the fact that hardly any child can be assigned to the category of the

2 Cf. Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 135.

‘IDEAL(ISED)’ CHILD. While Sue in *Fingersmith* perceives her childhood and the ‘loving care’ she receives from Mrs Sucksby as such, Maia in *Journey to the River Sea* initially has the prospect of but cannot attain such a childhood at the Carters. Only three child characters can arguably – at some point – be assigned to this category: Aurelius in *The Thirteenth Tale*, though Setterfield hardly provides information on his childhood days under Mrs Love’s care, Finn in *Journey to the River Sea* prior to his father’s death, on which Ibbotson likewise barely elaborates, and Clovis in *Journey to the River Sea*. Clovis is a particularly interesting case in this respect, as he can only achieve an ‘ideal’ childhood in the end by simultaneously occupying the category of the MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILD: he uses identity theft and lying as means to attain an ‘ideal’ and carefree childhood.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, two of the working-class child characters, Charles and Clovis, are victimised and abused by adults, echoing prevalent assumptions about Victorian working-class children. While Charles is regularly punished at the hands of Mr Way, who belts and beats him severely, and only barely better his position after running away to find Gentleman, Clovis suffers various forms of abuse as part of the Pilgrim Players before he eventually assumes a monstrous empowerment, ameliorating his situation significantly by traversing social class boundaries. Remarkably, he is unable to improve his situation on his own accord and needs the help of other child characters to return to England and live a life not originally his. A notable exception in this context is Sue, who, being born an upper-class child, grows up in a criminal working-class environment and lives a working-class childhood. Unlike Charles and Clovis, she does not experience severe forms of abuse in the house on Lant Street due to the extreme value she holds for Mrs Sucksby. However, given the treatment of John and the other farm infants, she would have been likely to also have experienced violence and abuse if she was just a regular farm or working-class child.

Tom’s Midnight Garden, the earliest example discussed in this study, is the text in which the least movement on the childhood scale occurs. In Pearce’s story, Tom dominantly is an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD, whose agency derives not least from his special position in the fantasy textual actual world (or FTAW), where he can only be seen by one adult, a secondary character, and is thus no longer under tight adult supervision. Similarly, in his textual actual world (or TAW), he only *perceives* himself to be a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD but strictly speaking he does not belong into this category. Hatty, by contrast, remains essentially a DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILD, though she temporarily attempts to claim agency and turn into an EMPOWERED, EXCEPTIONAL, HEROIC AND/OR AGENTIC CHILD, from which she is prevented by adult supervision and intervention. This fairly static

image of predominantly two categories might have to do with Pearce's aim of juxtaposing Tom's and Hatty's childhoods, highlighting that Tom, in the 1950s, enjoys much more freedom than Hatty in the late Victorian era.

Besides highlighting the merits of the childhood scale, this book has established a connection between neo-Victorian studies and possible-worlds theory (PWT) by focusing on the story-internal application of PWT to neo-Victorian texts and in particular an examination of the child characters' private worlds: their *wish-* (*W-*), *obligation-* (*O-*) and *knowledge-* (*K-*) *worlds*. While *W-worlds* revolve around a child character's wishes, ranging from going to a river to getting hold of a huge sum of reward money, *O-worlds* are predominantly determined by the adults around the child figure and contain prohibitions. They are also indicative of the child's moral compass and conscience, adding an ethical perspective to the text, or else, of their moral depravity, which was often fostered by the familial environment, as the discussions of *Journey to the River Sea*, *Fingersmith* and *The Thirteenth Tale* suggest. By contrast, the *K-world* gives some indication of the child's degree of ignorance, even innocence regarding certain topics, e.g., Maud's presumed knowledge about the books in her uncle's library, and may, as Sue's childhood days in the household on Lant Street imply, also be kept at a certain level to manipulate the child so as to keep him/her/them in intentional ignorance.

PWT has further been employed to explain the children's actual, attempted or perceived positions on the childhood scale. The interplay between the characters' *W-*, *O-* and *K-worlds* and the actualisation of certain and the non-actualisation of other worlds helped determine why they can be assigned to a specific category. PWT further provided the terminological framework for the analysis of adult-child and child-child interactions, highlighting that the actualisation of one character's world may result in the dissatisfaction of another character's world and lead to a series of actions and reactions, propelling the plot forwards (e.g., when two child characters attempt to actualise diametrically opposed *W-worlds*, as is the case in *Journey to the River Sea*). The actualisation of a child's *W-world* is frequently connected with a transgression of boundaries, because the actualisation of a *W-world* sometimes stands in conflict with the child's *O-world*, for instance when Hatty goes to the river without permission in *Tom's Midnight Garden* or when Maia enters the rainforest to make her way to Manaus in *Journey to the River Sea* even though she was supposed to stay at the bungalow.

PWT has also proven extremely useful in another regard, namely in the analysis of time-slip stories, a genre to which many neo-Victorian children's stories belong. In these stories, a *fantasy-universe* (or *F-universe*), frequently the Victorian past, is created and accessible to one or more child characters. The terms employed by PWT can hence be used to describe the relationship between the past (FTAW) and the story's present (TAW). In this context, the accessibility

relations devised by Marie-Laure Ryan are an apt means for describing the proximity or distance between both worlds. Their proximity or distance is based on the number of accessibility relations that remain intact when a character recentres to the world at the centre of the *F-universe*. This number thereby reflects the degree to which the time-shifting character has to adjust his/her/their frame of reference. To employ PWT in the analysis of neo-Victorian time-slip stories, an additional accessibility relation ‘J/temporal continuity’ was devised, which takes the temporal compatibility between worlds into account. Time-slip stories usually break this accessibility relation on a story-internal level by bridging the gap between past and present and thereby give room to elaborate on the temporal make-up of the FTAW, in which events do not necessarily have to follow in chronological succession.

Though both *Tom’s Midnight Garden* and *The Thirteenth Tale* recreate the Victorian past in the form of an *F-universe*, only the former links time slip to an exploration of childhood experience by allowing its male protagonist to physically recentre and *experience* the Victorian past. In this text, the FTAW Tom enters repeatedly is created through the memories and dreams of the Kitsons’ old landlady Mrs Bartholomew. The world at the centre of the *F-universe* hence is not a chronologically coherent world and makes Tom question the linear progress of time. Moreover, his visits usually do not connect to those of his previous visit but are jumps in time during which his playmate Hatty grows older and leaves her childhood days behind while he stays a child, which is used to elaborate on one of the core topics in this text: the ephemerality of childhood.

Since neo-Victorian fiction is an inherently intertextual genre, the relationship between neo-Victorian literature and Victorian source texts is also pertinent to the analysis of children and childhood in neo-Victorian fiction. All of the four novels employ Victorian narratives as source texts, often embracing and acknowledging them openly and thus drawing the readers’ attention to these earlier texts, as is the case in *Journey to the River Sea* and *Fingersmith*, which actually mention Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838) respectively. Sometimes novels also refer to other texts implicitly, establishing connections only readers familiar with the source texts will detect. Cases in point include the strong intertextual presence of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in the childhood experiences of and relationship between Isabelle and Charlie Angelfield in *The Thirteenth Tale* or the titular garden in Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) in descriptions of Finn’s lagoon in *Journey to the River Sea*. Cox’s observation regarding Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1860) can hence be applied to neo-Victorian fiction more generally: in drawing on Victorian texts as source texts, “contemporary [neo-Victorian] works both introduce and revisit narrative tropes and motifs, and in doing so enact a process of simultaneous returning and reimagining. This

process is central to constructions and conceptions of the relationship between contemporary literature and culture and the Victorian past”³. Those neo-Victorian texts centring on childhood experience thus revisit, reimagine and often challenge the images of childhood projected by Victorian source material and offer a neo-Victorian critique, especially where innately good and seemingly incorruptible Victorian children, such as Cedric Errol and Oliver Twist, are concerned.

Neo-Victorian narratives about childhood principally draw on source texts in which childhood experience is prominent, such as *Oliver Twist* (*Fingersmith*), *Jane Eyre* (all four novels), *Wuthering Heights* (*The Thirteenth Tale*), *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (*Journey to the River Sea*) and *The Secret Garden* (*Tom’s Midnight Garden* and *Journey to the River Sea*) amongst others. They frequently refer to Victorian texts that have attained the status of ‘classics’ by now and with which present-day readers are likely to be familiar. In texts for children, they are, it seems, more often also referred to by title, extending the child reader’s intertextual network and potentially making them aware of and curious about these other, previous texts. Often, in novels referencing a specific intertext, neo-Victorian child characters turn out to be more complex than their Victorian predecessors, as Clovis King and Charles Way have shown, and/or address topics that have usually been firmly excluded from Victorian texts, such as sexual abuse, which can arguably be found in *Fingersmith*. Each of the four novels establishes a web of intertextual relations, adding to the appeal of these neo-Victorian texts and the intricacy of the images of childhood projected by them.

Unlike other relevant, even foundational contributions in this field, this study juxtaposes narrative texts directed at child and grown-up readers to highlight significant departures regarding their depiction of childhood, but also notable continuities, which are particularly evident in a set of recurring themes and motifs. This set reflects the creative engagement with Victorian literary texts and notions of childhood, on the one hand, and contemporary attitudes towards and anxieties regarding children and childhood as well as dominant neo-Victorian concerns, on the other.

All four texts present the childhood experiences of one or more characters as traumatising experiences that still affect and impact the lives of the adult characters. In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Vida Winter recounts her traumatic childhood experiences and works through repressed traumatic memories by means of storytelling. Her repressed former childhood self, Shadow, eventually prompts her to tell the story of the Angelfields, including her own, before her death. In *Fingersmith*, Maud’s childhood was marred by physical and, more importantly, psychological sexual abuse, both of which arguably have traumatising qualities.

3 Jessica Cox. *Neo-Victorianism and Sensation Fiction*, 32.

As a result of what she had to endure at the hands of the servants and her uncle, she has a strained relationship with innocence in her adolescent years. In *Journey to the River Sea*, information on traumatic experiences is only given second-hand and centres on Finn's father's childhood experiences in Westwood. Although his childhood is only recounted briefly by Finn, these fragments and the nightmares that haunted Bernard in his adult years point towards their traumatic nature. To some lesser degree, childhood trauma is also addressed in *Tom's Midnight Garden*. After Hatty was scolded for letting the geese into the garden, her adult self dreams about an even more painful childhood episode (one of the days following her parents' death), implying that the scolding triggers an affective response and recalls an experience that is still influencing her deeply. All of my examples thus revisit "[t]he prevalent neo-Victorian trope of childhood trauma", which often "serve[s] to foreshadow protagonists' later suffering and explain, if not necessarily vindicate, their subsequent often violent or criminal actions – whether as children or adults – as a form of retaliation or symbolic justice not otherwise attainable"⁴. They also all underline the unjust suffering of the young that is frequently linked with emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse or triggered by such abuse.

Likewise, they all feature childhood experiences that are recounted from memory and frequently highlight the formative aspects of childhood, drawing on the Wordsworthian notion that "The Child is Father of the Man"⁵ or woman. Hatty in *Tom's Midnight Garden* dreams about her childhood days and permits Tom to enter these dreams, making the Victorian past an immersive experience for him. Re-experiencing her childhood days in the dreamscape even suggests that she lives through another, second childhood in memory and wins a friend she did not have before. In *Journey to the River Sea*, the memories of his father's harrowing childhood experiences in Westwood contribute substantially to Finn's decision to stay and hide in the Amazon rainforest. It is arguably a form of 'intergenerational memory', where the memories of the childhood experiences of the father determine the actions of his son, who aims at running away from his legacy as heir to Westwood at all cost.⁶ Maud and Sue in *Fingersmith* both retrospectively recount their childhood experiences, including the alleged stories

4 Marie-Luise Kohlke. "Neo-Victorian Childhoods.", 127, 121.

5 William Wordsworth. "'My heart leaps up when I behold'.", 246, l. 7.

6 In her *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), Kate Mitchell explores another form of 'intergenerational memory' – a term that is only used in her index – in her analyses of Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* (2004) and Helen Humphreys' *Afterimage* (2001): "embodied memory, or corporeal history", in which body and memory are linked. In this context, 'intergenerational memory' finds expression in "the unconscious repetition of various bodily actions and gestures across generations". Kate Mitchell. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, 160, 162.

surrounding their birth, and how they impact their actions as adolescents. In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Vida Winter tells the story of three generations of Angelfields and explains how repressing her former childhood self has contributed to her highly successful career as a writer. All characters are, to different degrees, affected in positive or negative ways by their experiences as children. The idea of telling childhood memories via dreams (as in *Tom's Midnight Garden*) or through storytelling (as in *The Thirteenth Tale*) also introduces the notion of passing on these stories, keeping them alive and preserving them from falling into oblivion. For instance, Vida Winter is the only one left to tell the story of the Angelfield family and has the ability to restore Aurelius' fractured sense of identity when no one else can and the interpretation of material remnants connected with his birth and subsequent abandonment falls short.

Fingersmith and *The Thirteenth Tale* not only address childhood abuse as a topic, but, moreover, present children as victims of (perverted) adult desires. Maud becomes such a victim when she is employed in her uncle's library, who arguably swears her into secrecy like a paedophile, and forces her to aid him in cataloguing his index of pornographic texts at the age of thirteen. She also has to read from his obscene books to her uncle and his guests in private book readings, who seem to enjoy and derive pleasure from Maud's simultaneous embodiment of innocence and experience. In a somewhat similar vein, Isabelle Angelfield becomes the object of her own father's desires, who seems to use his daughter as a substitute for his late wife. This is not least suggested by her treatment as a toddler and by the strand of matted hair he winds tightly around his ring finger like a wedding band which eventually causes his death. Both examples confirm an observation by James Kincaid, namely that, "[b]y insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism"⁷, which is arguably discernible in these relationships.

Picking up on Victorian (medical) discourses about twins and twinship, two texts also introduce identical twins among their child character cast. In *Journey to the River Sea*, Beatrice and Gwendolyn are identical twins with a clear hierarchy among them. Their actions, especially those revolving around the reward money, contradict the Western innocence paradigm they initially evoke through their angelic outward appearance and their dress. Their main function in the story is that of antagonists, literally doubling the amount of suffering Maia has to endure at their hands. By contrast, *The Thirteenth Tale* draws more strongly on the Victorian medical context of twinship, subjecting Emmeline and Adeline to an experiment that is undertaken by their governess Hester and Doctor Maudsley and separates them for an indefinite amount of time. Similar to Beatrice and

7 James R. Kincaid. *Child-Loving*, 4–5.

Gwendolyn, Emmeline and Adeline are presented as MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILDREN, whose actions are widely governed by their pronounced *W-worlds*, which are a result of their twoness and the lack of parental intervention. Yet, unlike Ibbotson's text, Setterfield's novel places a distinct focus on the complementarity of the Angelfield twins, making Adeline the wild and violent twin and Emmeline the docile and submissive one, which implies that Emmeline's monstrous empowerment may also result from their intimate twin bond and her subordinate position in the twin hierarchy. In their portrayals of Beatrice and Gwendolyn and Emmeline and Adeline, Ibbotson and Setterfield draw on a number of popular beliefs about twins, presenting them as eerily close and seemingly dependent on one another, usually following and imitating each other, and as living in a world of their own. Due to being directed at an adult readership, Setterfield's use of the twin motif is much more sophisticated than Ibbotson's; it is an altogether darker depiction with a strong psychological bent.

Fingermith and *The Thirteenth Tale* also explore Victorian society's attitudes to and stigmatisation of illegitimacy. In Waters' text, this concern is introduced on the first pages already and inseparably intertwined with Mrs Sucksby's baby farm on Lant Street, who 'cares' for a number of unwanted, illegitimate children, abandoned by their mothers. It also in part initiates the changeling plot surrounding Maud and Sue, who are given false accounts of their maternal lineages. In Setterfield's narrative, illegitimacy determines both Shadow's and Aurelius' childhoods to a similar extent: Shadow is the product of rape and was abandoned by her mother on the premises of her rapist. Due to the unwillingness of her two guardians, John-the-dig and the Missus, to inform Charlie about his illegitimate daughter, she becomes a 'haunting presence' in the Angelfield household. Aurelius is another illegitimate and abandoned child in Setterfield's narrative. Shortly after his birth, he was almost murdered and left on the doorstep of Mrs Love, who becomes a surrogate mother for him but cannot restore his identity. His sense of identity and belonging is eventually restored by Margaret (and indirectly also Vida Winter), who informs him about his parents and the day he was born. In both narratives, illegitimacy affects the characters' lives significantly and is linked with identity politics and the characters' sense of self and their past.

As in much Victorian fiction, the neo-Victorian texts selected for this study are also densely populated by orphan characters. While some of them are in quasi-orphan states, such as Tom, Emmeline and Adeline, due to the temporary absence of their parents or their parents' continuous lack of interest in their offspring, others are in an actual orphan state due to being illegitimate abandoned children, such as Shadow and Aurelius, who are not or only partly aware of the identity of their parents. However, the majority of child characters are orphans because one or both of their parents have died, including Hatty in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Maia, Finn and Clovis in *Journey to the River Sea*, Sue and Maud in

Fingersmith and Isabelle and Charlie in *The Thirteenth Tale*. These fictional orphaned children are usually provided with a “transnormative family”⁸, either in the form of relatives taking them in (Hatty, Maia and Maud) or by finding alternative families not related by blood (Shadow, Aurelius, Sue, Finn and Clovis). The host of orphans in these four texts clearly reflect the Victorians’ concern with and anxieties revolving around the astonishing number of orphan children both in fiction and reality. As in many Victorian fictional texts, the orphan figure evokes an affective reader response, dominantly one of pity and compassion, which may or may not be revised on the basis of these child characters’ actions at a later point in their stories.

In all of the texts, families were mostly presented as dysfunctional, and the family environment most often as dangerous, even detrimental to childhood experience. Hatty in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* dwells at the margins of the Melbourne family and is frequently excluded from the childhood play of her cousins. She is also disliked by her aunt and emotionally neglected. Her childhood dreams suggest that while she was not provided with a loving and caring family environment, her childhood home was a safe and still a comparatively pleasant one. In *Journey to the River Sea*, the Carter family is a dysfunctional family, where each family member is more concerned with himself/herself/themselves and caters to his/her/their own needs. Their bungalow is the place where Maia experiences physical abuse at the hands of Beatrice and Gwendolyn and where she is neglected in various respects by Mr and Mrs Carter. Westwood, as it is presented in the fragments of Bernard’s memories, is the ultimate place of childhood abuse and harrowing childhood experiences in this text. It is the place where Bernard experienced physical abuse at the hand of his siblings, for instance when he was shut in a chest for a prolonged amount of time, and at the hands of his father, who beat him on a regular basis because he did not conform to the family expectations. An even more dangerous and abusive family home can be found in *Fingersmith*. At Briar, Maud is not provided with a family environment but confronted with a place where the young girl is made to conform to her uncle’s wishes through a series of abusive punishments nearly costing Maud’s life and exposed to a quantity of pornographic material. In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Angel-field House is likewise a place where family relationships are widely dysfunctional. It is an environment giving rise to obsessive, even fatal relationships, such as the ones between George and Mathilde, George and Isabelle, Charlie and Isabelle and Adeline and Emmeline. It is also the place where children experience parental neglect and develop a monstrous empowerment. All texts reinforce that child abuse, be it emotional, physical and/or sexual, and abusive family envi-

8 Elizabeth Thiel. *The Fantasy of Family*, 8.

ronments are not endemic to a particular social class and continue to be present-day concerns as well.

As many other (neo-Victorian) texts for young readers, *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *Journey to the River Sea* elaborate on the significance of (interactions with) the natural world. This has not least to do with the prevailing connection between the child and the natural environment, as popularised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the fact that many first Golden Age children's texts continued to establish and strengthen this connection. In her novel, Pearce draws on the conventional image of a garden as a place of childhood play, which is used to establish a contrast between Hatty's past in the late Victorian era and Tom's modernised present in the 1950s, in which the lush and rambling garden has vanished altogether. The titular garden has a range of meanings for the two child characters as a place of freedom (Tom), of friendship and play (Tom and Hatty), and, more ambiguously, of punishment, adult supervision and control as well as of grief and loneliness (Hatty). In contrast to *Tom's Midnight Garden*, *Journey to the River Sea* presents a more innovative take on natural environments by setting most of the story in the Amazon rainforest. Even though Ibbotson's text presents very different, even contradictory responses to the rainforest, her text endorses and encourages contact with the natural surroundings. In Ibbotson's story, Beatrice and Gwendolyn are the only young characters to shun the natural environment and refuse any contact with it. All other children engage to different degrees with their natural surroundings. While Clovis is hesitant in making contact with the natural world and is easily frightened, Maia and Finn embrace the natural surroundings wholeheartedly. Maia is fascinated with the Amazon and what this place has to offer from the start, and Finn can even be regarded as a Rousseauian 'child in nature'. Notably, both texts establish a connection with and rework Burnett's 'classic' *The Secret Garden* in which the natural world – represented dominantly by the titular hidden garden – is one of the novel's most important settings for the child characters' mental and physical healing processes. Though flora and fauna overall play a subordinate role in the two neo-Victorian texts for adults, they are not eclipsed entirely. For instance, Setterfield's novel arguably imagines another 'child in nature': Shadow not only quite literally lives in the garden after she has been abandoned by her mother, occupying the garden shed and living on strawberries, she also later on works in the garden and even comes to take care of the topiary garden once John is prevented from doing so on his own due to old age. By comparison to the two children's novels, this topic is merely touched upon in passing in Setterfield's text.

As this set of recurring themes and motifs indicates, neo-Victorian novels not just revisit Victorian source texts for inspiration but critically engage with, re-imagine and usually rework the material they draw on. They also provide an additional ground for the comparison of child characters from different neo-

Victorian texts, as there often seems to be a correlation between the position of a child character on the childhood scale and the topics addressed in this text. For instance, the two pairs of twins display a disregard for their natural surroundings and turn into MONSTROUSLY EMPOWERED AND/OR MURDEROUS CHILDREN in their respective stories. Similarly, texts addressing trauma and dysfunctional family environments often feature SEXUALLY ABUSED AND/OR MURDERED CHILDREN OR DISEMPOWERED, EXPLOITED, ABUSED, PUNISHED AND/OR NEGLECTED CHILDREN.

The juxtaposition of childhood experience in neo-Victorian novels for child and adult readers reinforces the heterogeneity of representations of childhood for each target group. Like their counterparts in the examples of adult literature, the child characters in the children's texts occupy almost all categories on the childhood scale, albeit with certain thematic limitations. Somewhat unsurprisingly, these limitations revolve around the topic of sexual abuse, which (along with sexuality more generally) is usually eclipsed from texts for children. Nevertheless, as the recurring themes and motifs imply, the children's texts under scrutiny exemplify a remarkable range of neo-Victorian concerns, hence lending themselves for a comparative analysis, and sometimes even elaborate on different ones, as is the case with the strong focus on the natural environment. In other words, they are as implicated in the neo-Victorian endeavour of recuperating marginalised voices as those texts directed at adult readers and may present the same or similar topics in a different light and from a new perspective. Neo-Victorian children's literature hence should be cherished for providing alternative takes and perspectives on the reimagined Victorian past – and for providing new generations with images of the Victorian period.

This study has hopefully provided new insights, opened up new avenues for research, reinforced the relevance of case studies and supplied innovative means and ideas for the analysis of representations of childhood in neo-Victorian fiction, even if only a small selection of novels was discussed in detail. Like the foundational work that has already been done, this book, it is hoped, will also encourage and inspire academics to further explore the wealth of neo-Victorian texts about children and childhood that are already available, but have not yet received due critical attention, and new texts, which will be published in the years ahead and in which the lives of Victorian children continue to be explored, revisited and reimagined for readers of all ages.

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