



## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Children's Neo-Romanticism: The Archaeological Imagination in British Post-War Children's Fantasy

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**Children's Neo-Romanticism:  
The Archaeological Imagination in British  
Post-War Children's Fantasy**

by

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of PhD*

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## Abstract

The focus of this study is a trend in British children's literature concerning the ancientness of British landscape, with what I argue is a Neo-Romantic sensibility. Neo-Romanticism is marked by highly subjective viewpoints on the countryside, and I argue that it illuminates our understanding of post-war children's literature, particularly in what is often called its Second Golden Age. Through discussion of four generally overlooked authors, each of importance to this formative publishing era, I aim to explore certain aspects of the Second Golden Age children's literature establishment. I argue that the trend I critique is characterised by ambiguity, defined by the imaginative practice entailed in the archaeological view.

This study opens with some contextual discussion of canonicity and archaeological themes in children's literature, and outlines my methodology. In Chapter One, I argue for Children's Neo-Romanticism as a sensibility which highlights personal engagement with place as an experience of intersubjectivity. I progress to a series of single-author chapters moving from the start of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s.

Chapter Two's focus considers how Sheena Porter's novels associate the archaeological imagination with issues of identity and illuminate the internal debates of the children's literature establishment. Chapter Three looks at William Mayne's approach to the same themes in the 1960s and 70s, and the growing agency of his protagonists. Agency is a major theme of Chapter Four, which considers the literary devices and genre markers of John Gordon's novels. In Chapter Five, I consider the shifting perception of archaeological features in popular culture in relation to Judy Allen's eco-fantasies. In Chapter Five, I propose the legacy of Children's Neo-

Romanticism in a contemporary author, Catherine Fisher, who brings her own experience as an archaeologist to her novels of place, myth and self.

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## Introduction

“Wait on,” said David. “I can see with the eyes of a stone, and think with its thoughts, and feel with its layers and strata, and I just stand whilst the world rushes by like a wind. I think the wind is time. And then time stops and I can get out of where I’m standing, and I’m a person again.” (*Earthfasts*, 121)

David Wix, in William Mayne’s 1966 novel, is trying to explain to his friend Keith Heseltine how he imagines it feels to be a stone in a henge monument. After gazing into a candle flame, David has visions of things Keith cannot see, and seems to be verging on some greater insight into different ideas of temporality and his sense of self. The landscape of the Yorkshire dales is the setting for this sense of insight, but, in its alterity to human subjectivity, it is also the impetus for his reverie as well as the basis of the discourse in which he attempts to express it. It is, for David, a fantastic, heightened experience of the archaeological imagination, particularly in terms of geological time. In *A Land* (1951), the archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes presents the slow physical formation of the British Isles as an imaginative exercise, looking into the thicket of “forms and ... the irresistible power of change” in which “all the great secrets are hidden somewhere ..., those of ethics and aesthetics” (10). The idea that contact with the natural world is an essential experience of childhood is a tenet of Romanticism constantly reiterated in the Golden Age of children’s literature (in pastoralist fantasies such as *Puck of Pook’s Hill*, 1906, and *The Secret*

*Garden*, 1911). As I will argue, the Second Golden Age (as it has for a long time been referred to) is infused by a more nuanced theory of archaeological imagination. It is the theory that deeper understanding of consciousness and self can be gained through such engagement with the material landscape, moving through the present moment into other conceptions of time and intersubjectivity. David Wix is experiencing such an engagement, above, and multiple approaches to the idea are explored in a variety of novels by writers who were contemporaries of William Mayne's. That trend in writing is the subject of this study.

As the above dialogue suggests, Mayne's novel works with close fidelity to landscape, rich poetic nuance and some unconventional thematic material, even encompassing an episode of grief, but Mayne was not atypical in the context of his era, and was repeatedly celebrated and commended by the children's literary establishment of his day. In a 1972 article in the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) children's book section, his name was given with those of Sheena Porter, Alan Garner and Penelope Lively as "successful exponents, to a lesser or greater degree, of the 'school'" of writing about "[t]he landscape, with its latent power of movement – earthquake, landslide, historical revelation..." which, the reviewer claimed, "...has been a feature of the best writing for the young for the past decade" (Crouch 1972). Garner and Lively's profiles have maintained a steady popularity in the intervening years, and are introduced in Charles Butler's study of their work as "successful authors of children's fantasy fiction" who "remain influential and popular in the early years of the twenty-first century" (*Four British Fantasists* 1). William Mayne, by contrast, has, understandably, been exiled from children's bookshelves since his conviction in 2004 for child sexual abuse. Perhaps for related reasons, Mayne's work has been given little critical examination either, despite its rich textual complexity

and its importance to our understanding of 1960s and 70s children's book culture overall.

Sheena Porter is another name listed in Marcus Crouch's *TLS* review whose work is unavailable and under-critiqued today. As well as being placed by him among "the best writing for the young of the past decade", her work was extensively reviewed in the *TLS* by a variety of critics (Crouch 1972). She, like Mayne, was awarded the British Library Association Carnegie Medal for an "outstanding book for children", for *Nordy Bank* (1964). Unlike Mayne, there is no clear reason for the non-availability of her work and lack of critical acknowledgement. The most likely one, of course, is simply that her work was too closely associated with a book culture, style and readership that was left in the past, and which had, in fact, never been entirely settled and static. The *TLS* policy of reviewing children's books was, itself, curtailed in the 1990s, and the dedicated children's review section had already been abandoned by then. This study considers the relationship of Mayne and Porter's work, with that of novelists Judy Allen and John Gordon, to the culture and ideals of children's literature professionals (publishers, librarians, critics) in the Second Golden Age of the 1960s and 70s.

Valerie Krips has written of the preoccupation with the past in twentieth-century children's literature. In her reading of Garner and other Second Golden Age writers, the Romantic child figure effectively stabilises cultural memory by providing intuitive responses to historical sites, rehearsing memorialisation amid anxiety over national identity. The stabilisation of place through reiteration of spatial narratives, founding myths and means of physical interaction (whether metonymically, or simply on a local scale) is, as I will detail further, one of the social theorist Michel de Certeau's examples of authority normalising itself in

natural and ‘everyday’ experience. In Krips’ reading, there is some endorsement of Jacqueline Rose’s powerful critique of children’s literature itself as a means of stabilisation: of the child figured as unworldly, unschooled and imaginatively free, emphasising the adult role as a reassuringly fixed product of education and socialisation. Even where the child in the country is not perceived as a conservative or nostalgic image, it may easily be deployed, as in Roni Natov’s *The Poetics of Childhood* (2006), as an icon of redemptive pastoral surety. As I will show, however, the treatment of archaeological themes by certain authors produces narratives of disorientation, confusion and concern for children’s agency.

Such agency is extended to young readers, through narrative or textual ambiguities. Keith, for example, closely observing David’s experience of the sublime, is barred from it: “Shut up and come home,” he tells him, “I don’t like it when you’re acting like this” (Mayne, *Earthfasts* 121). Readers do not only share Keith’s inability to interpret David’s view; they are also invited to see how language itself has no objective relationship to subjective perception. What David calls a butterfly, Keith sees as a line across the landscape, like a crack in a camera lens; against reason, “the dark gr[ows] out of the light” (128). In these novels, I argue for the thematic significance of the archaeological imagination as a mode of interpretative ambiguity, with consequences for perception of the world, societal belonging and narratives of self.

In this introductory chapter, I give the rationale for this study and define the parameters and terms that it employs. I contextualise my study with questions of canonicity and an exploration of archaeological themes in children’s literature, before introducing the five authors featured in upcoming chapters and establishing the critical framework within which they are discussed.

## Aims and Rationale

### *i. Beyond the Children's Literature Canon*

One element of the rationale for this study is an attempt to broaden our understanding of children's publishing history beyond the authors and titles who have, unavoidably, dominated children's reading and critical appreciation in the last fifty years. The question of literary canons is fraught, and from its early days certain children's literature critics, such as Perry Nodelman, were particularly ambivalent about the idea, given the perceived special relationship of book and child reader with informed adult gatekeepers. Equally, librarians and book reviewers were required by such gatekeeper roles to delineate the most appropriate material for young readers, and discussion in a 1978 issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* ended with a return to the idea of canon. In a 1980 response, Nodelman stated that "[d]eveloping a list of important children's books is an undemocratic but praiseworthy endeavour" and whilst not wishing to become "First Church of Children's Literature Triumphant", he offered "A Tentative List of Books Everyone Interested in Children's Literature Should Know", with the qualification that "my list is not meant to be a canon. It is meant to start arguments" ("A Tentative List..." 6). Deborah Stevenson states that the power of children's literature scholarship "to affect the literature it studies is slight compared to the effect of criticism on other contemporary genres" ("Sentiment and Significance" 114), yet the nature of the children's literature establishment in its early years, when the character of modern children's literature was particularly plastic, created a closer and more equitable

relationship between critics and producers than exists now. The nuances of this relationship will be explored in this thesis with the aim of understanding some of the ideological presuppositions of the era. The majority of canons, touchstones, bestsellers and prize-winners of the 1960s and 70s have endured into the modern day both for young readers and children's literature scholars: Garner's work and Susan Cooper's 'Dark is Rising' sequence (1965-77) are both present on Nodelman's 1980 list, as is Philippa Pearce's novel *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). All the above titles are still in print, are presented to readers as 'classics' and form the subject matter of a wider variety of critical material. However, William Mayne, another name of Nodelman's list in 1980, exemplifies how once-favoured authors may be forgotten, whether consciously or not.

The special nature of books with a distinct, young readership is such that canons and touchstones are liable to shift underfoot. Thankfully, Nodelman's dreaded "First Church of Children's Literature Triumphant" does not exist, and for various reasons certain texts shift out of fashion or relevance to their intended reader, and thereby out of print. As Pat Pinsent argues, the work of children's writers who are no longer "still in print and still read, or named wherever the literary heritage of childhood is discussed" can often be "far more revealing about the mores of their time" than the texts that are claimed to transcend their historical moment (*Out of the Attic* 1). In order to give a new perspective on the children's literature establishment of this era, and to argue for the pervasion of a particular sensibility reinterpreted by multiple authors, this thesis will place a special emphasis on four writers whose work enjoyed popularity with, or had a pronounced relationship with the children's literature establishment in this period.



ii. *In Response to the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*

As well as shedding light on writers who are overdue for critical appreciation, and gaining a greater understanding of their period of critical production, this thesis aims to emphasise a theme of agency and interpretive ability common to their work that subverts what is ostensibly nostalgic or conservative in it. The thematic content of the novels in my corpus sometimes suggests a conservative anxiety over questions of land ownership and management, including among them several proposed factories and two drowned valleys. In their 'fresh air' subject matter they could be open to criticism as didactic or nostalgic texts, reiterating Romanticist images of childhood intuitively associated with imagination and the countryside. The ideal proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in whose view "[t]rue education is simply the development of the original nature of the child", that is, absorption in the natural world and unschooled play, is demonstrably adopted by Wordsworth, particularly in *The Prelude* and his Ode on *Intimations of Immortality from recollections of Early Childhood* (qtd. in Coveney 44). For Peter Coveney, the "relationship between the Child and Nature was fundamental to Wordsworth's concept of the growth of the moral personality" and, in fact, the "child was ... an essential part of the 'wisdom' he sought to convey" (68). In the view of Jacqueline Rose, Rousseau's child-figure endures and is endemic throughout (even implied by the textual operations of) children's literature, an idealisation which inscribes a power imbalance and reduces the child to a repository for anxiety over worldliness. In her *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), Rose identifies this repository status, not only in the classic figure and literary portrayals of Peter Pan, but in Alan Garner's 1976 novella *The Stone Book*, his account of a Victorian schoolchild, Mary,

whose encounter with prehistoric mark-making, memorialised in a stone prayer-book (archaeologically comprising “all the stories of the world and the flowers of the flood” *Stone Book* 61) is given a greater value than real books, words and reading. Garner’s emphasis on the materiality of ancient landscape, particularly how its historical meaning vies with that of written discourse, is problematic for Rose in its ostensible distancing of the child from textual stability. Yet other aspects of this short text challenge Rose’s reading as too reductive: Garner positions it within a wider context of a quartet, patterned with recurring themes of vision, tradition and history. Most importantly, *The Stone Book* should be read, as Neil Philip describes it, in terms of a “linguistic skirmish” of dialect and symbolism, the “visible proof of a larger battle, between birthright and education, between lower and middle class, between emotion and logic, instinct and reason; a battle that is won by amalgamation and resolution rather than outright victory” (129). Rather than limiting, it illuminates the multiple kinds of interpretation Mary must practice, to inherit identity as a child and to form her own. Such strange, existential undercurrents to ostensibly pastoral fantasies run through the texts of my corpus, challenging reductive narratives of childhood experience and education.

Ideas of educational development and, particularly, socialisation are frequently entailed in these texts, which touch on themes of alienation, isolation, class consciousness and mental health. However, I argue that in their use of archaeological ambiguity and aspects of fantasy they have more in common with the adolescent narratives explored by Robyn McCallum in her work, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* (1999), which in her view employ radical, modernist strategies to “imply a context in which to formulate questions about subjectivity” (142) or to “explore what the lived consequences of subjectivity mean” (161). Such

texts not only offer alternative approaches to the narrative of selfhood, particularly in terms of intersubjectivity, but also prevent naturalised reader identification with the implied reader, or construct the implied reader as an active role, licensing or demanding the multiplicity or subjectivity of meaning. The texts in this thesis are heterogeneous in their use of such strategies, but consistently present selfhood as an engagement with otherness, with multiplicity and even dispossession. This passage from Porter's Carnegie-winning novel, *Nordy Bank* provides an illustration:

Each day it grew stronger, the shadow within herself. Since the first time of being alone on Nordy Bank, when she had felt uneasily that she was somehow *not* alone, its presence had been with her. At first, she had thought the strangeness might be the beginnings of flu, or unexpected homesickness. Now that she realized the power of it she could not imagine how she could escape. (74)

Porter presents archaeological identification as one among many shifts in personality for a girl progressing from solipsism to confidence. This particular episode is disturbing, nebulous and threatening.

In exploring the various ways in which archaeology, which deals in images of irresolvable ambiguity, has been utilised in dramas of selfhood, place consciousness and fantasy, I intend to provide a response to Rose's concerns about the child as a device of discursive stability. Indeed, some of the texts endorse what I describe as 'delinquent manoeuvres' and represent adult authority, and the fixed nature of place, as intrinsically unstable. At the same time, their ambiguities invite active interpretation on the part of their young readers.

I will now explain my use of the term ‘archaeological imagination’, before establishing the parameters of this study and explaining my choice of texts.

### **Parameters and Terms of the Study**

#### *i. The Archaeological Imagination and its Influence*

As I will demonstrate, the trend explored by this study, which I call ‘Children’s Neo-Romanticism’, is characterised by the sense of past and present as contiguous, permeable worlds. In *Shadow Sites* (2007), Kitty Hauser has argued for the powerful and broad influence of the archaeological imagination upon twentieth-century British film and photography, and particularly the consolations of the rural landscape, emblematic of disintegration but also endurance, in the wake of world wartime trauma. Such images of the past, consoling and immanent in the rural landscape, often carry the charge of nostalgic anti-modernism. In the eye of the Neo-Romanticist viewer, however, the archaeological imagination as described by Hauser guarantees “the presence of the past *despite* the incursions of modernity ... [For those viewing things archaeologically] the past may no longer be so evident in the modern landscape, but its increasing invisibility does not make it sensuously unrecoverable” (Hauser 4). The archaeological imagination, therefore, has a huge role in twentieth-century culture. For the purposes of this study, however, it is valuable to acknowledge its original context in the history of archaeology.

The concept of an ‘archaeological imagination’ was first described as such by Michael Shanks in *Experiencing the Past* (1992) as part of a modern phenomenological examination of archaeology as a practice, work continued by

Tilley (1994). Shanks' archaeological imagination is "a bridging field, connecting different ways of working on remains of the past," implying "a *creative* understanding of life today, of possibilities of change, innovation, of the roles of individual perception, practice and agency" (17). Shanks considers various images and ideas behind the "aspirations, feelings and desires" of the archaeologist: Detective, Adventure, Tourism, Nostalgia, and so on. As such, it is not necessarily a deliberate act or even an act per se, but an unconscious or involuntary response to ancient landscape. It describes a mode of perception informed by the way antiquity presents itself in the landscape.

The concept of the archaeological imagination has been explored beyond its original place in the phenomenological critique of archaeology, notably in Jennifer Wallace's 2004 meditation on the role of the past in self-identity, both culturally and subjectively (*Digging the Dirt: The Archaeological Imagination*). However, the concept is best understood in the terms of its original phenomenological purpose, to describe the anticipation of discovery preceding excavation of a site, not exorcised by excavation, nor confined to professional archaeologists. It is not always necessarily practical or even desirable for those interested in a site to dig there: this is particularly true of earthworks such as the megaliths that imposingly circle and bisect the village of Avebury in Wiltshire. In instances such as these, the site is a ritual landscape that is primarily approached through observation and measurement. The modern technology of ground-penetrating radar may now be employed, but in the era considered by this thesis the measurement and visualisation employed in evaluating a burial mound or henge was not significantly altered from the work of early antiquaries such as William Stukeley. This form of archaeology is particularly germane to questions of defining and appreciating place, with its wide view of

arrangements of landscape features and its focus on the monuments of Neolithic people who were establishing, for the first time, a sense of rootedness and home. The archaeological imagination is particularly associated with prehistory and other areas of history that are excluded from written record and human experience. In her idiosyncratic treatise, *A Land* (1951), the archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes depicts imaginative acts on the beach at Lyme Regis, or lying in her garden in Hampstead, which nonetheless have an urgent application to human understanding of its place in history of the landscape.

Hawkes is quite frank about presenting geologists and archaeologists as “instruments of consciousness who are engaged in reawakening the memory of the world” (26). At times, such as evoking the Lyme Regis site of her first fossil discovery, the landscape is simultaneously site of recollection and image of consciousness itself. There “one is exposed to the assault of time” as though temporality were dangerously visual and sensual, another physical substance to which one could “abandon oneself ... like moving in that smoky world which is reached by moving among the images of the past stored in one’s brain” (72). Such descriptions are key to Hawkes’ presentation of imaginative visualisation’s place in scientific understanding, as in this later section:

For thirty million years this sea remained almost constant and at the rate of one foot in thirty thousand years, the chalk mounted layer by layer on its bed. *The arithmetic is simple but the reality is hard to grasp* [my emphasis]. If, enjoying the sun, a child leans against the cliff at Folkestone, his small figure will span the accumulation of one hundred and twenty thousand years. And yet, knowing this, still my imagination will so speed up the process that I see

it as a marine snowstorm, the falling of flakes through one of the clearest seas ever known. (Hawkes 80)

Hawkes' self-conscious use of this powerful, imaginative visual image to convey the non-visible forces behind the formation of place is not, in fact, out of place in the scientific fields of archaeology and geology. As Georg Baumgart argues, in "The Poetics of Nature: Literature and Constructive Imagination in the History of Geology" (2011), "the history of geology is the history of imaginative reconstructions", and the acceptance of prehistory's immensity (particularly when it was inhabited by long-extinct creatures which bore little relation to humanity) demanded a massive cultural acknowledgement of imagination and visualisation (34).

Field archaeology, which depends upon actively imaginative interpretation, reconstruction and visualisation, is frequently evoked by the texts of my corpus, if only in their protagonists' unconscious explorations, undirected, through the ancient features of a scene or place. It may take certain forms in which reflection on the archaeological imagination is the primary activity, and some cultural forms in which it is the defining characteristic and objective. Its cultural importance in twentieth-century Britain was one of exciting revisionist viewpoints.

The archaeological imagination was stirred by a revolution in archaeological practice in the early twentieth century. Air travel and aerial photography, engendered by the First World War, gave archaeology an invigorating new approach and a new public face. As Hauser puts it: "Aerial archaeology seemed to open up an unknown country inhabiting the more familiar one, this one visible from the air" (157). Its pioneer, O.G.S. Crawford, the Ordnance Survey's archaeology officer, spearheaded

a new trend in locating interesting sites and arrangements through images of Stonehenge, Roman Scotland and many other regions of Britain. His publications, including *Wessex from the Air* (1928) and the journal *Antiquity* (1927—), brought field archaeology to general attention. For the lay person, the concept of an archaeological viewpoint (with no need to excavate) offered an insight into the history and character of their home that was authentic, educational and excitingly revelatory. For modern artists, such as Paul Nash and John Piper (discussed further in Chapter 1), the unknown country immanent in the familiar one was characterised by the primitivist, surrealist and structuralist concerns of their artwork. Hauser has argued for the influence of the archaeological imagination on the film-makers, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, in movies depicting moments of transcendentalism such as *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

The cultural popularity of field archaeology was part of a pervasive new trend for open-air leisure and youth movements, together with hiking, scouting and orienteering. Its educational and moral benefits, for children and other British citizens to view their countryside anew, with insight and an OS map, piecing together the past and appreciating its loss, is summarised by the historian David Matless in the figure of the “geographer-citizen” (78). Such means of exploring the countryside, often guided by books or instructors (including an infamous crowd of thousands who went with naturalist H.V. Massingham on a moonlit walk), were disdained by many writers of the era, either because they felt the means were too artificial, or simply because they felt the countryside was not a place where urbanites belonged: “A hideous word – hiker,” says the narrator of Geoffrey Household’s *Rogue Male* (1939), whose fate in the novel is eventually to live, bestially and in secret, in the very soil of the English countryside. “But, by God, it fits those bawling



Englishwomen whose tight shorts and loose voices are turning every beauty spot in Europe into a Skegness holiday camp” (68). Likewise, Mary Butts’ pamphlet, *Warning to Hikers* (1932), does little to disguise a sense of outraged elitism amid concern for authentic response to nature. Hiking and orienteering were part of a democratisation of archaeology in which intuitive feeling for the ‘spirit of place’ became the subject of moral and spiritual concern. Its role in children’s literature, as I will show, had its pedagogic aspects and the promise of instilling a sense of stable English identity. By way of context, however, I will show how it manifested in other attempts to direct, orientate and ‘place’ the child in twentieth-century Britain.

The fusion of leisure and education meant that landscape archaeology was not only the form of archaeology recommended to the general public, but to children in particular. A movement in education during the 1940s, advocating the teaching of archaeology in schools failed to gain traction, but there was a slowly increasing emphasis on evidence and interpretation in the way history was taught, especially in secondary schools. In the 1970s, the Schools Council of the United Kingdom produced a project entitled ‘Place, Time and Society’ for 8-13-year olds which Mike Corbishley describes as promoting “a detective approach to finding and understanding of place” (146). Field archaeology offered access for young people to a wider discipline that was more self-directed and personally rewarding, not bound to a youth movement, whilst preserving a distinction between professional and amateur activity, assuaging anxiety for the wellbeing of fragile archaeological objects at the mercy of an enthusiastically wielded trowel. Sir Leonard Woolley, in *The Young Archaeologist* (1961), promises his young readers an “adventure into the past into a world that is new because it has been unrecorded or forgotten, and is real because it is *your* world ...” (2), yet strikes a cautionary note from his first page: “I

should be very sorry to see any of my readers trying to do ‘practical experiments’ in archaeology, except under someone else’s supervision; and I don’t expect any of them to become professional archaeologists” (1). Comparatively, in *Going into the Past* (1955) Gordon Copley stresses the ease and thrill with which his young readers could become engaged with their local surroundings: “The excavation of sites is a highly skilled job, and a very expensive one to do properly. [...] But there is much of value that may be learned from some of [those sites] by field archaeology even before they are excavated” (15).

Copley’s book gives a detailed account of prehistoric life in Britain: wherever his readers live, he promises them that they will be “within reach, at any rate by cycle, of some of the kinds of earthworks or buildings described in this book” (16). In each chapter, he lists the earthworks that might be visited on a day out. There are of course also museums to be visited, and these too are listed under appropriate chapters. Copley’s readers are encouraged to learn enough about the forms of ancient sites that they will be able to make their own discoveries, but they are specifically warned that without a great deal of experience “you must not dig into them”; instead, “going into the past will become a very exciting detective adventure” (16). It is suggested that such an exercise in time travel will be entirely possible without actually touching anything. The subtitle of ‘Things to be Seen in the Open Air’ appears multiple times in each chapter, while a photo-insert includes twenty-five images of earthworks, monoliths and ruins, including aerial photos and shadow-sites.

Poet Geoffrey Grigson’s book for children, *Looking and Finding* (subtitled ‘and Collecting and Reading and Investigating and Much Else’) was originally published in 1958 and revised for republication in 1970. Its hearty proselytising tone

suggests an anxiety about children's activity or lack of it<sup>1</sup>: "*Moral: don't stay at home, but go and explore. Don't stay indoors, but go and look*" (1970 12).

Compared to the work of Woolley or Copley, however, Grigson takes pains to avoid the voice of schoolroom didacticism, urging the investigation of place and local history for its own sake and even implying a dimension of aesthetic or sensual pleasure to such hobbies, in comparison to the improving qualities of History and Geography ("It is not a bad thing to give yourself pleasure and delight, so long as your pleasures and delights do not get in the way of other people and upset them" 9). He exercises less caution than Copley and Woolley, the professional archaeologists, and the earnest refrain of the book is "You can... You may..." Landscape archaeology is not specially recommended by Grigson, but imaginative engagement with material landscape is endorsed throughout. The opening chapters are concerned with sourcing a large-scale map of the reader's local area (whether at a local stationers', asked for at birthdays, or borrowed from local clergymen) and Grigson's list of "desirable things to know and explore" is dry yet suggestive, reading like a gazetteer of places haunted by vanished human activity (13):

Old roads

Canals in use

Roman roads

Canals disused

Green lanes

Fords

Footpaths

Footbridges

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<sup>1</sup> Grigson's anxiety may have had something to do with the introduction of a second television station in 1955 and the perceived overall rise in popular programming as a result, but we might equally consider at the steady transformation in children's literature, begun in the 1950s, which underpins this thesis

Old railways	Ferries
[...]	
Churches with square towers	Windmills
Churches with spires	Watermills
Castles and ruins	Burial mounds
Ancient chapels	Burial chambers
Ancient houses	Camps and forts
Follies and monuments	Standing stones
Dovecotes	Deserted villages
Barns	Battlefields
Pounds	Old mines and mineheaps
(13)	

Beyond this recitation of human sites now rendered non-human and private places now released into common access, the book's clear underlying objective is to inculcate a sense of place consciousness through archaeological imagination: to see the historical significance in all objects, and not fixate upon 'treasures':

Anybody, if he takes the trouble, and looks in the right place, can find chipped flints instead of gold cups, a badger skull instead of a crystal skull, or pieces of pottery three thousand years old instead of all the ship treasure of

Sutton Hoo – though he might find another ship treasure as well, if he gets up, and goes out, and looks. Who knows? (12)

Such modest excavations of natural treasures are part of Grigson's image of childhood. He describes finding flint arrowheads himself as a boy in his Easter holidays, whilst engaged in the equally schoolboyish hobby of looking for eggs in birds' nests. He gives directions, suggesting it would "always be sensible to search the ground – try it anyhow – *east* of barrows" (103), and that "scraps of pottery of 1800 B.C., scraps two thousand, three thousand, even four thousand years old" can be found "if you know where to look" (106). He does at least instruct the reader to "[t]ake the bits you collect ... to the museum ... [a]nd talk to the man in charge" (107). Yet the book as a whole, with its urge to comb local OS maps (or historical maps, which, like Copley, he calls time machines) for significant buildings, symbols and names, is concerned not with the wider discipline of archaeology but the private imaginative engagement with place (as when he recommends reading local poets, or *Walden* (1854) and *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789) as "encouragers and appetizers" but notes that you do not have to visit the sites they describe, which are "quite considerably spoilt" anyhow (25). The chapter on finding flints and sherds concludes with the recommendation of *Urne-buriall*, the seventeenth-century essay by antiquarian and polymath Sir Thomas Browne. Grigson writes, "I think all the archaeologists of England have been moved and encouraged by reading *Urne-buriall*" (108). This thesis will go on to argue that direct association of archaeology with philosophical and poetic feeling, such as Grigson's, characterises the implicitly ideological association of children's experience and the archaeological imagination in the fictions of fantastic place explored herein.

The archaeological imagination can even be identified in Copley's *Going into the Past*: the very title has intimations of impossible transgression, while Copley's suggestion of a "very exciting detective adventure" again implies drama and adventure rather than strictly formal, historically-minded scouting (16). As well as the readily accessible museum item, Copley occasionally takes time to "jump aboard the time machine" and make the lost world of the Stone Age feel uncannily present, in the first-person narrative of a child (22). In his visualisation, "we turn our eyes toward the new land which is to be ours", see "thorn trees and brambles, which cease only on the lower slopes where the dark and silent beech-woods begin" and are "delighted to see on the ground many great nodules of unbroken flint" (23). The description is an act of imagination for him, not merely into another era but a child's viewpoint. Rather than institutionalise the archaeological experience, he renders it a highly subjective exercise in which the Sussex coast becomes an alien, barely recognisable place. His description of flints is dry and didactic, but the account of exploring the thorn trees, brambles and beech-woods is an implicit example of continuity, not merely of British vegetation but of wandering observantly through them, as he directs his readers to do.

The association of imagination and archaeological feeling is demonstrated by a special emphasis in Herbert Saunders' *Aids and Suggestions for the Teaching of Local History* for the Kent Education Committee in 1922:

Museums are surely valuable but where the exhibits are under glass their value is comparatively small. The flint-head must be handled and dreamed over ere the Palaeolithic man or Neolithic man appears; the urn must be caressed before we have the vision of the Roman soldier; the old parchment crackled before the enclosed fields can lose their hedges. (4)

What Saunders recommends to teachers, on behalf of the Education Committee, not only previews the “exciting detective adventure”, time machines and new worlds of Copley, Grigson and Woolley; his examples also sound like half-remembered summaries for countless children’s fantasy narratives since the 1900s. I will now briefly explore the place of these amid other children’s novels about archaeology.

i. *Archaeology in Children’s Literature, and the Archaeological Imagination*

In *Four British Fantasists* (2006), Butler describes archaeology as a discipline which “seeks to establish a systematic correlation with space and time” and argues that its model of chronologically layered landscape provides a metaphor for the stratified levels of meaning in the work of Garner, Cooper and Lively, as well as that of Diana Wynne Jones (57). Butler’s study argues for their thematic closeness as, in part, caused by shared life experience, and a chapter is devoted to their common interest in ‘Applied Archaeology’, noting that archaeology along with “geology, palaeontology, and landscape history have fed the work of these writers by providing both material for their stories and models for their understanding of time, memory, and history” (44). Butler draws attention to Cooper, Garner and Lively’s personal involvement in the world of archaeology, whether it is a correspondence with the archaeologist and writer Jacquetta Hawkes (Cooper), rescue of a sixteenth-century medicine house in Cheshire (Garner), or the production of a popular work of landscape archaeology entitled *The Presence of the Past* (Lively, in 1976).

Archaeologists and their theories appear repeatedly in all the texts considered by this thesis, and even where excavation is not proposed, their young protagonists are constantly fascinated by ancient features buried in the landscape: the earthworks at Nordy Bank, the Eyell in Yorkshire, the mummified bog body, the stone circle. Butler further argues that Cooper and Lively's novels are concerned with subversions of this stratified metaphor through fantastic figures which transcend such linear strata. In *Landscape in Children's Literature* (2012), Jane Carroll develops this point by noting the frequent passage of Cooper's characters into chthonic or cave-like spaces as part of an "exploration and understanding of the landscape" through which the past is "rescued and made accessible" (149). Carroll does not accept Butler's argument for archaeology as the master metaphor of Cooper's work (which would not fully account for the various topoi of Carroll's argument), and throughout my corpus, archaeological practices and motifs are usually understated. Physical excavation is rare and scientific process is rarely followed. Yet these texts themselves are informed by archaeological practice and discovery, and characterised by the archaeological imagination: a reading of the material aspects of being-here which stimulates a sense of the vanished and forgotten.

As I will argue, my focus texts reflect the ways history, archaeology and geography were presented, even recommended, as ideal leisure pursuits for children in the first half of the twentieth century. The practice and philosophy of archaeology are also sympathetically treated in British children's literature, combining an innate endorsement of scholarly behaviour with the dramatic potential of buried treasure. The figure of the archaeologist provides an opportunity for writers to illustrate the continuing value of academic study beyond school in ways that other academic



figures do not, and to demonstrate the practical application of learning as opposed to the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. However, their treatment in children's literature more broadly can differ significantly. As my brief survey of their approaches will show, two major emphases can be distinguished from each other. These contrasting emphases are embodied in two formative children's novels with archaeological themes, which were published in the same year, 1906: E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* and Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*. The writers were admirers of one another's work, Kipling having written her a fan letter about his children's love of her tales of the Psammead (a 'sand fairy'). On the serialisation of *Puck*, in which Kipling's children themselves meet a fairy, Nesbit wrote, herself, to H.G. Wells with some concern about plagiarism: "I say – do read Kipling in the January *Strand* and read my *Five Children and It* – will you?" (qtd. Briggs 253). *The Story of the Amulet*, a sequel to *Five Children and It* (1902), deals like Kipling's novel with supernatural contact with figures of the past who metonymise the formation of British history, yet the difference in emphasis is significant.

*Amulet* bears a dedication to the archaeologist E. A. Wallis Budge, director of the Egyptian department of the British Museum, and the novel shows clear evidence of Nesbit's engagement with archaeological research. An ancient relic allows three children to travel in time, used by Nesbit to situate the reformist ideas of the Fabian Society in a broader historical view of social change. Kevin M. McGeough and Elizabeth A. Galway have described the way Nesbit is, in this novel, "demonstrating alternative possibilities for British society through the exploration of other centres of civilisation, which reifies the imperialist centrality of Edwardian London at the same time that it critiques some of its less desirable attributes" (195). An antiquarian scholar is depicted as ineffectual and solipsistic until the novel's conclusion, when

he is merged with his spiritual twin, a magician from Ancient Egypt, implying an impulse to irrationality and otherness beneath the drab academic facade. Budge's British Museum, however, is the central image in Nesbit's Fabian vision of revolutionary scholarship. In one episode, visiting the attained Fabian utopia of a future London, the children find all of Edwardian London has been swept away but the British Museum: in this, as with the fantastic metaphor of the amulet's power, Nesbit suggests that archaeological study is an essential component of civilisation and particularly of a national self-reflection necessary for progressive reform.

Those children's novels which, like Nesbit's *Story of the Amulet*, focus on archaeological scholarship, frequently entail a pedagogical aspect, even when the dig takes place out of school hours. Gladys Mitchell's adventure, *Caravan Creek* (1954) incorporates detailed explanations of Viking burial rituals, aspects of British history and archaeological practice itself (drawn from Mitchell's experience, also seen in her more famous crime novels). Mitchell's novel encodes archaeology in the borrowed genre tropes of the crime novel, part of a trend in British popular fiction to metonymise society in small, rural communities. As Penny English writes of Enid Blyton, and particularly her 1960 novel *Five go to Finniston Farm*, the changing legal complexity of 'treasure trove' gives the opportunity for archaeological objects to reveal a "conflict ... between the purely commercial and the symbolic value (as part of a national, social or family identity) of cultural property" (239). *Caravan Creek* contrasts a pair of high-minded archaeologist parents ("Mummy says they ... just *live* to dig up ancient remains and send them to museums ... It seems a queer kind of life to me" 10) with the unscrupulous Professor Mattino, who is not above stealing the treasure merely to raise his status as an academic, and a pair of thugs who are in it for the money. In dramatising such broad debates, however, these

novels give no space to subjective or private encounters with questions of the past, and generally disregard the importance of ambiguity and mystery in order to state their position clearly on heritage, history and the moral authority of the academic.

Even in more nuanced depictions of child psychology, such as Matthew in Jan Mark's 1977 novel, *Under the Autumn Garden*, the academic and rational value of archaeology may be emphasised over depictions of mystery and imagination. In this instance, the more that Matthew is personally motivated by his school project, digging for relics in his back garden, the less chance of success he has: criticism from teachers and school-friends alike makes him stubborn and obsessional about his work, whilst the reader is made conscious of multiple features of local history that Matthew sees but does not notice. He is only interested in an object which he can lay personal claim to. His friends are quick to show off their own knowledge, comparing Matthew to the historical figure of the amateur antiquarian, who "caused terrible damage to historic sites because they didn't understand them" and "only kept things if they liked the look of them" (56). Matthew feels "great shame" at this, feeling he is "an antiquary if ever there was one" (56). Like Nesbit or Mitchell's adventures, Jan Mark's novel presents archaeology as solidly scientific and rational, with rewards only for those who acknowledge its seriousness. Mark's acute depiction of children's experience is almost a rebuke to such novels as *Puck of Pook's Hill* that depict the child as intuitively, fantastically, attuned to the countryside and its embodiment of history. Unlike its protagonists, Matthew will not intuitively gain an understanding of local history by merely immersing himself in the material landscape.

Instead of a scholarly institution such as the British Museum, Kipling's novel is typified by his own Sussex estate and its surrounding area. In *Puck of Pook's Hill*,

the young protagonists do not leave the Sussex Downs where they first accidentally invoke the self-described “oldest Old Thing in England”, Puck, who is both the Robin Goodfellow of Shakespeare and of folklore (8). Over repeated, episodic meetings, Dan and Una are introduced to one after another figure out of Sussex history: a Norman knight from the Battle of Hastings, a Roman centurion, an artisan from the Middle Ages. In his memoir *Something of Myself* (1937), Kipling describes the inspiration for the novel, an inadvertent excavation of a series of historical objects reflecting multiple shifts in British national identity from Neolithic to Cromwellian.

The inadvertency of Kipling’s archaeological discovery is reflected in the way that the children invoke their unearthly educator unconsciously, through repeated immersion in the Sussex countryside. Sussex becomes metonymically the enduring Old England incarnate: the green fields that directly link modern citizens to a history redolent of chivalry and magic. That the children are wonderingly ignorant of their heritage is also significant: *Puck*, and its 1910 sequel, *Rewards and Fairies* – the origin of Kipling’s famously paternalistic *If* – are history lessons, in which material contact with the mute, enduring landscape is clearly preferred over schoolroom activity. Dan’s punishment for failing a Latin conjugation becomes tawdry, for example, when he communes with a Roman Centurion immediately after.

In this formative text, Kipling does not even gesture toward the archaeological scholarship that Nesbit makes central to her *Amulet* and its vision of the future. Instead, he deliberately endorses the educational and moral benefit of subjective, irrational archaeological imagination, even including aspects of folklore (Puck himself, and the supernatural episode of ‘The Dymchurch Flit’) and poetry

(Puck as Shakespearean quotation) into his mixture. The archaeological imagination presented here and through his use of metonymy is not merely Romantic reverie but, as Donald Mackenzie describes in discussing the novel, the demand placed upon a viewer by the incompleteness, “challenging or teasing us into the re-creating response that is, in a complex of senses, reading” (ii). Such “challenging or teasing” analogy of the reader also applies to their correlation of historical, fantastic and folkloric material in the text.

The influence of Kipling’s novel is enduring. Education by a magic avatar of the past can be seen in John Masefield’s *The Box of Delights* (1935), T.H. White’s *Sword in the Stone* (1938), and more overtly in the less well-known William Croft Dickinson’s *Borrobil* (1944). In this novel, by a specialist in Scottish folklore and writer of ghost stories, young Donald and Susan on holiday in the countryside are drawn to dance between the standing stones of ‘Eldritch Wood’ on Beltane, and pass into “the times that are dead and gone,” as Donald describes it (22). Here, they meet the magician Borrobil, who introduces them to a series of figures from ancient time. However, the characters encountered here are not historical figures but the archetypes of folk-tale. Where Kipling’s novel is an education in English history, Croft Dickinson’s is a primer in the tropes of Celtic mythology. The landscape is unspecified and difficult to identify, and its archaeological discourse is almost entirely fantastic. When a dragon wraps his tail around a hill, Donald comments, “Now I know what makes those ridges on the sides of hills, ... but what a lot of dragons must have been killed all over the country in the days gone by” (57). The ‘challenging and teasing’ of the reader is still present in the invitation to critique Donald’s comment.

A further trend of didactic novels about England, such as 1940s *Visitors from London* by Kitty Barne, returns to the trope of open air and imaginative education. 1935's *South Country Secret* is a particularly interesting example of the genre, for its overt depiction of archaeological imagination with the personal and societal disruption of wartime. Its authors are "Euphan" and "Klaxon", in reality the novelist Barbara Euphan Todd (famous for her series of rural fantasies about the scarecrow-wizard Worzel Gummidge (1936-63), and her husband, Commander John Graham Bower of the Royal Navy. The novel foregoes fantasy for description of a visit by children from South Africa, for whom England is a complicated sort of home. Their guide is Commander Parsons, an ex-military man who perhaps resembles "Klaxon", who takes pains in showing the children Sussex, Wiltshire and Dorset, even organising a treasure hunt, which ends in a view of the Chalk Horse of Uffington. His charges are eager from the start to learn about 'home' and plan to write their own individual history books, including one that will be a "poetry-geography-history" book, a fair description of *South Country Secrets'* miscellany of anecdotes and poetry (all recited by heart by Parsons) (55). At Winchester, Parsons delivers a speech beginning: "This *is* England, and there's nowhere in the whole country where you will find so much history and so much tradition and so much legend all mixed up together" (190). Despite the recurring sense that place must be understood as a composite, modernity has nothing to contribute to the English identity of either Parsons or the children. Meanwhile, despite the book's disinterest in individual character, there is a curious emphasis on Parsons himself, when he muses on his place in history ("... I'm standing in the middle of a see-saw. It's a thing one can't help doing when one comes to Winchester – the old men swing up and the young men swing down, and then they change places" 193), and indeed, later breaks off

with emotion, midway through a sentence: “You can’t touch a stone without—” Archaeological imagination, and its activation through unmediated material contact with the countryside, are charged with meaning in this deceptively impassioned novel.

The time slip novel, defined by Alison Uttley’s *A Traveller in Time* (1939), just two years after *South Country Secrets*, is a frankly pedagogical subgenre of children’s fantasy, and Tess Cosslett (2002) has associated it with a move in educational practice toward teaching history ‘from below’ and understanding it at a human level, compared to wider historical trends. Whereas Dan and Una’s Roman Centurion slips forward in time, Penelope finds herself going back, haunting the lives of Elizabethan men and women and intervening in their lives. The genre permeates British children’s literature in such central titles as *Charlotte Sometimes* by Penelope Farmer (1969), *Tom’s Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce (1958), and *Moondial* by Helen Cresswell (1987). Whilst this genre frequently returns to themes of personal identity, their archaeological feeling is minimal, being set primarily in the past, but such feeling arises in such scenes as Penelope’s modern-day view of the farmhouse she has lived in, now a ruin. Her exclamation of “Who’s destroyed it like this?” imbues the mundane scene with a surreal apprehension of the Romantic sublime (211). This turns to grief and pathos: “There was nothing more to see, it was all over, the place was steeped in sorrow” (213). Uttley’s protagonist, like that of Pearce’s novel, conclude their narratives with a stronger sense of historical continuity and, indeed, of seeing “the web and woof of time threaded in a pattern” (86). As Penelope’s experience with the ruined house illustrates, however, the reassuring pedagogy implicit in time-slip novels, even when laced with a mystic,

transcendentalist understanding of time, is frequently informed by a disorientating archaeological imagination.

Related to this genre, but decidedly idiosyncratic, are the ‘Green Knowe’ books of Lucy M. Boston (1954-1976). Here, Tolly, a child of the 1950s, meets the children of his ancient house from the seventeenth, nineteenth and finally twelfth century. Although there is a genealogical sense of security in Tolly’s close relationship with Green Knowe, other novels feature children from America, Russia and China, and there is explicitly no hierarchy between them and Tolly. Likewise, other children’s fantasies published after 1960, distinct from the time-slip, reiterate the implicitly pedagogical promise of material, archaeological engagement with place, but with a diminished sense of security. The ancient powers invoked through such engagements are frequent and almost always threatening, and must be combated or exorcised. Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) is one of the most influential examples of a text featuring such tropes.

A recurring figure throughout this thesis, Garner was born in 1934 and spent his childhood in the midst of Cheshire’s oral culture and the freedom of its hillsides. These two aspects of his identity met, enduringly, in the Legend of Alderley and its intimate connection with the topography of Alderley Edge: “I grew up on the Edge, aware of its magic and accepting it. I didn’t know that it wasn’t the same for everyone. I didn’t know that not all children played, by day and by night, the year long, on a wooded hill where knights slept in the ground” (“Introduction” 11). In his first novel, Garner invents a pair of children from outside Cheshire, Colin and Susan, whom he then tours through the viscerally material landscape of his childhood in fantasy based on the Legend. The children become defenders of a magical talisman, which a catalogue of magical beings from folklore and legend are mobilised to



capture. Goblins, witches and faceless horrors pursue the heroes through the caves and valleys of Alderley Edge, sometimes disguising themselves as friends or innocent hikers, before battle is met with the aid of a wizard and the forces of darkness are driven back. After a sequel, *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963), Garner continued to explore such intersections of legend, landscape and identity, with growing critical attention and deepening complexity.

Published in 1965, Susan Cooper's *Over Sea, Under Stone* features more impetuous urban children, this time on holiday in Cornwall, who must help the magician Merlin prevent arcane magical forces from gaining an ancient chalice containing a powerful rune. As in *Weirdstone*, these opposing forces take the form of guileless human beings, and danger is met in hilltops and sea caves. There were evidently, however, deeper themes to explore with this material. *Over Sea, Under Stone* was the first in a five-book sequence, published throughout the 1970s, presenting the ancient magic structures of Dark and Light as part of global identity, manifesting in British culture but not defined by it. Successive titles also explore aspects of gender and cultural inheritance. Cooper, like Garner, has worked prolifically as a children's fantasy writer concerned with intersecting themes of fantasy, history and place.

Penelope Lively's *The Whispering Knights* (1971), follows the same pattern of a sinister ancient force, in human guise, that must be met and balanced to prevent it getting out of hand, but *Astercote* (1970) and *The Wild Hunt of Hagworthy* (1971), both make unsettling connections between folk culture and mob culture, without at all dismissing the power of the archaeological imagination. In *Astercote*, the trope of children protecting an ancient artefact is presented with fresh nuance: a lost grail becomes an excuse for a witch-hunt, but seems not to be magic in itself, whilst a

sense of the fantastic is evoked in the reverie of a solitary girl in a ruined village. In *Wild Hunt*, an ancient dance invokes a mysterious atmosphere of violence amongst modern day villagers, only apparent to the novel's young protagonist, and whose link with legend must be severed, rather than preserved. Whilst evoking the excitement, drama and special insights of the viewer with archaeological imagination, these novels seem to recommend a strict sense of linear perspective as opposed to the sense of historical confusion produced by Puck or experienced by Commander Parsons in Winchester.

Susan and Colin deal extensively with the wizard Cadellin in *Brisingamen* and *Gomrath*, but in successive novels by Garner the adult figures are less dependable. The task of inheriting place is not an idle one for Garner, and his protagonists must experience it alone. In Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* (1973), schoolboy hero Will Stanton is inducted by a new incarnation of Merlin into a vision of his local Buckinghamshire landscape that transcends time. This book presents Will's inheritance as magical but it is intimately associated with a deep, archaeological appreciation of his local landscape: "A hillside rose up out of that time, grassy and sunlit before Will's eyes, with the sign of the circle and cross cut into its green turf, gleaming there huge and white in the Chiltern chalk" (*Dark* 257).

The work of Garner, Lively and Cooper, as well as that of Jan Mark, belongs to the period with which this study is concerned. Before introducing the writers upon whom it is focused, I will now establish the parameters in which this study is located and my reason for choosing this era.

ii. *The Second Golden Age and the Place of Fantasy*

Historically, this study explores some of the new ambitions and innovations of the book culture of children's literature's Second Golden Age. I acknowledge the history and connotations of this term, and adopt it intentionally to describe the period in order to denote the self-conscious idealism and ambition of the era's establishment figures. As early as 1971, the critic and author John Rowe Townsend acknowledged this description of the era (whilst still *in medias res*) with the caveat that "the figure of speech [i.e. "the Second Golden Age"] grows wearisome" (12). Even as it was being produced, the question of why it should be so shinningly good (and of what makes a good children's book) was being considered from multiple perspectives: producers, critics and other 'gatekeepers' such as librarians. Initially, children's literature studies had a less purely academic emphasis than those in Canada and the USA, spearheaded by the *Children's Literature in Education* journal.

In her study of the era, its publishers and critics (2013), Lucy Pearson defines the Second Golden Age period as 1950 to 1979, citing the critical surveys of Peter Hollindale, Peter Hunt and Fred Inglis. Pearson continues to describe the 1950s as a period in which groundwork was laid for a "radical expansion and diversification in children's publishing during the 1960s and 1970s" (1). This distinction can be understood in terms of production and reception: whereas major and influential texts in the canon of children's literature were undoubtedly produced in the 1950s, the generation of a children's book culture involving readers, critics and children's professionals was not recognisably formed until the end of the decade. The narrative this thesis offers is based around the development of a particular sensibility during that 1960s-1970s period, and its legacy in contemporary children's literature.

Children's novels of the 1950s are an important contributor to that sensibility but are treated as being part of a different context.

As I have demonstrated, the science of archaeology has a long association with children's literature. The use of the fantastic mode in particular, however, has consequences for the reader's interpretation of folkloric and legendary material. As Catherine Butler and Haillie O'Donovan have shown, ambiguous figures of legend such as King Arthur can be deployed by authors with hugely differing effect depending on their contextualisation of fantasy in the world of myth, and vice versa. In the realist work of, say, Rosemary Sutcliff, Arthur and Merlin are humanised and critiqued as soldiers. Susan Cooper, in *The Grey King* (1975), utilises a fully mythopoeic Arthur and Merlin to give dimension to her invented fantasy world, and to make overt its relationship to a sanctified, platonic British identity.

Such operations become more nuanced in other uses of folklore, such as the fairy, which, as explored in Chapter 3, can truly be said to narrate attitudes to 'spirit of place' in fantastic terms. The problematic relationship of archaeology, folk culture and fantasy is exemplified by Garner's use of local Cheshire folklore in *Weirdstone*, and his presentation of the Legend of Alderley (verbatim in the form Garner received from his grandfather) as a peritext, textually distinguished from the rest of the novel. The indication, from the outset, is that the novel must be understood within certain degrees of fictionality, requiring hermeneutic, even archaeological skill on the part of the reader. A postscript to *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*'s sequel, *The Moon of Gomerath*, makes explicit the task of producing and reading such discursive bricolage, with Garner presenting "the ingredients of the story" as "true, or as true as I can make them", including "genuine" spells, "real" names (because "a made-up name seems wrong"), and the claim (or admission) of having "adapt[ed] [elements

and entities of folk-lore] to [his] own view” (169). The differences between things that are “true”, “genuine”, “real” or “made-up” are subtly effaced, and the reader is prompted to reconsider their reading of the entire novel, its significance and its relation to historical meaning.

Similarly, in Judy Allen’s novel *The Spring on the Mountain* (1973), two teenagers discuss the nature of a charged feeling of walking in the countryside, along a ley line, and the sense that one of them feels “the whole area, the fields, the mountain, the birds, particularly the starlings, everything, was watching us”, which, to an experienced reader, signals the fantasy genre. The other puts the sensation down purely to the fact that he is from Leeds, and that going into the country they “feel exposed and – visible – because you’re used to being one of a crowd of other people all swallowed up by buildings and streets” (54). The reader’s understanding of this debate provides context for other aspects of the novel, which approaches both New Age escapism and Age of Aquarius mysticism in terms of authentic experience and intuition (see Chapter 4).

The implications of interior or secondary fantasy worlds, though integral to children’s literature of this era, cannot fully efface the cultural or historical significance of the manifestly unreal when it appears in a realist world that is presented as mimetically resembling that of the reader. Incorporation of folkloric material in otherwise realist literature predominantly comprises the magic realist sensibility, reflecting Tzvetan Todorov’s categorisation of the ‘marvellous’ fantastic, which supplements the reader’s own world-view (also found in a religious text). The repeated use of the fantastic in the context of archaeology’s ambiguity, producing moments of disorientation and fear for protagonists and readers alike, is best understood in terms of the ‘fantastic realist’ mode explored by Alison Waller in her

study, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (2008). In this mode, the dominant tone of realism is invaded or disrupted by the fantastic which, in Waller's view, "provokes an initial hesitation on the part of character and/or reader" (18). For the purposes of this study, I particularly explore the reader's experience of hesitation at the shift from narrative engagement to hermeneutic interpretation, and their role as reader in correlating the fantastic in relation to the child protagonist and their world. Children's fantasy is, therefore, a major theme of this study.

Pearson informs us that "[b]oth the critical texts and the children's books [of the 1960s and 70s] present imagination and fantasy as central and necessary aspects of childhood. This construction of the child reader had important implications for the kind of literature that was regarded as 'good' for young readers" (34). The forms and reception of fantasy were a major concern to the children's literature establishment, as evidenced by *The Cool Web* (1977), a multidisciplinary collection of essays by a variety of participants in the children's literature establishment (authors, critics and schoolteachers). The editors explicitly state that the proposal "that 'fantasy is an intensification of reality'" is a major theme of the collection (196). In one essay, the prominent educationalist, James Britton, describes fantasy as a necessary, assimilative form of play, and argues for provision of "the cultural material on which it may flourish" (47). Elsewhere, Catherine Storr, having worked as a psychologist as well as a children's author, recommends fantasy as the best means of introducing children to concepts of good and evil: "If we talk to children about the great subjects in this way, in folk stories and myth and in any form of art ... [w]e are demonstrating also a way of handling this knowledge which makes it tolerable to live with" (127).

Alan Garner is the most frequently cited living children's author in the collection; as well as contributing his own essay, he is the subject of a review (reprinted from *Children's Book News*) by Pearce, author of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, who characterises him entirely in terms of his interrelation of "two contiguous worlds. One is the world that most of us agree to describe, however inadequately, as ordinary, everyday... The other is the world of folklore and myth, dream and nightmare and vision. The wall between these two worlds is tough, but of less than tissue-paper thinness. Where ... one world bursts its way into the other, there is the beginning of a Garner story" (291). Just as significant as this characterisation of Garner's work as, seemingly, exemplary of the establishment's ideals, is Pearce's casual description of real and fantastic worlds as 'contiguous'. Pearce criticises Garner's novel *The Owl Service* for its difficulty and obscurity, yet literary complexity in children's fiction is also encouraged by the culture of the period. Though published in 1977, *The Cool Web* itself was prepared in anticipation of Sir Alan Bullock's 1975 report, 'Language for Life', which formed part of a governmental enquiry into the place of literacy in education. In his report, Bullock not only put the argument for children to read for pleasure, and also "to read responsively" (130). Arguing for the complexity of reading's significance to child development, Bullock wrote: "In working his way through a book the reader imports, projects, anticipates, speculates on alternative outcomes; and nowhere is this process more active than in a work of imaginative literature" (129).

The emphasis on "imaginative literature" again resonates with *The Cool Web*'s interest in fantasy, but also endorsed are texts that invite active, interrogative forms of reading. The contiguousness and irruption of one world into another, and the task of actively interpreting their respective discourses for protagonists and

readers, typifies not only Garner's work but also a wider trend in children's fiction that was, in fact, observed by some contemporary commentators, not limited to *TLS* reviews. In 1977, the educationalist, Elizabeth Cook, remarked upon a "particularly interesting development ... by writers for children" in the form of "teenage or even adult romance or novels built upon plots taken from myth, legend or fairy tales" (xiv). Cooper and Garner were among several names which Cook linked to this "development". She balanced the potential for this hybrid form to popularise ancient narratives amongst the young with a wariness about its capacity to supplant or misrepresent the originals, noting that "it is difficult to predict its effects for good or ill" (xv). In a 1970 study of contemporary children's literature, John Rowe Townsend places Garner's *The Owl Service* and Mayne's *Earthfasts* as peers of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, a novel he calls the "single masterpiece of English children's literature since the Second World War" (113). For Townsend, as for Pearce, Garner and Mayne's fantasies<sup>2</sup> shared a theme of "the irruption of old legend into modern life" (163).

As I have shown, such fantasies centring on real landscapes and legends were written and published within a culture that explicitly endorsed them, but were also dependent on a particular attitude to archaeology. I have selected four prolific authors of the Second Golden Age, and one from recent years, to explore the treatment of these themes in depth, and in the following section I briefly explain my reasons for selecting these five writers.

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<sup>2</sup> He also highlights two historical novels, Helen Cresswell's *The Piemakers* (1967) and K.M. Peyton's *Flambards* (1967)



iii. *My Choice of Texts*

A number of texts fall into the themes and temporal parameters outlined above. In addition to their interest in the archaeological imagination, I have selected texts which bear sustained critical analysis. In addition to this, while some notable texts stand out as meeting all these criteria (such as Jones' scholarly yet mischievous 1985 recasting of the tales of Tam Lin and Thomas the Rhymer, *Fire and Hemlock*) I have ruled them out if they present themselves as in some way atypical of the author's wider work. The authors chosen for this study have been chosen as akin in some way to Cooper, Lively and Garner as writers who made a sustained engagement with the same thematic material and tropes. A final distinction has been placed upon these selections, which was that the writers must have enjoyed some degree of popular or critical success in their period to the extent that they can be considered to reflect the evolving ideals and ideology of the Second Golden Age.

The multiple character of place and the liminal, interpreting role of the child protagonist are central tenets of this study. In the Garner's novel, *The Owl Service*, which had such a marked presence in children's culture 1960s and after (both in literature and TV), the multiple discourses of a Welsh valley become equally reified and present, and the task of the central protagonists is to perceive this multiple quality and understand it through a process of negotiation. The children of Susan Cooper's *Over Sea, Under Stone* follow secret passages and caves to protect an historic grail from ostensibly human authority figures (including a vicar) who in fact embody magical forces, underscored by Arthurian mythology. All these aspects are steadily developed throughout the sequence to present a system of meaning in which ancient British place is associated with folkloric fantasy. In Lively's first children's

novel, an Oxfordshire Neolithic stone circle is simultaneously a group of knights who must be called into action by the novel's protagonists to preserve the local area from the resurrected Arthurian figure of Morgan le Fay.

In all cases, the novel is characterised by an atmosphere of threatened disorder and even death. The brutality of the past and of folkloric or mythical narrative contribute to give a sense of incipient catastrophe. Though the novels often have multiple protagonists, these novels are defined by the singular experience of one sensitive child. Their negotiation with the components of a (single, identifiable) place is always, in at least some significant or notable instance, personal to them and unmediated by an adult character or (to varying degrees, with varying effect) a written text. In this encounter, the multiplicity of place will be revealed by the reification of its historic, folkloric or mythical, geographical and aesthetic components. All these aspects had to be in place to qualify a text for inclusion in this thesis.

Despite its obvious affinity with these themes, novels of the time-slip genre have been excluded due to their general exclusion of folk culture material. As I will argue, this strand problematises the mode of historical consciousness conventionally endorsed by time-slip novels. The relation of time-slip fantasies (such as Helen Cresswell's *Moondial* (1987), or Denis Hamley's *Pageants of Despair* (1974) to such ideas of folklore, place and identity would bear further study. For related reasons, the tale of high fantasy inspired by mythology or folklore (such as Lloyd Alexander's *The Book of Three*, 1964) are also excluded, as well as light rural fantasies such as the Worzel Gummidge books. Underlyingly, the texts of my corpus evoke and question the concept of place, which I define (guided by Michel de Certeau's work, discussed later) as the product of multiple discourses and narratives:

historical, geological and mythological. Where certain discourses are absent, this thesis has generally viewed those fictions as texts which deal with place as setting but not theme. This also means that, except for a highly specific mention in Chapter 5, this study does not cover the work of Mollie Hunter, whose novels show a strong affinity with this theme. For the most part, Hunter's novels are set in the past (or in the case of *The Stronghold* (1974), an imagined future) and only *The Bodach* (1970) (also known as *The Walking Stones*) deals with the same intersections of modern day and past, both folkloric and historical.

Porter and Mayne, bracketed by the *TLS* with Garner and Lively, produced a number of works in the Second Golden Age era for whom this intersection of contiguous worlds of past, present, fantasy and landscape were apparently self-evident. Both writers were well received by children's literature reviewers and recommended by literary gatekeepers, and both were winners of the annual Library Association Carnegie Medal for an "outstanding book for children" (as were Garner and Lively). Their work is subtle and consciously literary, and came to be involved in contemporary discussions of its suitability for child readers due to claims of didacticism, belletrism or complexity. For differing reasons, Mayne and Porter are no longer published for children and are underrepresented in children's literature criticism (particularly Sheena Porter). John Gordon and Judy Allen are also prolific children's writers who enjoyed popularity in the 1970s with the same focalised themes (Allen was a multiple literary award winner in 1988). Their work reflects the changing attitudes of the children's literature establishment toward horror and fantasy tropes, and themes of ecology and mysticism.

Together, these four writers illustrate an evolving, richly literary approach to writing for children from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. The thesis moves

chronologically, focusing on one author per chapter, and concludes by arguing for the legacy of this sensibility in the work of contemporary writers. The focus of this chapter is the novelist, Catherine Fisher, whose prolific works of fantasy deal repeatedly with themes of place, selfhood and British folklore. Fisher has, in the past, expressed her admiration for the work of Alan Garner, and I argue for the influence of the Second Golden Age's character on her work as a whole. Textually rich, and informed by her own archaeological research, Fisher provides a final point of continuity for the study, whilst exploring new and exciting territory.

### **Relationship to Other Work in the Field**

This study's emphasis on children's writers underrepresented by critics is influenced by, and founded upon, a wealth of critical work on other writers of this area. A number of writers including these major canonical figures, as well as John Gordon and Judy Allen, are explored in Peter Bramwell's exhaustive *Pagan Themes in Children's Literature* (2011). Bramwell explores the degree of adherence or distortion of authentic pagan approaches to nature, with an emphasis on those fictions that acknowledge or suppress implicitly feminist or environmental themes. Whilst many of the texts in my corpus deal with ideas of magic rooted in prehistory and folklore, it would be drastically simplistic to overtly associate them with pagan religion. In certain texts, however, the distinction of folkloric belief, religious belief and the fantastic is one of the interesting nuances of discourse, which, as I will argue, readers and protagonists are required to interpret.

There is an established critical discussion of children's literature and the concept of place, whether concerned with post-colonialism, new urban narratives or overt eco-criticism. Jane Carroll's study of Susan Cooper's 'Dark is Rising' Sequence will be of the greatest value to this study. Carroll utilises the language of geographical discourse to bridge between disciplines and critique the differing uses of fictional landscapes in producing literary meaning. "Landscape is not a passive background to Cooper's *Sequence* but has its own role within the events of the narrative and, at times, its own agency," she writes (80). Yet, she argues, it is not a generic category but can be represented in a multiplicity of forms within the text, such as bounded, urban or lapsed topoi (terms derived from the vocabulary of landscape theory, the latter being those sites defined by their association with the past). Each of these has its own symbolic function and significance within the text. Whilst not applying Carroll's adapted language to these fictional topoi, I intend to draw upon her conceptualisation of borderlines and liminality. One aspect of Carroll's exploration of Cooper's work is to appraise how it is informed by Old and Middle English poetry, particularly the Old English epic, *Beowulf*. The term of *mearcstapa*, which also belongs to folkloric material, is employed in that poem to refer to those unearthly figures therein who live in exile on borderlands, and who deliberately trespass on the boundaries and territories of the Danes. Carroll adopts term, glossing it as "boundary walker, the one who has a foot in the real and the unreal" to describe the distinctive figure of Will Stanton in *The Dark is Rising* (46). He is human and earthly but he inherits the supernatural mantle of the Old Ones, giving him sight beyond the everyday and the power to transcend the present moment and visit the past. Carroll likens him to such wandering figures as *The Dark is Rising*'s Walker and, in John Masefield's influential 1935 novel, *The Box of*

*Delights*, the transtemporal Punch and Judy man Cole Hawlings. I would argue that the same placeless, privileged yet dangerous role could be said to belong to other, less intrinsically fantastic protagonists such as Susan and Colin in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, or Mair in Lively's *Astercote*. Once these children trespass on the realm of the fantastic, they become boundary haunters, with their own territorial claim upon the "special spaces of childhood" which "follow the logic of fantasy and imagination, places conventionally viewed as, and here reiterated as, strictly off-limits to adults", as the editors of *Space and Place in Children's Literature, 1789 to the Present* (2015) characterise children's fantasy (Cecire, *et al* 1). One aspect of this study will be the significance of such trespasses on the fantastic when they are explicitly related to archaeological imagination, geographical orientation and spatial practice.

As already discussed, one of the most influential writers in Second Golden Age fantasy is Alan Garner, who received a thorough and respected critique in 1981's *A Fine Anger* by critic and folklorist Neil Philip. Critical scrutiny has been continual and consistent for this highly canonical author. Foremost among these is Butler's study, *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper* (2006), which, as previously indicated, is a formative text for this study. Garner and the other writers are considered with even-handed attention, with the notable effect of declaring the significance of Jones' work after years of critical neglect. Butler examines these four contemporaries in a socio-historic context, as writers who interrogate ideas of belonging and British identity in the twentieth century's historical and social shifts. As well as some coincidences of biography, Butler views these four writers as united by "a profound concern with time, myth, magic, the

nature of personal identity, and the potency of place” (7). Archaeology forms a major part of Butler’s study, analysed in multiple forms and texts in the chapter ‘Applied Archaeology’. Cooper, Garner and Lively’s interests in archaeology and history beyond their writing for children are highlighted, as is the capacity for an archaeological viewpoint to stratify place, time and identity and offer different models of interpretation and correlation, by characters and readers alike. In addition to demonstrating the thematic coherence of these writers, Butler considers the significance of their writing for a young audience. In this, she suggests, they acknowledge children’s experience of place and time in ways that disrupt simplistic viewpoints on childhood as either a developmental stage or lost realm: “[N]one of these writers is inclined to impose a sharp distinction between the two states “adult” and “child” ... The portrayal of the dynamic interaction (rather than abrupt division) between these states of [adult and child] is ... not in the end to be achieved by a reduction to fixed definitions or narrative formulae” (273). In this dynamic interaction, in my argument, they typify a progression in thinking about childhood that marks the Second Golden Age from that of the Edwardian era. My aim, in this study, is to explore the significance of such thematic interests beyond the most enduring and successful writers, and to consider its particular relationship to ideals of the children’s book establishment in the mid-twentieth century.

As previously described, my study is, in part, a response to Jacqueline Rose’s argument on children’s fiction, in which Rose highlighted the “impossible relation between adult and child”, and the fantasy of this relation which misrepresents the stability of adult, child and text (1). In Rose’s argument, any attempt to provide a literature for children is intrinsically defined by an idealised child-figure, inherited from Romanticism, embodying a lost state of innocence synonymous with pre-

literateness. Even in the case of Peter Pan, ostensibly a figure of adventure and otherness, Rose reads the anxious desire for a stable hierarchy of knowledge, agency and authority, dependent upon the fixed direction of this literary exchange. Such an exchange is, for Rose, characterised by “a form of investment by the adult in the child, and to the demand made by the adult on the child as the effect of that investment, a demand which fixes the child and then holds it in place” (4). The textual field in which adult and child are concerned, Rose argues, bears the task of stabilising this hierarchy and thereby cannot function as a literary text. In response to Rose, Kimberley Reynolds argues for a tradition of radical children’s literature which repeatedly destabilises such hierarchies, subverts narratives of stabilisation and even models of stabilised reading, and nourishes anti-establishment feeling (2007). She points to texts which highlight their own literary qualities or subvert ideas of textual stability, also the focus of John Stephens’ work on subjective reader positions. For John Stephens, a critic informed by Bakhtinian theory, “the negotiations between a reader and a text are analogous with the relations between a Self and an Other in actual world inter-personal discourse”, with the child reader particularly vulnerable to transmission of ideology through their interpretation of the implicit and “understood” in their readings of insufficiently dialogical texts (54). In Stephens’ analysis of the reading event, reader identification is key: the ideological reach of a text is judged by the extent to which the text persuades the reader into identification with the implied reader, perhaps even to the extent that they perceive themselves as identical with that figure and accept uncritically the implications and assumptions attached to it, therefore becoming purely subject to the text.

Like Reynolds, Stephens highlights those texts which foreground their own literariness, offer multiple points of identification or stress points of ambiguity in the



interpretation of the text. This position is explored at length by McCallum in her exploration of children's texts which employ radical, modernist strategies to “imply a context in which to formulate questions about subjectivity” (142) or to “explore what the lived consequences of subjectivity mean” (161). Such texts not only offer alternative approaches to the theme of maturation in the context of subjectivity, but prevent naturalised reader identification with the implied reader, or construct the implied reader as an active role, licensing or demanding the multiplicity or subjectivity of meaning. In the argument of this thesis, the archaeological imagination was intrinsic to a particular sensibility in Second Golden Age children’s fiction that exhibits various subversions of conventional child subjectivity of the kind highlighted by McCallum, Reynolds and Stephens.

In order to articulate this sensibility, beyond those major canonical writers, I have adopted the label of Neo-Romanticism. As Chapter 1 argues, the definition of this term (which has only rarely applied to written works as opposed to visual culture) has been in flux since its adoption in the 1920s. However, the relationship of the Neo-Romantic sensibility to the archaeological imagination is articulated in Kitty Hauser’s *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology and the British Landscape, 1927-1955* (2007). It is Hauser’s description of Neo-Romanticism as “a way of seeing as well as a style”, her observation “that there may be Neo-Romantic viewers as well as Neo-Romantic artists”, and her characterization of the archaeological imagination as, in fact, modern and non-preservationist that, in my view, energizes readings of these Second Golden Age fantasies (12). Whilst Hauser follows the majority of art criticism in restricting Neo-Romanticism to visual culture, and curtailing its period of influence in the mid-1950s, I have aimed to theorize and identify a field of Neo-Romantic writing in Chapter 1. As that chapter argues, the theories of Kimberley

Reynolds expressed in *Radical Children's Literature* (2007) inspire my proposal that children's literature "incubates" the Neo-Romantic sensibility after mainstream culture seemingly exhausts its possibilities (8).

Before addressing the theme of Neo-Romanticism, I will discuss the methodology with which these texts are explored.

### **Theoretical Perspective and Methodology**

#### *i. Michel de Certeau and the Child in Place*

As indicated by Butler's study of Garner et al, one of the fundamental themes of the Neo-Romantic trend in fantasy is the production, and interrogation of, place. Of the multiple major theoretical works on place, the philosopher Michel de Certeau's exploration of the production of place in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) best illuminates the strange relationship explored in these texts between historical sites and their sensitive inhabitants: indeed, his description of 'spatial practice' is explicitly characterised as joyfully 'childlike'. De Certeau's emphasis on the ideologically shaped constructedness of any given *topos* can account for the cultural meaningfulness of the 'spirit of place' with which child characters and readers engage, repeatedly, in these texts.

The context for de Certeau's work is fundamentally political: the 'everyday' he critiques is an effect of the artificial means (industrial practice, the law, city planning etc.) that control and manage life in society, but which come to appear natural and commonplace. His subject is a variety of strategies of resistance,

frequently overlooked because they take the form of acts of consumption, traditionally understood as a passive act. (Both means and responses are – or were, in advance of studies in social behaviour and popular culture – frequently overlooked in favour of critiquing its representation in art; de Certeau is concerned with resistance in actual, lived experience.) A single territory may be transformed from a *place* (in which the “law of the ‘proper’ rules”) to a *space* (which “occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it” and cannot be stable, univocal or ‘proper’) through the mode in which they are explored, that is, through our spatial practice (117).

Place, in de Certeau’s work, “implies an indication of stability” (117). It depends on the designating and organising of orders of significance upon the elements of a territory, by practice and narrative (including fiction, description, even idiomatic expressions – all narratives which give meaning to human activity). The concept of a space is directly related to that of place, but it is typified by mobility and change. It is place modified by ambiguity, defined by a place’s user through the nature of their usage (“like the word when it is spoken” as de Certeau puts it 117). Space is therefore, in de Certeau’s definition “a practiced place” (117). His examples are the geometrically defined street and the written text, each comprised of signs and becoming spaces through their use by walkers and readers, respectively. Every self-determined walk through a landscape, along a chosen route, ‘actualizes’ possibilities, creates a *here* and a *there*, and alters the nature of the place the walker explores. It is one means by which an individual experiences a profound sense of subjectivity and agency to the point of existentialism, and in de Certeau’s description it is intrinsically childlike in nature: to deploy spatial practices “is thus to repeat the

joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, *to be other and to walk toward the other*” (110-11).

Walking about a place – and the degree to which we are conscious of our route – is only one of the spatial practices (“ways of moving into something different”) analysed by de Certeau: talking about place is another, i.e. our sensitivity to the founding aspects of stories (even the most mundane, such as legal narratives about place ownership) (109). Story, per se, is a ‘delinquent’ entity, with no fixed existence within or outside any boundaries, but only “in the interstices” of its own codes (130). Whilst it articulates and marks out the boundaries of space, in doing so it charges those borderlines with narrative meaning. De Certeau contrasts the experience of the tour, which reflects the subjectivity and contingency of our childlike walk, with the artifice of the map, other cartographic practice and the discourse of legal ownership, which totalises our experience of time and place, effacing history, and correlating landscape features of different orders, times and narratives. He makes a clear analogy between narratives of place (which fix the limits of inhabitants’ claims on their landscape) and “the formation of myths, since they also have the function of founding and articulating spaces” (123). Such narratives continually seek to evoke singular versions of place, when in fact, “beneath the fabricating and universal writing of technology, opaque and stubborn places remain” (201). With his influence, we can perceive the question of place as a means of naturalising and dehistoricizing aspects of landscape to quite literally enshrine continuity and delimit its uses by inhabitants, through the artificial correlation of founding myths, lost rites and historical tradition. De Certeau argues that founding myths, legal discourse and mapmaking practice alike, deliberately evoke the ‘delinquent’ form of story in order to set boundaries, “bring[ing]

movement in through the very act of fixing, in the name of delimitation” (129).

Place, which feels numinous, is in fact strictly bounded; likewise, in these novels, such boundaries and their narratives are explored by a figure who is by convention the most overtly placed (and manoeuvred) in society by ideological doctrine.

The narrative of legal authority is frequently involved in a project of situating the child, whether barring their access or bringing them into direct contact as a subject of a developmental programme (or in short, the education system of their place and time). In the light of de Certeau’s theorization of place, we can understand the orienteering trend of the early twentieth century, characterised as “geography-citizenship” as a means of delimiting children’s spatial practice. This is nigh-on explicit in Woolley’s 1961 text, when he promises the rewards of archaeological activity “will not only serve you for the purposes of archaeology, which is after all more of a hobby than a career, but will also make you a wiser and happier citizen” (95). The significance of the child viewer, in the example of the Scouting movement, is to fix them as one of the elements of place and to characterise the place of the British countryside as a memorialising site. It is this memorialising of place that Krips is describing in her critique of Garner and others, in *The Presence of the Past*. However, as I have shown, the archaeological imagination endorsed by writers such as Copley and Grigson, whilst ostensibly following the geography-citizenship trend, permits a certain agency and irrationality on the part of the child viewer. Whether as Copley’s detective or Grigson’s time traveller, the child as archaeological viewer innately perceives the delinquent character, and constructedness, of place narratives. In the novels of the Second Golden Age, they may even, as I will argue, learn to explore place in ways that frustrate legal, educational and parental authority, highlighting for readers the boundaries of place, space, narrative and temporality.

Such delinquency, in de Certeau's own writing, is not only profoundly subjective but intrinsically childlike. Once again, such a formulation is open to criticism as a re-inscription of the Romanticist model of childhood. I will now argue that it is the active and engaged task of reading and discursive interpretation which transcends this model and typifies the novels of my corpus.

ii. *Bakhtin, Polyphony and the Chronotope*

In my earlier quotation of Garner's *Moon of Gomrath* postscript, I suggested that effacing the differences between "genuine" and "made-up" forms of discourse (all converging, in this case, on the place of ancient Cheshire) produces a challenge for the child reader, a sense of disorientation with regard to historical authenticity in which they are invited to pause and interpret. Few children's novels have a bibliography of sources, and the ones quoted by Garner exhibit huge variety without much authorial comment: the ancient Welsh myth-cycle of the *Mabinogion* alongside Robert Graves' mythopoeic study *The White Goddess* (1948) and the interwar mysticism of Alfred Watkins' *The Old Straight Track* (1925), proponent of ley-lines and "full of the most romantic elements of archaeology and folk-lore" (171). If the object of archaeology is, as Butler describes it, to correlate space and time, making it appropriate to novelistic explorations of Britain's spirit of place, it must do so by correlating a series of forms of objective and subjective evidence: cultural, historical, material (57). This strong mixture is best understood in Mikhail Bakhtin's use of the term 'polyphony'.

Though deriving from different contexts and with different emphases, Bakhtin's theory and the work of de Certeau share a political impetus and seek

strategies of resistance to dominating and homogenising discourses. Bakhtin stresses the value of the novel form as the medium that best illuminates the relationship of power, discourse and the individual's consciousness. In Bakhtin's criticism, the textual world of the novel is presented as a demonstration of the way self is constituted, continuously, in dialogue with the other. Philosophically, Bakhtin does not consider 'being' as a meaningful experience in isolation from the other: in the context of literature, he sees the novel as an opportunity to reveal and subvert this interrelationship.

The novel in Bakhtinian terms presents an interanimation of voices of differing status, reflecting and critiquing the dialogic nature of language and culture. It has an inherently subversive quality, in which all discourses of authority, the narrator's voice included, interweave and respond to one another in such a way that no final authority holds sway, as David Lodge describes it, "to make interpretive closure in the absolute sense impossible" (23). Dialogism, like other Bakhtinian concepts, has been a useful tool despite its subtlety and, as his critics have observed, an ambiguity over Bakhtin's own original use of the term. It is important to bear in mind that the concept of polyphony belongs to its inventor's conception of culture and society: multiple discourses pervade all aspects of society in his view, and it is not possible for a novel to fail to be dialogical. Like other cultural productions, however, it is possible for its dialogical qualities to be suppressed in an attempt to produce a monological text. In such texts, even alternative or opposed voices are informed by a single dominating discourse. In the context of Bakhtin's work, such monological texts represent authoritarian tendencies: they may constitute overt acts of propaganda, or equally they may be novels whose dialogical aspects have been

compromised in some way. It is such monological texts that Stephens expresses concern over, as described earlier in this chapter.

Bakhtin is particularly useful, with de Certeau, in exploring the relationship of polyphonous discourse to constructions of both place and identity in children's subjective experience. In his philosophy of discourse, selfhood is constructed out of a continual dialectic. It is also produced in direct relation to societal ideology, which in many of my focus texts is signified by various kinds of narrative about place. Thus, the depictions of extreme alterity and heightened subjectivity – and the novels of my corpus are frequently accounts of alienation or solitude – may be understood as disruptions of signification between those individuals' constructions of selfhood and the common discourses that construct their sense of place. In Bakhtin's view, being and ideology are constituted of the same objective, materially embodied signs: "And nowhere is there a break in the chain, nowhere does the chain plunge into inner being, nonmaterial in nature and unembodied in signs" (52). In works such as my focus texts that explore crises in interpretation of the objective world, dialogism shows how subjective identity is discursively related to history, social interaction and even the apparently voiceless landscape are all related through the materiality of signs. In the successfully dialogic novel, constructions and crises of self are related through a concern for objective systems of discourse, whether myth, local history, geological strata, or whatever is suitable.

The affinity of the reader or archaeologist for landscape is also illuminated by Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope*. The nuances of this literary feature (not to be simplistically understood as a mere device or theme) are useful in understanding how subjectivity (key to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism) is embodied through interrelationships of space and time in material discourse. Deriving from Bakhtin's



essay 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' (1937), the concept derives from then-contemporary Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity, a paradigm shift in thinking about the Universe as an object inseparable from processes of objectification and from its observers themselves. In Einstein's work, the events of spacetime are made more complex through the introduction of subjectivity: depending on where you and another observer are in relation to two separate events, they may or may not happen simultaneously. Bakhtin's use of Einstein's theory, either as a literary metaphor or itself as a metaphor for a literary device, is not entirely clear or consistent; critics have made use of subtly different uses of the term since it came to popularity in the 1970s. In Bakhtin's own description, the chronotope is, textually, "a concrete whole" in which "[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Morris 84). As Liisa Steinby observes, after Michel Holquist, the chronotope is both a form of experience and of representation, not a single device or trope within a text but an optic for understanding how such interrelationships function within the text. Graham Pechey, among others, has argued that a plurality of chronotopes is characteristic of the novel form, and that one individual novel may even be said to contain multiple chronotopes.

Certainly, it makes sense to explore my corpus with the optic of the chronotope, and to consider each of them as a correlation of chronotopic perspectives on place. In many of these novels, this correlation is often instigated by a modern child with a material object that prompts a multiplicity of approaches to place: an earthwork, a standing stone, a body. In one novel explored by this thesis, an amateur archaeologist explains the study required to understand ancient

megaliths: “Archaeology, astrology, astronomy, geology, geography, mythology, folklore, mathematics and geometry. All very relevant to the problem in hand, and each one works of a lifetime’s study” (Allen, *Stones of the Moon* 26). This polyphonic response to the material world is typical of Children’s Neo-Romantic novels in general, and produces some fascinating texts.

### **Organisation of the Study**

The significance of de Certeau’s work evolves through the critique of my focal texts, as differing writers approach the idea of children’s agency in exploring and interpreting the constituents of place. Throughout the study, I consider the extent to which the figure of the child perceives the boundaries that delimit place and perspective, and in what ways the implied reader is conscious of such boundaries being emphasised, bridged or effaced altogether. The perception of such boundaries as produced through a polyphony of discourses, and of such discourses’ relatedness to their subjects, varies from writer to writer, and the contrast between such depictions of child spatial practice is revealing. I argue that such invitations are intrinsic to Children’s Neo-Romanticism, but some approaches, and the related effects of insight or disorientation, are more radical than others.

In Chapter 1, I will put the argument for my use of the term ‘Children’s Neo-Romanticism’ to characterise the sensibility in evidence throughout my corpus. The thesis then progresses in roughly chronological order from the early 1960s to the end of the 1970s, exploring, in successive chapters, the work of Sheena Porter, William Mayne, John Gordon and Judy Allen. Each writer’s differing approach entails a new

emphasis: the drama of subjectivity, ways of seeing, childlike spatial practice, and the public perception of Britain's ancient culture. In the concluding chapter, I consider the legacy of Children's Neo-Romanticism in the work of a contemporary writer, Catherine Fisher.

## **Chapter 1: “The Memory of the World”: The Neo-Romantic Sensibility, Being-Here and Intersubjectivity**

Whilst the archaeological imagination pervades twentieth-century children’s literature, this study is concerned with its treatment in a Neo-Romanticist mode. Neo-Romanticism originated in visual art of the 1920s and grew to prominence in the 1930s and 40s; more recent studies have also argued for its influence in cinema and photography. As Andrew Radford observes with regard to the Modernist writer Mary Butts, critics have not yet weighed how “Neo-Romantic intellectual themes and disputes modify interwar novelists’ descriptive capacities and psychological enquiries,” nor how “[referring] to Neo-Romanticism energises a reading of Butts” (x). I argue that our understanding of Second Golden Age children’s literature is likewise invigorated through recognition of its Neo-Romantic traits: the modernist, surrealist character given to its visions of landscape, the relation of such visions to depictions of selfhood, and the particular inflections Neo-Romanticism gives to the archaeological imagination.

In this chapter, I prepare the ground for the rest of this study by arguing for a thematically consistent, historically aligned and excitingly heterogenous body of twentieth-century writing characterized by the same Neo-Romanticism. Covering the two decades between the Modernist equations of Paul Nash in the 1930s to the geological fantasia of Jacquetta Hawkes, considering magic spells, grail quests and green children, I intend to demonstrate how Neo-Romantic artists and writers revel in modernist innovations and archaeological discovery, whilst emphasising their

affinity with Romanticist feeling, correlated by advances in archaeological practice. I conclude the chapter by considering how the Neo-Romantic sensibility illuminates this study's critique of intersubjectivity, agency and child development narratives in the Second Golden Age.

### 1.1 Characterising the Children's Neo-Romantic Sensibility

Geographically, this corpus covers the Welsh Marches, Yorkshire, the Cambridgeshire fens, Wiltshire and Somerset; rural locations, villages, towns and the city of Bath; romantic hillsides, unremarkable farmland, and the familiar if mysterious shape of the stone circle. Its consistent trope, however, is the child protagonist looking out on the view. Drawn by something magnetic in the scene, away from their fellow campers (in *Nordy Bank*), family (in *A Parcel of Trees* and *It*), friends (in *The House on the Brink*) or even school (*The Stones of the Moon*), the solitary child figure walks toward the deserted landscape. When school trips take them to the same scenes, there is no innate appeal to these individuals; its value is highly subjective for them. "Isn't it nice to have something secret?" the protagonist of Sheena Porter's *The Scapegoat* says to her friend, looking out on the site of a ruined church (59). Yet their experiences as a result of engagement with landscape are typically ones of fear and disorientation.

The threat in these novels commonly belongs to the ancient past; it doesn't time-slip in order to manifest itself, but is revived or unearthed, although rarely through physical excavation. Its consistent feature throughout my corpus is a resistance to visual representation; as William Mayne describes one image, they

belong to “another sort of universe that was there but could not be noticed” (*It* 53). The threat is variously an unseen force, a flaw in perception, invisible to most or all characters, impossible to identify, or an ineffable pattern of energy. The protagonists typically invoke it through their close attention to the landscape, and look through it or into it, unavoidably gazing deeper into the substance of the countryside; through this repeated motif, a trope emerges of the child troubled by aspects of their own perception of place. The Romanticist child of Blake and Wordsworth may be understood as a figure of visions, but in the focus texts of this thesis, such visionary activity is unwilling and unwanted. The long association of Neo-Romanticism with visual media is one reason for its usefulness in addressing such visions.

“Neo-Romanticism is itself a danger for the writer seeking to describe it,” as Kitty Hauser puts it, rather ominously (10). Radford concurs, saying “[w]hat comprises Neo-Romanticism and its cultural legacies is notoriously tricky to delimit” (1). The identity of the Neo-Romantic sensibility has evolved in the critical consciousness since its earliest usage, allowing its use in new kinds of territory without crude acts of juxtaposition. Having been applied to, but never adopted by, wartime artists such as Paul Nash and John Piper, the term of ‘Neo-Romanticism’ has also been (in the work of Stella Hockenull, among others’) attached to the ‘Archers’ film production team, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, for their lyrical, technically modern fantasies of English identity. In Peter Woodcock’s *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries* (2000), the term is explored and, in my opinion, too freely applied to a wide variety of writers, artists and film-makers, from the inarguable (John Minton, Graham Sutherland and John Cowper Powys) to the rather more arguable (David Lean, Samuel Palmer and Iain Sinclair); elsewhere, however, there has been an

under-appreciation of the Neo-Romantic sensibility's pervasiveness and significance. Its credibility as a movement diminished in the middle of the twentieth century, but was revived through exhibitions such as David Mellor's 'A Paradise Lost?' survey at the Barbican gallery, in 1987. As Hauser interprets it, both Mellor's exhibition and his accompanying publication, suggest that Neo-Romanticism may be better thought of as a sensibility, or "as a way of seeing as well as a style; that there may be Neo-Romantic viewers as well as Neo-Romantic artists" (12). Hauser suggests that arguing for Neo-Romanticism as a sensibility in this way, rather than a style, requires further work of delineation by the critic than was included or required in Mellor's project. Her work valuably locates the sensibility historically within a context of archaeology's changing cultural significance, citing the role of the aerial view and *Antiquity* magazine. It is my aim, in this chapter, to make that delineation and theorization of Neo-Romanticism, in order that its influence in twentieth-century writing may be better understood and examined, and thus employed in understanding the children's fiction of the Second Golden Age.

## **1.2 Paul Nash, John Piper and Graham Sutherland: Modern Britain's genius loci**

The only conscious adoption of the term was its initial use by a group of émigré Russian painters in Paris in the 1920s and 30s, but since its first, tentative application by Raymond Mortimer in 1942 it has become particularly associated with images of Britain, albeit ones informed by modern art movements of continental Europe. That school of 1942 featured landscape specialists Piper and Graham Sutherland, and draughtsman and sculptor Henry Moore. All three were employed officially as war

artists in World War II, as was Nash, who had also served in the Artists' Rifles of World War I. Their work applies surrealist and expressionist strategies to (uninhabited) scenes of violence and disturbance, depicting the imperilled landscape in new colours, styles and perspectives to present it as a place never quite seen before and yet embodying a deeper sense of time than modern civilisation could gauge. Other artists of the era are identified with the movement through their adoption of obviously similar themes (the Arcadian landscapes of John Craxton, the spectral fantasies of Edward Burra, the surreal visions of Cecil Collins) or through their promotion by the same publications (notably Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* journal and John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing* series).

The Second World War, in Hockenhull's words, "operated as a catalyst for the intersection of ideas which in the visual arts demonstrated a preoccupation with the sublime aspects of nature, rendered through various codes and conventions" (179). Certainly, the ideology which characterised these artists' work had already been articulated and debated since before the Second World War and threat of invasion. Its most influential figure, Nash, in some senses belonged to the previous generation of artists, being a child of the 1880s and artistic figure of the 1920s. Nash earned hero status among young artists through his embrace of new and Modern ways of thinking when others scorned them as modish and alien; Nash mocked the detractors with a 'Week-End Review' article on their anxieties on 'Going Modern and Being British' (1932). With poet and critic Herbert Read (of whom more later), Nash established a group of Modernist artists and architects (including Edward Burra) with the dynamic title 'Unit 1'. Although the group only exhibited once before disbanding, Nash's accompanying treatise on English art is an impassioned



endorsement of modern art as part of a tradition beginning with such Romantics as Blake and Wordsworth:

“There seems to exist ... an imprisoned spirit. [...] If I were asked to describe this spirit I would say it is of the land: *genius loci* [i.e. the spirit of place] is indeed almost its conception. If its expression could be designated I would say it is almost entirely lyrical. [Like Blake and Turner,] we, today, must find new symbols to express our reaction to environment. In some cases this will take the form of an abstract art, in others we may look for some different nature of imaginative research. But in whatever form, it will be a subjective art.” (qtd. in Causey 109)

Nash was a subscriber to Crawford’s *Antiquity* journal of archaeological discovery, and from the 1930s his work increasingly explores scenes of the British countryside, dwelling on particular objects such as trees, stones, and pillars. Inspired by exciting new surrealist trends, which have a similar Romantic investment in the imagination, he evokes the drama of subjectivity, the sense of objects becoming suddenly meaningful through ancient or natural design, as if a walk in the countryside had the same inevitable condition of a dream. In the *Architectural Review*, he writes, “I began gradually to discover that [the Dorset seaside town] Swanage was definitely, as the saying is, surrealist” (qtd. in Fraser Jenkins 126). His *Swanage* collages – and the motoring guidebook he wrote for Shell about the town – make that sense explicit. Yet rather than seek correspondences for his own dream images, he focused – under the influence of *Antiquity*, perhaps – on objects with their own inherent resistance to easy definition, making monochrome trees loom menacingly in his *Monster Field*, while the ancient stones of Avebury appear to stare the viewer down in his photographs. Michael Remy’s evocation of Nash’s viewpoint

is, I would argue, that of the archaeological imagination, inventing an “order which fuses the past and the present, the organic and the inorganic, the interior and the exterior, and the encounter of ‘event’ ... becomes the initial reconstruction of a world which we have lost and which we must find again” (Remy 1986 42). The particular aim of reconstruction noted here is intimately and historically related to the trauma of twentieth-century conflict. It typifies Neo-Romanticism’s fantasies of reformation as well as its moods of violence and melancholy.

Two of Nash’s peers, Piper and Sutherland, had the same interest in archaeological themes. Piper famously compared a photo of the ever-enigmatic earthwork Silbury Hill, almost unrecognisable in this image from above, with a painting by Joan Miro, and his work frequently depicts ruined buildings with a drama that, like Nash’s trees and stones, suggests an apprehension of their innate meaning in the condition of incompleteness. Sutherland comes closer than Nash or Piper to full abstraction in paintings such as *Black Landscape* (1939-40) where a range of Welsh hills and trees looks half-animal, rearing up in ominous black and crimson against a sky of the same bloody hues. Unlike Nash and Piper, Sutherland was not given his own Shell motoring guide to curate (the idea conjures up an apocalyptic and disturbing motoring holiday), but his viewpoint was endorsed through commission of a giant mural for the ‘Land of Britain’ pavilion in the 1950 Festival of Britain. This mural re-envisioned the prehistoric landscape of Britain as peopled with strange forms, which erupted directly out of the earth. Together with Nash and Piper’s motoring guides, Sutherland’s mural illustrates the proximity of such surrealist imagery to mainstream media, reflecting contemporaneous cultural drive for national heritage and geographer-citizenship explored by Krips and Matless respectively.

Like Sutherland, Moore's profile was high enough (and close enough to the zeitgeist) that his work was prominently featured in the Festival of Britain. His *Reclining Figure* was sculpted out of plaster before being cast in bronze, in which form it sat outside the 'Land of Britain' pavilion which "activated the correspondences found in Moore's earlier work between body and landscape" (Correia). Positioned in such proximity to Sutherland's otherworldly creations it is likely to have produced a sense of consonance in the minds of visitors, too, with Moore's figure only schematically recognisable as a human form: partly skeletal, partly fleshy, partly there and partly not. In *A Land* (1951), Hawkes emphasised Moore's affinity with prehistoric forms and his almost passive role "of a sympathetic agent giving expression to the stone, to the silting of ocean beds shown in these fine bands that curve with the sculpture's curves, and to the quality of the life that shows itself in the delicate marking made by shells, corals and sea-lilies" (103). Moore, who illustrates Hawkes' extraordinary book with crayon drawings of reclining women and 'Knights and Kirtled Ladies Waiting for Creation', is central to her subject by virtue of his sympathetic mediation of stone, life and place. In her view, the delicate markings visible to the geologically-minded archaeologist are suffused with potential for the 'sympathetic agent' who chooses to work with them.

Moore was the "sympathetic agent" in this example of Hawkes's, but her description equally describes Nash (whom she praises elsewhere in the book) and Sutherland (whose idiosyncratic mural for the Festival would have been her selection – Hawkes was curator of the 'Land of Britain' pavilion). Although catalysed by the trauma of wartime, the Neo-Romantic sensibility was in fact defined by such ways of seeing and instances of sympathy. As I will show, protagonists such as Bron in

*Nordy Bank*, *Alice in It*, and *Sulis* in *Crown of Acorns* are defined by their sympathetic and creative responses to the materiality of place.

### **1.3 The Archaeological Imagination, Romantic Legacies and Being-Here**

Published on the brink of a new era in Britain's self-perception, *A Land* stands at the end of an era of modernist writing with Romantic emphasis. As I will argue, its imaginative reverie is directly associated with an urgent sense of being-here, crystallised through the particularity of the scene: a garden in Hampstead, the quality of chalk in Moore's sculpture, or the bemusing awareness of Lyme Regis's ancientness (quoted in my Introduction). Such particular details are simultaneously part of that self-perception in the midst of a new internationalist spirit, and such instances of high subjectivity lead, for Hawkes, Piper and others, into a heightened intersubjectivity. Under the influence of the Neo-Romantic sensibility, the nationalist overtones of geographer-citizenship are replaced by evidence of something mutable and self-aware, with consequences of our understanding of my focal texts.

*A Land* restates the Neo-Romantic sensibility from the informed position of an experienced archaeologist. Hawkes studied at Cambridge in a time when women were not awarded a degree on completion, undertaking field work at Colchester and later Palestine, where she was moved by the excavation of Neanderthal remains. Her first book was published in 1939, and several more followed. *A Land*, however, contains no biography beyond the immediate moment: Hawkes lying back in her garden, ruminating on time and consciousness. Her reverie, which resonates with de Certeau's endorsement of heightened place-consciousness, contains, for her, the

sublime power of multiple possibilities. She narrates the birth of our planet, the gradual emergence of continents, the production of a discrete set of islands called Britain, and (departing from science) the development of consciousness intimately linked with that place and identity. It is a fine path to tread, but Hawkes' concern with national identity is intended as part of an open, internationalist feeling that recalls Nash's meditation on *genius loci* for Unit 1: "Like everyone else within the walls of these islands I am a European, and as a European committed utterly to *la volonté de la conscience et la volonté de la découverte*. To enjoy, to create (which is to love) and to try to understand is all that at the moment I can see of duty" (13). Her work is distinguished by a pronounced effort of intersubjectivity: "It is ... as an integral part of the process that I claim to tell the story of the creation of what is at present known as Britain, a land which has its own unmistakable shape at this moment of time" (10).

Such intersubjectivity is inflected with notions of what might be called extra-subjectivity germane to the era, such as the theories of collective unconscious explored by Carl Jung and the experiments with time and free-floating consciousness promoted by J.W. Dunne<sup>3</sup>. The emphasis throughout Hawkes' extraordinary argument, however, is on the imaginative perception of aspects of the world beyond our experience, in which context geologists and archaeologists are not merely conventional scientists but "instruments of consciousness who are engaged in reawakening the memory of the world" (26). Hawkes wrote from experience, and

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<sup>3</sup> The influence of Dunne's extremely popular theories may be seen in some of the time slip fantasies earlier described, and more overtly in the 'Time Plays' of writer J.B. Priestley, who in 1953 married Jacquetta Hawkes. The couple contributed a co-authored fantasy story to Thames Television's 1975 anthology series for children, *Shadows*. Their story, 'The Other Window', features a prototype of a glass that shows events of the past, which fortunately melts when Cromwellian soldiers look back through it threateningly. See Chapter 6 for an exploration of other children's fantasy television in the 1970s.

this particular text is a clear acknowledgement of what Michael Shanks would later describe as the archaeological imagination.

Whilst not intending to bracket *A Land* with High Modernist works, I feel it is worth considering the contemporaneous trend in writing, observed by Pericles Lewis, for “borderline states of consciousness, forms of the divided self, the process of conversion, the function of ritual, the magical potential inherent in words, moments of subjective experience, and the relationship between social life and sacred power” (5). Lewis reads such work as evidence for an insistent preoccupation with the terms of spiritual feeling in an era that High Modernist writers avowed as innately secular. *A Land*’s avant-garde, self-reflexive approach suggests the influence of High Modernist writing about place and history, such as Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941) and Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1943). The legacies of Romanticism in Modernist writing, sometimes deliberately obscured by the writers themselves, comprise a growing field of Romanticist research. In the introduction to his *Romantic Presences in the Twentieth Century*, Mark Sandy argues that such “Modern and contemporary engagements with Romanticism are also often marked by a feeling of dispossession, a self-aware absence of authenticity, and an unfulfilled longing”, echoing Lewis on High Modernism (5).

Lewis typifies Woolf’s sacralising concept, in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) of “making of the moment something permanent” as a return to the sublime which makes her “very much the heir of the Romantics” and a “Wordsworthian interest in the mind’s power to transform reality” (159). Hawkes’ sense of transcendence through close attention to the material world, highly conscious of the being-here resembles Woolf’s Romantic inheritance given a decided archaeological character. Piper, who, like Nash, published art criticism as well as working extensively in the

‘field’ itself, argued that such an approach was innately Neo-Romantic. His 1942 book *British Romantic Artists* was his own approach to the subject broached by Nash for Unit 1, namely the dominant Romantic gene in the lineage of British art linking Turner with Nash and his contemporaries, but with a different emphasis to Nash, as Alexandra Harris explains. In a letter to Nash (explaining the selection of a distinctly un-mystical Nash watercolour of Piper’s own garden as the book’s conclusion) Piper insisted that “dreams are *not* as romantic as bits of real experience” (qtd. Harris 155). For Piper, the Romantic sublime does not have to be engineered out of mystical associations: it is invoked in the immanence of being-here and crystallised by artistic fixation on the detail of a place. Again, the ideology and practice of Neo-Romanticism can be seen to affirm de Certeau’s joyous sense of subjectivity in the act of walking in the city. Both depend upon a sense of the particular to heighten or sacralise the present moment, without any need of the religious or otherwise infinite cosmos. Piper’s interests, coloured by historical circumstance, are perhaps illustrated by his enthusiasm for Recording Britain, the scheme for capturing British scenes under immediate threat from war or industry.

This styling of Neo-Romantic feeling is seen most overtly in the following chapter, on the work of Sheena Porter. Here, the imminent destruction of the protagonist’s home produces a sense of existential reverie. Other fantastic approaches, in works by Mayne and Gordon, threaten a sense of cataclysm which likewise charges the uninhabited scene with urgency and intensity, and in the work of Allen, new environmental themes recontextualise a similar kind of threat to the countryside, not only materially but in terms of its continuity and sanctity.

Throughout my study, I return to the Neo-Romantic emphasis on a heightened sense

of being-here and intersubjectivity that the particularity of landscape is shown to engender.

#### **1.4 Three Neo-Romantic Writers and their Approaches to Archaeology**

Although a sensibility defined by visual media and perception, the continual redefinition of Neo-Romanticism's character since 1942 makes it easily adaptable to discussion of literary texts, particularly given Nash and Piper's own written work and the close thematic relation of prose works by Hawkes, Butts, John Cowper Powys and Herbert Read. Such texts illuminate other thematic concerns of Neo-Romanticism, such as the relation of heightened subjectivity to objective discourse, be it symbolic or literary. As much a part of Nash's interest in subjective experience was his search for objective systems of equation. The confidently expressed but essentially mysterious example of his own attitude to such 'imaginative research' is directly engaged with prehistoric, archaeological objects and their correlation to the spirit of place:

“Last summer I walked in a field near Avebury where two rough monoliths stand up, sixteen feet high ... A mile away, a green pyramid casts a gigantic shadow. In the hedge at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun. In my art I would solve such an equation.”

(Causey 109-10)

One solution, represented by his 1935 oil painting *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, is a dreamish vision of what might be Avebury, transposing formal geometric shapes in place of the Neolithic standing stones, “to recreate the dream in



which such disparate elements can co-exist in an irrational order that nevertheless possesses an imaginative truth” (Wilson 178). Other paintings such as *Pillar and Moon* (1932-40) invite the viewer to respond to the implications of what Nash described as “the mystical association of two objects which inhabit different elements and have no apparent relation in life. ... [Its intended power] is to call up memories and stir emotions in the spectator...” (qtd. Fraser Jenkins 153).

Other literary approaches to place and history demonstrate this same concern for objective language. Mary Butts was a High Modernist contemporary of Woolf’s, and her prolific output has a constant thematic unity: a passionate, deeply felt and sometimes bitter exploration of the condition of the sacred in Britain. In *Ashe of Rings* (1925), she writes semi-autobiographically of how its heroine, Vanna’s place in a great house is usurped by another woman, who attacks her (and is repelled) through a series of magical manoeuvres. Describing this magic exchange to her oblivious mother, Vanna observes with pointed irony that “One form of insanity is a weakness for symbolic action” (230); in internal discourse, the character merely says, “Oh damn analogies [sic]” (231). Elsewhere, however, such symbolic analogies are presented by Butts as a mark of elite knowledge, a “very peculiar kind of awareness ... sometimes lost by people whose life has been passed in towns ...” (*Warning* 312). Patrick Wright highlights the unstable hermeneutics of Butts’ prose, “a writing which foregrounds the operation of the text and its productivity over meaning ... a writing full of panic at the realisation that the world it craves can, for very good historical reasons, no longer exist anywhere *but* in texts; and in bizarrely Gothic, cranky and hallucinatory texts at that” (106). It is self-consciously discursive in its efforts to claim, articulate and control the discourse of space, place and history.

The magic symbolic order in which Butts reads meaning out of the countryside is, in my view, intrinsic to the Children's Neo-Romanticism of my corpus and its equivalence of scientific and folkloric discourse. In *Armed with Madness* (1928), the character Scylla seems almost to be describing Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* when she says, that "odd things were always happening and old patterns repeated themselves", and that when it does, "Freud [is] very useful in the case of irrational fear" (16). The finding of what may be an ancient grail is likened to ritual, which places its witness "in a state of consciousness unique to him. Not vision, but wonder become a state..." (140). Yet, just as the auratic child throughout my corpus is defined by their solitude, not everyone who perceives the grail is a witness in Butts' work, and such wonders only signify "cyclical patterns of land-holding and esoteric knowledge" which "coalesce to form a vehement nativism" (Radford 137). Her work advises us to be cautious of Neo-Romanticist ideology, and of the trope of the solitary child as sympathetic agent.

The extraordinary and idiosyncratic Wessex novels of John Cowper Powys take an entirely different approach to the equivocality of place and the processes which define it, again inspired by the power of the archaeological imagination and the contemporary quest for objective sacralising discourse. Powys relates the modern challenge of understanding place through history and myth to projects of citizenship, industry and control with openly political overtones. Brother of two idiosyncratic writers in their own right<sup>4</sup>, Powys was already in his early sixties and an established writer when excavation of Maiden Castle began in 1934. Exploration of this Iron

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<sup>4</sup> T.F. Powys is another writer whose strongly religious, place-oriented novels deserve characterisation as Neo-Romantic, as in his mystic fantasy *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, in which God arrives in a small town in Dorset in the guise of a travelling salesman, stopping time long enough to dispense death or enlightenment in liquid form to the squabbling inhabitants

Age hillfort in Dorset was supervised by Sir Mortimer Wheeler, a high-profile figure associated with the vogue for archaeology in the early twentieth century<sup>5</sup>, and Powys took a deep interest in the proceedings, which he fictionalises in his novel *Maiden Castle*. In Powys's novel, reflection on the meaning of the excavation event is complicated through the figure of Uryen, who may be the reincarnation of an ancient deity, a madman or a conservationist with a rich vocabulary: "I've been the Power that's older than all this damned sunshine, the Power that's older than all these new Gods ... You can cry out, lad, if you like, that it's all fantasy and illusion, you can cry out that your excavations set it at naught; but I tell you that sooner or later you'll know it as I know it!" (252) The reader is left to judge his significance, but in any case, he is significant as a voice of scepticism over the ideology of archaeological practice, even describing the Maiden Hill excavation as a work of vivisection.

*A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) features no physical excavation but multiple acts of imaginary archaeology. The novel is set in motion by a controversial bequest to Johnny Geard, incoming Mayor of Glastonbury and a zealous believer in the existence of the Holy Grail. Geard intends to use the bequest to stage a massive Midsummer pageant blending history, Christian scripture and Arthurian legend, a characteristically British reimagining of the Oberammergau Passion Play, to make Glastonbury a new mystic centre for the world. The many opposing discourses to be balanced by readers are suggested by this interior monologue, one of many:

Comrade Spear wanted to "liquidate" the Grail quest on behalf of

Communism, Red Robinson wanted to destroy it because of the treacheries

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<sup>5</sup> Besides his knighthood, Sir Mortimer's high profile is indicated in his award for Television Personality of the Year in 1954. He makes a cameo appearance during a sequence in Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising*

and oppositions it had condoned. He [Paul Trent] had wanted to shake it off, as a morbid, medieval superstition, hurtful to free spirits, like a clammy miasma! And all this while, Old [Johnny] Geard was working his miracles by its aid; but casually, carelessly, almost indifferently, as if he had discovered that the whole Grail Quest were only a mere by-product of some vast planetary reservoir of an unknown force. (Powys 1000)

What is the place of the Grail in this? It is never physically retrieved and so takes a similar role to that in Butts' Modernist psychodrama: the object of a search for some objective language, through which the disinheritance and disintegration of the land will be redeemed. Geard's pageant inspires violent social agitation from local workers because, Radford argues, "Arthur betokens ... another one of those conquerors who told the luckless and the lowly that they had no right to forget, let alone glorify, their own emblems of tradition" (94). It could be argued that Powys' novels are a semi-real setting in which avatars of Hawkes, Butts, Wheeler and himself tussle for the true significance of Glastonbury's archaeological heritage.

A third interesting piece of Neo-Romantic prose, published two years after *A Glastonbury Romance*, is shorter but more overtly linked to the imagery of Nash and Hawkes, integrating revolutionary politics with English folklore and the imaginative resonance of geology. *The Green Child* (1934) is the work of Herbert Read, who, despite a knighthood in 1953, ought to be perceived as very much an enabler and promoter of Modernism, Surrealism and the avant-garde in Britain: his friendship with some of Britain's most radical artists (including Nash, Moore, and Barbara Hepworth) led to him, as described earlier, becoming part of the Unit One movement, and working at Routledge publishing he introduced Samuel Beckett's

*Murphy* (1938), Simone Weil, and poets such as Geoffrey Grigson (whose *Looking and Finding* was described in my Introduction).

Kieron Winn describes Read, the poet, as an integrator of “disparate twentieth-century elements [into] a salutary brand of modernism which is refreshing and regenerative”, which “at the same time exemplif[ies] and continu[es] the distinctly English romantic tradition of attachment to nature” (Winn 28). In 1934, *The Green Child*, his only novel, exemplifies the same characteristics, telling of the return of Olivero to his childhood home in Yorkshire after a strange career in the politics of South America, in search of the green child of folklore: for Olivero, “beings half-human and half-angel, intermediate between the grossness of earth and the purity of heaven” (120). Having rescued the child, he moves with her into a subterranean utopia where Olivero himself attains the honour of transmutation in the “petrifying-trough” into one and the same, sacred “crystal harmony” as his lover, Siloën, the green child (153).

According to Katharine Briggs (1967), the story of the green children which so fascinates Olivero (and seemingly Read himself), is real, so far as English folklore goes. Read’s surreal text transplants the story to an imagined nineteenth century, and considers the child’s association with the earth as representative of an ideal, alternate philosophy, to which the industrial and base modern world is inimical. Olivero rescues Siloën from an enlarged, fully automated mill, in which the villainous Kneeshaw has slaughtered a lamb and is forcing the child to drink its blood. The girl’s expression is described as one of “concentrated terror as she struggled to refuse the proffered cup”, which is a suitable description of the atmosphere Read consciously evokes in describing the scene (19). The subjective multiplicity of place, wondrous or earthly as in Butts and Powys’ work, is extreme here; Kneeshaw’s is a

nightmare while Siloën's, when they reach it, is a modernist dream of aesthetic and philosophical order.

Bob Barker is sceptical of Read's dreamworld, particularly in the language which was "not difficult in itself, for it had no irregular inflexions and was devoid of abstract concepts" (Read 136). "Read would have been hard pushed to expand it much beyond this level of self-ostensive definition," says Barker, and "the later discussions [...] on the nature of Time and Order would surely have been impossible" (Barker 111). Yet Read is meticulous in describing the central place of such ideas as material embodiments, particularly in a culture with no sense of passing time. Jacquetta Hawkes would, perhaps, recognise *A Land's* ideological framework in the way that crystallography...

was the most esteemed of all sciences in this subterrestrial country; indeed, it might be regarded as science itself, for on it were based, not only all notions of the structure of the universe, but equally all notions of beauty, truth and destiny. [...] Aesthetic pleasure was a perception of the degree of transgression between the artificial form and its natural prototype ... (Read 145)

Such an idea might also be read as a restatement of Paul Nash's objective of equations between natural and unnatural forms in art. Like Hawkes' word-painting of accreting chalk particles forming a cliff, Read here presents an image of geological landscape formation, surreally transplanted from scientific imagination into a fantastic utopia, which accordingly recognises it as the intrinsic cause and natural basis of all their ideals of beauty and harmony. Even the individual's body and selfhood are given their places in this bizarre, gnostic society, with the final

immortality of these people assured by physical calcification. Graham Sutherland's weird inchoate forms would make a fitting illustration to this closing scene.

Read's influence as editor is also manifest in the work of the 'New Apocalypse' movement, sometimes referred to by critics as new-romanticism or Neo-Romanticism. As Jo Ann Baggerly narrates this moment in British culture, English Surrealism flourished in the interwar period, and alongside it was the specifically literary movement describing itself (under the influence of Apocalypse, a final work by the late D.H. Lawrence) as the New Apocalypse. This group, which among others championed the work of Dylan Thomas (but was not, in turn, claimed by him), was formed in 1938 by the angry young romantic, Henry Treece, with fellow poet J.F. Hendry. Their first collection, *The New Apocalypse*, came out in 1939, and its successor *The White Horseman* (including Hendry, Thomas, Treece and Vernon Watkins) was published by Routledge, that is, by Herbert Read, in 1942. Baggerly, however, views the entire movement as an alloy of Treece's poetic outlook with that of Read: a Lawrentian "concern for the unconscious [fused] with the anarchism of Herbert Read to form a new philosophy and to take advantage of the constructive power of these new possibilities" (33).

My aim thus far in this chapter has been to show a consistent body of Neo-Romantic writing, consonant with established Neo-Romanticist themes and ideology, with which children's fantasy novels of the Second Golden Age form a continuity of tropes, concerns and objectives. Like the children's authors of my corpus, the writers explored here demonstrate a sustained engagement with the archaeological imagination, perceiving, interpreting and sacralising place through awareness of being-here. The moment of imaginative engagement with such non-human objects as chalk cliffs or crystallography, as well as such ambiguous human

artefacts as a grail or folk-tale, prompt for the ‘sympathetic agent’ a moment of intersubjectivity, which might be ascribed as a hesitation on the brink of interpretation, between (in the terminology of fantastic literature) the marvellous and uncanny. Such moments of engagement recur as distinguishing features throughout the novels of my corpus. They also recall the epiphany of self-determined spatial practice, articulated by de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, of profound subjectivity and agency, “*to be other and to walk toward the other*” (110-11). For de Certeau, such an experience is intrinsically childlike. In the final section of this chapter, I consider the relation of this Neo-Romantic subjectivity to conventional narratives of identity.

### **1.5 The Place of Subjectivity in the Twentieth Century**

That issues of subjectivity will be significant in this thesis has already been suggested in my first chapter. It is implicit in my discussion of the figure of the ‘sympathetic agent’ and their highly subjective view of landscape; in McCallum and Stephens’ concern for the subject position of the reader to the text; and in de Certeau’s characterisation of agency as childlike subjectivity. It is crucial to phenomenology, a philosophical position which presumes our only understanding of the world is via subjective sense-experiences, from which the archaeological imagination itself derives.

The changing questions of subjectivity – self-consciousness, self-awareness, relations of all these to the other and society – have characterised the twentieth century. In the eyes of political theorists, the self that was *subject* to authority might,



as the twentieth century progressed, also be understood as an *agent* of power in itself. However, the defining post-structuralist philosophers of the twentieth century were concerned with the interrogation of the possibility of the subject – and particularly the individual as agent – in the context of continuous production of power and authority. The phenomenological understanding of being through experience, in instances such as those explored by Hawkes, would only be meaningful in this post-structuralist interpretation as the product of a dominant ideology. Whilst the common object of such thinking is rationalist confrontation of ideology, its consequences for ideas of the self are ulterior to the concerns of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, resulting in a philosophical riposte to all artistic representation of meaningful subjectivity. Its conclusions, as David Lodge articulates it, have a nihilistic character: “The subject ... is not a concrete, substantial identity situated outside language, but is produced and continually modified by the entry into language,” and such ideas “come perilously near to an epistemological abyss of infinitely recessive interpretations of interpretations, rendering all human intellectual effort essentially futile” (46).

Children's literature, as McCallum describes it, commonly refuses this narrative of the self by simply effacing it, returning to humanist philosophies which ascribe unworldliness and societal participation with innate value, and to the Rousseauian valorisation of the essentially wild child who exchanges solipsism for society. Exceptions to such narratives may, as Victor Watson has it, be written out of a fascination for “narrative and language and its relation to truth” and the production of maturation narratives which are marked by uncertainty (2). McCallum and Stephens' interest in such subversive narratives belong to a Bakhtinian framework, in which the self is to be understood as a shared event, realised simultaneously with

and through dialectic discourse, both interior and exterior. As alluded to in my Introduction, Bakhtin argues that selfhood cannot be understood independently of the polyphony of discourses which produce societal ideology, and all with the same, materially constituted signs.

In dialogic theory, ideology itself cannot be understood purely as the dominating force posited by the thinkers of post-structuralism: the production of meaning does not move in one sole direction, but comprises a mutual relationship with both objective signs and interior experience. The meaning of “I” occurs purely in terms of simultaneous relations: “I” is the needle that stitches the abstraction of language to the particularity of lived experience”, in the words of Bakhtin's translator and biographer Michael Holquist (28). There is no possible monological discourse, only the possible suppression of other discourse, which typifies authoritarianism. Such a model of the self does not circumvent the revisionism of twentieth-century philosophy, but places it in a social context, rather than one of pure signification and ideology. Language, as the bearer of ideology, nonetheless comprises subjective meaning, and even the private experience of selfhood can only be understood, in Bakhtin’s argument, in terms of two voices.

The novel, as Bakhtin’s preferred form, illuminates the production of both selfhood and ideology and suggests that the agency of the individual should be understood through their reading of signs, and through them, their own intersubjectivity. In the novel which successfully achieves the dialogical interrelation of multiple discourses, the progression of selfhood from infant solipsism to engaged social interaction is not a false representation of maturation but a valuable portrayal of the child as agent as well as subject, and an exploration of the artificial

constructed nature of socialisation with consequences for our ideas of self and the world.

In such a context, the intersubjectivity that is produced for viewers such as Hawkes through meditation on material signs, which I characterise as a key trope of Neo-Romanticism, can be read as intrinsically dialogical. Similarly, the anxiety shared by Nash, Butts, Cowper Powys and Read over the nature of the discourse derived from such material, objective signs is a dialogical anxiety. Such objective features of landscape (as, for example, the megaliths of Avebury) constitute a discursive voice in the polyphonic production of place. The question, treated variously by all the above writers, and the novelists of my corpus, is what alternative interpretations can be made of place, selfhood and other polyphonic productions when the discourse of such objective features have no stable identity, because of their archaeological status.

### **Conclusion**

Neo-Romantic writing, as I characterise it, narrates instances of engagement between the perceiving human and the material signs of place. In Nash's work, this describes his encounters with the stones of Avebury, and his contemplation of their design; in the work of Hawkes, it is any number of images, such as the chalk cliff-face at Folkstone, connoting the slow formation of Britain. For the viewer, this engagement inevitably triggers a sense of de Certeauian heightened subjectivity, and opens a space for experiences of dialogic insight into the constructedness of place, history and selfhood.

The archaeological imagination is a mode, in which ambiguity is sensuously explored, that uncovers the multiple discourses which produce place out of material objects. The highly various texts of Butts, Powys and Read demonstrate the disorientating experience of acknowledging these multiple discourses, the differing perspectives on intersubjectivity that they entail, and a Romanticist scepticism for any rhetoric of place, particularly that of government and authority, which precludes the possibility of the irrational, folkloric or purely imaginative discourse from individuals' engagement with place and being-here.

By the mid-1950s, this sensibility was unfashionable in mainstream media. This was, however, the period in which the identity of the Second Golden Age of children's literature was beginning to form, an era, I have argued, in which the pastoral and nostalgic certainties of certain Golden Age texts as *Puck of Pook's Hill* were giving way to more radical and consciously literary texts with a new emphasis on fantasy and imagination. Like the artistic transition period that inculcated Neo-Romanticism with elements of surrealism, modernism and Romanticism, the Second Golden Age provided a space in which novelists such as Cooper, Garner and Lively, but also the novelists of my corpus, could experiment with established tropes of landscape, history and fantasy. Without arguing for direct influence, as in Juliet Dusinberre's study of Lewis Carroll and High Modernism, *Alice to the Lighthouse* (1987), I propose this as an instance of incubation and restoration, described in Kimberley Reynolds' *Radical Children's Literature* (2007). "One of the least recognised areas of creative enrichment and transformation [contributed by children's literature]," she writes,

takes place around the way children's literature both incubates genres that have ceased to be used in adult fiction and participates in generic innovation.

In this way it functions both as restorative – receiving and returning in rejuvenated form genres originally associated with adult fiction – and as a wellspring from which adult writers can draw. (18)

Reynolds' examples of such rehabilitation are traditional material, such as the adventures of King Arthur, and the hybridised genre of magic(al) realism. The conditions of the Second Golden Age, its concerns about sensitive or reluctant readers, its idealisation of Romanticist viewers, and its awareness of intertextuality, are explored in the following chapter, which looks at the novelist Sheena Porter, long since out of print but an award winner in 1964.

## Chapter 2: “The Shadow Within Herself” The Novels of Sheena Porter

Sheena Porter is a novelist, well regarded in the 1960s and awarded the Carnegie Medal, who regularly deals with the significance of landscape in relation to her protagonists’ internal conflicts, or as Naomi Lewis writes in the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS)*, 1971: “As is usual in her work, one gets a strong sense of place and the effect of place on the people who live there” (*Realities* 775). *Nordy Bank* (1964) is her only work of fantastic realism, but her repeated use of the archaeological imagination in the determinedly socially realist novels of teenage rites-of-passage (such as *The Scapegoat*, 1968, and *The Valley of Carreg-Wen*, 1971), as a means of comprehending selfhood, makes an interesting, resolutely realist contrast with upcoming authors in this thesis. Yet *Nordy Bank* is an excellent example of Children's Neo-Romanticism and the relation of archaeological feeling to ideas of selfhood. It is also valuable as an example of the ideals of the children's literature establishment in the mid-1960s, and particularly for its intertextual relationships with distinct canonical classics of that context.

This chapter will contextualise Porter as one constituent in an historic moment: the interaction of critics, librarians and writers in redefining what is considered “outstanding” and ideal in children's literature, and the positioning of the reader within such canon-defining discussions. It will evaluate the significance of Porter’s popularity at this moment in the history of children’s literature, in relation to her consistent treatment of place, intersubjectivity and the role of the reader.

I begin with a survey of Porter's work (nine children's novels concerning landscape and history in different formulations) including contemporary reception (although there has been no critical analysis of Porter's work). Porter is well represented in the regular children's review sections of the *TLS*, and her evaluation by prominent critics of the time (Lewis and Marcus Crouch, also a children's librarian) offers insights into the critical values and approaches of the children's literature establishment of the era. Her work also features in texts reflective of the professional interest in children's literature (such as parents, teachers and children's librarians) and I refer to these too in describing *Nordy Bank*'s reception. I pay particular attention to the awarding of the Carnegie Medal in 1964, with a brief exploration of the role of this major and enduring prize in characterising the ideals of this era in children's literature, and some consideration of the shifting nature of the award's judges and their criteria. Due to a surprising feature of *Nordy Bank*, this chapter will make particular reference to the work of historical novelist Rosemary Sutcliff, whose work was also honoured by the Carnegie Prize, in 1959.

I will contrast two of Porter's explicitly realist, yet Neo-Romantic texts, and look at *Nordy Bank*'s account of the enthusiastic reader who becomes subjectively disorientated and vulnerable when they come to read the landscape as text.

## 2.1 Sheena Porter: A Survey

### *i. Biography and survey*

When, in 1972, the regular children's book review section of the *TLS* described Alan Garner, Penelope Lively and William Mayne's work, concerned with "landscape,

with its latent power of movement [and] historical revelation”, as amongst “the best writing for the young of the past decade,” the first name in its list of “successful exponents of the genre” was Sheena Porter<sup>6</sup> (*Swallows*). As this chapter will demonstrate, landscape and historical revelation were subjects particularly valued by what Pat Pinsent succinctly describes as the “children’s literature establishment” (publishers, children’s librarians, and widely read critics like the one quoted above) of the Second Golden Age of children’s literature (*Post-War Child* 212). My introductory chapter described how the concept of a children’s literature canon has been in dispute since the first serious treatment of the field by the academic community, yet historically celebrated titles continue to pervade the reading lists of child readers as well as students of children’s literature. High profile reviewers such as those of the *TLS* were actively engaged in constructing a version of the ideal work of children’s literature, but major literary prizes such as the Library Association’s Carnegie Prize have played a more ambiguous role. Several authors whom I associate with the archaeological imagination in this thesis (Boston, Garner, Lively, Mayne, Pearce and Porter) were all awarded the prize, yet their subsequent literary profiles have been varied to say the least.

None of Porter’s nine novels for children remains in print. Her last novel (*The Hospital*) was published in 1973, and there has been no critical examination of any of her writing beyond a brief mention in *The Making of Modern Children’s Literature* (2013), which dwells on its conservative embodiment of class concerns (45). This seems notable (if not, as we shall see, untypical), given the praise and

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<sup>6</sup> It went on to contrast their work with “cheerful Martin Cobalt” whose novel *The Swallows* demonstrated “just how difficult it is, unless an author is prepared to exercise his craft with the utmost care and restraint” to create “literary classics” in that genre. The review postulated that Cobalt might be a pseudonym for a writer with a cynical and careless attitude to children’s fiction: in fact, Cobalt was a pseudonym of the aforementioned William Mayne.



recognition her work received in the 1960s. A survey of Porter's consistently positive reception in the *TLS* review pages reveals a narrative, not merely of appreciation but anticipation for her development as a writer: this is, in part, typical of the climate of children's book publishing in the 1960s and 1970s, which was more concerned than today's media with providing a moderate, encouraging atmosphere (not a hothouse) in which writers and texts could find their respective voice and audience. The biography of Puffin editor, Kaye Webb, notes the advice of her predecessor, Eleanor Graham, that "if you nurse a book for five years it will have a life of about twenty," and that in the late 1960s, the head of Penguin "took an equable 'swings and roundabouts' approach to sales" which differs distinctly from the concerns of the book trade of the 2010s (Groves 153). In a talk at the 2015 IBBY Conference, editor of the children's literature pages of the *TLS* (in the 1970s) and the *Guardian* (since 1999) Julia Eccleshare spoke of the freedom to support children's writers that is no longer available in the current era of minimal pages per year ("From Writer to Reader"). Certainly, the attention to Porter in the *TLS*, as will be shown, is both nuanced and informed, aligning her with writers of similar trends, and drawing parallels between her novels. The selection of Sheena Porter as one of the four main subjects of my thesis is intended to offer an insight into the ideals of the children's literature establishment: as will be seen, her own work has a uniquely interesting relationship with some of the themes, authors and literary ideals celebrated by the Carnegie Prize.

Sheena Porter was born in 1935 at Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, enjoying as a child (according to a book blurb) "an active country life". She wrote her first two novels (published 1961 and 1962 respectively) while working as a children's librarian, and later wrote that her experience had strongly influenced her

initial approach as a writer, when her aim was simply to “catch middle of the road readers who were just not ready, and perhaps never would be ready, for the really good, difficult modern fiction”, consciously aiming to provide a “stepping stone” to “the more demanding work of such writers as William Mayne and Lucy Boston” (Crouch 1977, 130). Before 1961, she had moved from Leicestershire to Shropshire, a region which becomes a setting of great significance to all her novels, which she felt grew increasingly more personal and less didactic (128).

The first of these, *The Bronze Chrysanthemum* (1961), is a quiet adventure in which the theft of church silverware is uncovered by a group of siblings through a series of happy coincidences. It seems to have received no coverage in the *TLS*. Her second, *Hills and Hollows* (1962) is described somewhat dismissively in the paper as “more homely and ... less exciting” than other novels that month, dealing with “middle class children with sound middle class backgrounds” (*Nice, Happy Families* 902). “One cannot believe”, the review continues, “that the curious field that [the family] all love will be spoilt by a team of builders, and of course it is not, although ... archaeological importance is not even hinted at until the last ten pages”. It is true that the theme is only lightly treated, but significant that it is the solution to everybody’s problems, with the spectre of rural development exorcised by the powers of historical significance. It is a novel about sentimental feeling for place as a childish thing, leading to hasty action, and about adults coming to see their countryside’s real identity (significantly, through an aerial photograph).

Porter's third novel, *Jacob’s Ladder* (1963), in which two schoolgirls overcome a fear of high water and confined spaces to unearth a secret passage from a river island to a medieval priest hole, was likened favourably to the much-admired William Mayne. Naomi Lewis called it “carefully written,” with the aim of “holding

the atmosphere in suspension”, though, ultimately, she implied it was too narrow in ambition (“End of a Chapter” 978).

Two years later, Lewis described 1964's *Nordy Bank* as strong and ambitious. “The parts of the story ... do not entirely cohere, but the telling is powerful – a strong advance on this author's earlier books” (“Everybody’s Children” 1062). *Nordy Bank* describes a camping holiday undertaken by a group of children to the hills of the Welsh Marches. Among these children is the imaginative child, Bron, and in the course of the novel Porter describes Bron's psychic battle for her identity when that of an Iron Age woman threatens to subsume hers. The novel also describes the saga of a retired police Alsatian loose in the area. The storylines converge when Bron and the dog befriend one another and Bron's own personality reasserts itself, and the concluding portion of the novel is more concerned with establishing the future homes of the dog, Bron and her parents, who are about to move to Paris.

*Nordy Bank* evidently raised Porter's profile and gained the support of librarians and critics. Reviewing her following novel, *The Knockers* (1965), again in the *TLS*, Crouch says: “Now she is a creative artist in her own right. *The Knockers* confirms the high hopes of *Nordy Bank*” (“Spirit of Place” 3328). *The Knockers* is another story of young people isolated in the Shropshire Hills: in this case, it is Long Mynd plateau, where three young friends are tricked into believing in the spectral manifestation of local folk legend Wild Eadric and his Wild Hunt. The culprit is a scornful school-friend, but the drama of the book is focused on the children's dare of a night-time walk across the hills, in the footsteps of the famous Reverend E. D. Carr (described in *A Night in the Snow*, 1865). The children's walk in the snow is nearly as dangerous, and ultimately leads to discovery of the eponymous ‘knockers’, not ghosts or folkloric figures but Deathwatch beetles. Crouch's review and other

ensuing reviews of Porter's work in the paper reflect the way that she had by now taken landscape and regional identity as her main subject: "Miss Porter knows and loves this country, and out of love and knowledge she has built a most powerful and moving story," he writes. "There will be better books than *The Knockers* later on" ("Spirit of Place", 1139).

He is more cautious in his review of her 1966 novel, *Deerfold*, but speaks more generally of Porter as "a writer in whom one trusts with increasing confidence for a story growing from sound understanding of human behaviour and of the places which people live" (*Mainly for Girls* 1070). Another novel rooted in the natural landscape, *Deerfold* describes Megan's private moral dilemma when she makes friends of the new English arrivals to her Welsh valley, who snobbishly assume she is the daughter of the estate manager, instead of a forestry worker. Megan overcomes her shame at her real identity and rediscovers her love for the valley in the midst of a hunt for a missing child, in the course of which a further series of happy coincidences force the English children to reconsider their opinions.

Porter's next novel, *The Scapegoat* (1968) does not appear to have been reviewed on publication. It is the account of another private moral dilemma: after her father remarries, Carys develops an addiction to shoplifting, but inadvertently makes a close school-friend a scapegoat for her behaviour. Ashamed and afraid, Carys runs away. The novel returns to Porter's earlier themes by framing Carys' loneliness with a favourite hiding place<sup>7</sup> which, after the main plot is resolved, is found to be a lost room in the wall of a since-demolished church. The significance of this belated

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<sup>7</sup> *Der Schlupfwinkel*, in the translated title of the German edition. Sheena Porter's work is surprisingly copious in German translation, especially compared to the other writers in my thesis.

archaeological theme is somewhat ambiguous, but will be further evaluated in this chapter.

The last of Porter's novels to be reviewed in the *TLS*, *The Valley of Carreg-Wen* (1971), is another realist, issues-led narrative, and once again is inseparable from its physical setting. In a North Wales valley, a village is due to be drowned to build a reservoir, and a subtle tension exists between the current inhabitants and the families of men constructing the dam, temporarily living in caravans on a nearby hillside. When an attempt to sabotage the dam goes wrong, and a night-watchman is critically injured, these tensions grow, driving apart two schoolgirls whose kinship is represented in their shared appreciation of the valley's beauty. "The relationship between the two girls and the rising tension in the Morgan household are convincing," wrote Lewis, admiringly, "and the ending of the book beautiful, controlled and balanced" (*Realities* 775). The novel contains some striking scenes of grief and anger, and a markedly serious tone. Its presentation of views on the valley will also form part of this chapter.

Sheena Porter's final novel, *The Hospital* (1973), is another distinctly realist and issues-led novel, which mixes Annette's shame at visiting her mother in a mental hospital, and the mental breakdown of a teacher, with the travails of staging an obscure Gilbert and Sullivan operetta at school, and the first flush of teenage romance. The novel makes a bold attempt at a social realist narrative, with some convincing central characters, but overall the many elements of the novel (including another adopted dog, and Annette's parents' divorce) do not cohere. There is something disappointingly trivialising about the handling of the teacher, Miss Stewart's depression, which she seemingly overcomes easily when motivated to

rescue an ailing school play. *The Hospital* does not seem to have been reviewed, or published in paperback.

Porter's novels are dedicated to social realism and the private dilemmas of solitary figures (the fantasy *Nordy Bank* included). Her constant subject of the child with difficult secrets struggling to meet the expectations of adult authority, reflects a common trope of children's literature in which a child struggles to accommodate their unconventional, individual self within wider society. In Porter's work this crisis frequently leads to emotional displacement (and this becomes more pronounced from book to book, as cosy family novels give way to novels of unreliable parents) and, to varying degrees, the need for these alienated children to seek a new place of their own: young saboteurs of a building project feel a secret shame at their behaviour, and one runs away from home; having let the blame for her shoplifting to fall on a friend, a young woman feels ashamed and runs away from home; the daughter of a forestry worker secretly denies that working class identity and pretends to live somewhere else; the daughter of a potential saboteur of a building project feels a secret shame at his behaviour. In her *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction*, Robyn McCallum explores a tension in adolescent fiction and its surrounding discourses which "typically assume and valorise humanistic concepts of individual agency, that is, the capacity to act independently of social restraint" yet whose narratives of maturation are directed away from solipsism and toward social integration (7). The tendency of the adolescent novel, and children's fiction concerned with 'coming of age', is to a naturalised transition from infant solipsism or alienation toward a socialised yet empowered subject position in relation to peers and adults. This way, according to McCallum, the mainstream of children's novels regarding selfhood operate with an ideal of subjectivity that does not recognise the

Modernist, existentialist and Post-Modern revolutions in discussing selfhood that dominated the twentieth century (already sketched in Chapter 1). In Porter's novels, the progression from solipsism to integration is often straightforward, with protagonists' anxieties resolved in community acceptance and school-friends' forgiveness. Secrets are shared with authority figures and it is discovered that seemingly alienated figures are entirely acceptable (one example being this exchange in *The Scapegoat*: "Isn't the headmistress rather strict about these things?" "Yes, as a general rule, she is, but I explained the circumstances and she was very sympathetic" 113).

*Nordy Bank* offers an alternative approach to the theme of child character development, with a fantastic and disturbing depiction of psychical disruption and either regression or possession. It also, as Pearson describes, embodies certain conservative preoccupations concerning class. Indeed, its composite of both radical and conventional tropes, and its portrait of a child reader, make it a valuable object study in understanding the evolution of the children's literature establishment.

ii. *Nordy Bank and the Carnegie Prize*

The celebration of *Nordy Bank* as an "outstanding book for children" in the eyes of the Library Association gives us some insight, not merely into the popularity of Porter's novel but also the assumptions and preferences of the awarding bodies. Pinsent has written of the way the Carnegie offers us an insight into the features of books regarded as significant by the children's literature establishment of the day, and although the changing make-up of the judging panel should be taken into

account when making such judgements, she seems accurate in typifying them as concerned with children's innocence, “all ... to some degree ‘realist’” (no high fantasy or sci-fi novels are recommended) and with the aim of “portraying a wider society” (*Post-War Child* 216). The prize’s concern with the past is clear enough when we consider the themes and topics of prize-winners between 1960 and 1970 (listed in Keith Barker's *In the Realms of Gold* (1986)). The first award of the decade was for a non-fiction title with an archaeological theme, introducing young readers to the world of palaeontology (*The Making of Man* by I.W. Cornwall, 1960). Four of the decade’s awards were to low fantasy novels with a significantly historic setting: the fictional house of Green Knowe (visited by a gorilla in *A Stranger at Green Knowe* by Lucy Boston, 1961), Haworth Parsonage (in Pauline Clarke’s *The Twelve and the Genii*, 1962), *Nordy Bank* (1964) and the haunted Welsh valley in Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service* (1967), while 1968’s *The Moon in the Cloud* by Rosemary Harris is a fantasy novel situated in the remote past of the Bible. Of the remaining three awards<sup>8</sup>, two were made to historical novels (Hester Burton’s *Time of Trial* in 1963 and K.M. Peyton’s *The Edge of the Cloud* in 1969), and one to a school story involving a history-related riddle (*The Grange at High Force* by Philip Turner, 1965). In 1970, the Carnegie was once again given to a book concerned with the past: Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen’s dramatic retellings of stories from Greek Myth (*The God from the Sea*). This period’s preoccupation with the past is not atypical in the history of the prize. The awards of the 1950s and 1970s are also dominated by books either set in the past or thematically concerned with it (including Mayne’s *A Grass Rope* (1957), discussed in Chapter 3, and Lively’s *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (1973), discussed in Chapter 5), as well as another

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<sup>8</sup> Somewhat controversially, no award was made in 1966 due to no book being considered suitable.



archaeologically-oriented work of non-fiction, *A Valley Grows Up* (1953) by Edward Osmond.

The Carnegie Prize originated in the 1930s with a small selection committee featuring no children's book specialists. Its first selection was an entry in Arthur Ransome's popular series of holiday adventures, *Pigeon Post* (1936). The 1960s were a decade of upheaval for the prize. By the start of the decade, the committee was still primarily composed of senior members of the Library Association, with only one member representing the Association of Children's Libraries: novels were proposed by children's librarians, but the ultimate choice of "outstanding book for children" was made by individuals with minimal professional involvement with children themselves. Pressure to change this situation came from librarians and children's writers, with Aidan Chambers making a particularly strong condemnation of the prize and its selections in his 1969 work, *The Reluctant Reader* (which appears to have been written before the 1967 choice of Garner's *The Owl Service*, which receives no mention). Chambers made *Nordy Bank*'s successor *The Grange at High Force* the subject of his disdain, describing it as "typical of the kind of book ... which, over the last ten years, has come to be considered ... *among adults*, the epitome of good-quality literature (67)". He called it "intellectual, sophisticated, over-written" and "conservative in its theme and content" (ibid.). He went on to specifically accuse the Carnegie selection of a preference for historical novels, a genre in which he perceived writers to excuse themselves for the use of poetic language and atmosphere, and the avoidance of modern subject matter and idioms.

In Crouch's *Chosen for Children: An account of the books which have been awarded the Library Association Carnegie Medal 1936-1975* (1977), *Nordy Bank* is admired for its success in "showing children behaving naturally and, for the most

part, sensibly in a clearly drawn conventional setting,” for examining “the affinity between child and animal ... with deep understanding” and “most effectively” for “tread[ing] delicately the frontier between the real and supernatural worlds” (25). Such arguments for the clear delineation of realism and fantasy, and even for the affinity with animals, fits Pinsent's characterisation of the Medal and its objectives. Pinsent notes, with particular regard to the popularity of Boston's ‘Green Knowe’ books in Carnegie shortlists, “a nostalgic mood ... fairly prevalent among the children's literature establishment” in this era, and this too might be an accusation levelled at Porter’s melancholic, history-oriented narrative (218). The undiluted enthusiasm of the six children for camping out on the Brown Clee in the first place (a scenario recalling founding Carnegie winner, Ransome) embodies the novel’s yen for the past. Although the modern day setting and circumstances of the children belie Chambers’ criticism of the prize, it could also meet his accusation of conservatism and intellectualism. When Crouch summarises the appeal of *Nordy Bank* to the judges, it is worth examining the subtext of his endorsement of its “uncanny atmosphere”, and the way that he does so by identifying “the sensitive reader” with the protagonist of the novel in the midst of her unsettling psychic experience: “The sensitive reader, like Bron, cannot help turning round ‘to make sure that no one was standing behind her’ (ibid). There is a clear inference that the Carnegie Medal judges’ ideal of children's literature in the mid-1960s (and that of one of children's literature's major critics of the time) valorised the depiction of “sensitive” alter-egos for its imagined readers, and depictions of human socialisation which fit naturally with such depictions of states of imaginative receptivity. Indeed, Crouch's phrase can even be read as indirectly describing Bron as a “sensitive reader” (since the character is repeatedly shown to enjoy reading, even preferring it to the company of others),

making the ideal of identification even more precise. The association of reading with receptivity to the atmosphere of place is particularly emphasised in *Nordy Bank* and other Porter novels, which employ a preference for reading as a repeated character trait implying sensitivity.

Although other contemporary reviews of *Nordy Bank* are scarce, it is notable that a brief extract of the novel was included alongside pieces from *Treasure Island*, *Black Beauty* and other children's classics as the sole representative of modern children's literature in 1967's *The Open Door to Reading*, the concluding volume in the popular Ladybird Key Words Reading Scheme, edited by teacher William Murray. Although the excerpt makes no mention of the children at all, focusing instead on the exciting moment the Alsatian makes his escape from a train carriage, the recommendation of the novel in the context of a Reading Scheme directed at fledgling readers strengthens my proposal of *Nordy Bank* as a novel welcomed by individuals with a professional interest in children's literature, that it was widely disseminated, and specifically that it was admired for its narrative of readers, reading and archaeological interpretation.

Sheena Porter's relationship with the ideals and canon-making of the era is therefore shifting and ambivalent. She was evidently not regarded as significant by Humphrey Carpenter, whose entry describing her in *The Cambridge Book of Children's Literature* (1984) is minimal, its reference to *Nordy Bank* dismissive (a simple "holiday adventure"). Crouch, in *The Nesbit Tradition* (1972), describes Porter's skills as "workaday, and for the most part, workmanlike" but "once in a while she sounds a deeper note", and again it is *Nordy Bank* (as her "finest novel") along with *The Knockers* that are particularly commended (155). Crouch seems to read *Nordy Bank* more carefully than Carpenter: he features Porter in two chapters, a

“holiday/outdoor adventure” précis, but also a chapter entitled “Self and Society’, in which he praises the novel as “an absorbing and dramatic story [in which] the inner and outer themes are inseparable” with the lesson that “self-discovery can go hand-in-hand with the discovery of society” (201). Sheila G. Ray, in *Children's Fiction: A Handbook for Librarians* (1970) likewise recognises Porter's use of “the framework of the traditional holiday adventure story as a background to the development of character” (59).

I will argue that Porter’s exploration of her themes of alienation and displacement are deserving of more than Crouch’s “workaday” slight. Whilst Porter begins her career writing too consciously for the less sophisticated child reader, her respect for more skilled acts of interpretation quickly grows and her subject matter becomes accordingly challenging. Her most overtly Neo-Romantic novel, *Nordy Bank*, provides the most interesting and surprising mix of discourses, but close reading of her other, non-fantasy texts shows a similar treatment of characters whose experiences compel them to seek a sense of place, and obtain it through the archaeological imagination. I will consider the recurring motif in Porter’s novels of a child looking out on a landscape scene, beginning with two of her realist novels *The Scapegoat* and *The Valley of Carreg-Wen*.

## **2.2 *The Scapegoat* and *Valley of Carreg-Wen*: Sensitivity and Vulnerability**

### *i. The Scapegoat (1968)*

To a great degree, Sheena Porter’s realist novels follow conventional narratives of the development of personality, accentuating the dangers of alienation and the

accepting nature of society. Watson notes the convention of “maturation narratives” to be “fluid, uncertain and open-ended”, in order to maintain the strict borderline of child and adult psychology typified by Rose’s critique of the children’s novel (39). Some interesting features of these texts, however, indicate the possibility of alternate narratives of selfhood and experience engendered through appreciation of landscape and a Neo-Romantic attitude to place.

Both novels considered here use chronotopes of unwilling eviction and a sense that traumatic life events can create a charged, almost physical sense of the past. This is reflected in both characters dealing with differing forms of dispossession, grief and loss of identity. The primary narrative of *The Scapegoat* is Carys’ coming to terms with her response to her widower father’s remarriage, and the consequent move from their family home to a claustrophobic flat in the same town. There are few overt references to her mother in the novel: she is unnamed, undescribed, undiscussed. We are told that Carys sometimes forgets that her mother is dead; only when she returns to the old family home to find it occupied, with the holly tree in the front garden removed, is she “brought hard up against the blank wall of her mother’s *not-ness*” (16). The other characters of the novel have little obvious patience for Carys’ grief and it is never referred to as such, as if taboo. A direct obverse to being-here, *not-ness*, and the way it becomes paradoxically visible, is a theme of the novel.

Although openly resentful toward her stepmother, Carys’ emotion manifests in secret, impulsive thefts: at first meaningless but more often calculatedly spiteful, or tactical (to shift blame from her). Carys is no teenage delinquent: in the course of the novel, her biggest thefts are her step-mother’s pearl earrings (which she hides) and two bottles of perfume from Roots the chemist (Carys naively assumes they’re

inexpensive because of their size). She steals the perfume as an act of aggression toward the shop assistant, who is pointedly ignoring Carys' friend Alison. By the end of the novel Carys has acquired the most mundane ephemera: scones, rubbers, an empty purse. The purse turns out to have been planted by an enterprising teacher, but somehow the blame falls on Alison. There seems no option for Carys, but to confess (which she does by letter) and run away.

Although some of the thefts are deliberate acts of spite, Porter presents Carys' impulsive urge to steal, from her point of view, as a mysterious experience of dispossession, even of one aspect of personality suborned to another. Having stolen some cheap bracelets from a stall at the county fair, "Half of her mind admired them; half of it was more or less amazed that they were there. She hadn't really *meant* to take them, not at all, in fact; so why had she?" (29) She takes the rubbers "quite without thinking" (34), and much later, surveying all her stolen objects, we are told she "could hardly believe herself; that *she* had actually been shop-lifting! And a sneak-thief at school!" The language of intersubjectivity has become charged with a disconcerting otherness: "Carys sat on the bed, her new happiness soured by a sort of *fear of herself...*" (my emphasis). As I will show, Porter's use of language here resembles her depictions of Bron's intersubjectivity in *Nordy Bank*.

Nonetheless, the text never entirely concerns itself with Carys' anxieties of identity. Porter makes the link between Carys' unsettled home life and her bad behaviour so clear that the reader can always be confident she will collect herself by the novel's conclusion: the frequent shifts into other people's viewpoints, where we learn so quickly that no charges will be pressed, further reduces the complexity of the novel. Yet the primary narrative of the novel is counterpointed by a secondary,

archaeological narrative which contributes an extra hermeneutic complexity and nuance for readers' understanding of Carys' problems.

Early in the novel, Carys and Alison become aware of an excavation in the land behind Alison's back garden and are interested to hear about the church that stood there until the sixteenth century when, with little warning, the entire structure suddenly collapsed. Their imagination is stimulated by a site characterised through loss, "seeing in their minds' eye the heavy tower of a Norman church and walls and windows that had disappeared, where now was only empty air and the still branches of trees" (39). In the midst of Carys' arguments with her stepmother and school-friends, she and Alison take time to research the vanished building so that Alison can "look out of my bedroom window and imagine it" (39). She is clearly beginning the transition from rationalist scientific discourse to something more subjective and personal. Soon after, the friends uncover a secret passageway behind the ivy on the stout wall at the foot of Alison's garden, and discover a tiny room set within a wall that looks out over the great empty space. At first, they are disappointed to see simply what is there, not the apparition of St Chad's or even "obvious signs of ruin" (58). Carys observes that, "if you could go scratching round in them, I bet you'd find plenty of clues, buried under flower-beds or hidden behind ivy" (58). At this stage, the emphasis is on the rational, scientific discourse of archaeology. However, the hidden room comes to mean far more to Carys than an educational object lesson, and the girls begin to tread the fine line between rational discourse and that of the archaeological imagination. In this, they embody a version of the *mearcstapa* role as defined by Carroll, indicating these differences within archaeological practice. Notably, the vantage point from which they explore this role is a room located within a physical boundary.

At this point, when Carys is feeling her space encroached on by her stepmother, the room represents a place she can claim as her own: “Isn’t it nice to have something secret?” Carys asks Alison. “I want it for our secret place. I haven’t anywhere special of my own now...” (59). Located literally within a boundary, without function or history, Carys values the hidden room for its absence and not-ness, whilst at home she is concerned with belongings that only become significant through their loss: the possessions of her stepmother and school-rival that are taken out of spite, the impulses of an identity she does not know or claim as her own. Meanwhile, the den grows in significance when they use it as a vantage point, and come to appreciate its view of the site of the vanished church. The girls feel that their claim on the site is only transitory: even their secret residency there, which at first made it “special”, does not make it their property. “It sort of belongs to itself,” Carys says; the concept of ownership perhaps being emphasised because, technically, the den properly ‘belongs’ to Alison’s family (70). Moreover, it demarcates the den as entirely outside all the dramas of ownership and belonging that Carys is concerned with, and implies a non-materialist, spiritual dimension to its value (also implied by the religious history of the site).

The girls’ experience of the ancient site is an unanticipated experience of the archaeological imagination in which the “view of shrubbery through the narrow building meant nothing” and “they both felt strongly the sense of no time” (70). Chronotopically, too, the site comes to represent an atemporal position in the narrative, when Carys, ashamed, runs away from home and hides there for two nights, retreating from the narrative of the thefts and the parallel narrative of her own emotional development. Porter’s use of the den as a site of retreat, in which the present moment is charged with meaning, makes it a Neo-Romantic motif which



transcends the other concerns of the novel; it is not only an unmapped place but a site of retreat from time. It even has the surreal effect of destabilising the girls' sense of narrative time, so that, since St Chad's physically existed for longer than that it has been gone, in the girls' view, "it's still there more than it isn't!" (70). Porter reveals that the den was a fifteenth-century window onto the altar for a woman of means, who was excluded from the world by her leprosy: a space created purely to give a view onto the church, in more than one sense an observance of religion, for a woman living in retreat. The implied authorial comparison of this imagined woman and Carys subtly suggests an underlying continuity of place for those intuitively sensitive to its use, whilst Carys herself is trying to comprehend a complex, othered sense of selfhood.

Porter's text does not dwell on these historical associations, and the conclusion of the novel is too swift and consoling to make use of this sense of strangeness. The great significance of the den is its representation of the intimacy of Carys and Alison's friendship, and the sense of historical place as existing beyond the conventions of land and property, which transcends time and ownership, and offers a place of reflection. It also crystallises a theme of the novel that encompasses the *not-ness* of Carys' personal loss and her assortment of purloined objects: an emphasis on material things as markers of loss. Although Porter may be said to be unambitious in integrating this image with her wider text, the counterpoint of the archaeological imagination to the conventional narrative of alienation and acceptance has a special distinctiveness.

ii. *The Valley of Carreg-Wen (1971)*

A similar image of landscape is key to a later realist novel of Porter's, *The Valley of Carreg-Wen*. In this novel, Lyn and Rachel begin with the complete opposite of the close friendship depicted in *The Scapegoat*, and the resentment is (for the most part) expressed instead of repressed. A new dam is in the last stages of being built to flood the valley in which Lyn has always lived, and the reader is told that the villagers have only just begun to be resigned to the operation and to their leaving the small rural community before the end of the year. Lyn is alienated from the community through her resentment of the eviction, and out of frustration, she and others bully the dam workers' children, including Rachel. A small group of saboteurs mount a nocturnal attack on the dam and inflame the situation between the village's inhabitants and the workers. The serious injury of a night-watchman also places the saboteurs in a questionable moral position, which makes Lyn doubt her own convictions and the role in the proceedings of her moody, secretive father. Both girls are, to an extent, alone and at odds as the book begins.

Rural communities threatened so totally by industrialisation, and in particular the prospect of total erasure of a place and community by such acts of valley flooding, was a controversial topic of the era. Perhaps most infamously, the rural community Capel Cerwyn in North Wales was flooded in 1957 to create a reservoir that would serve the water needs of industry in the North-West of England. The action was carried out in the face of local public protest and objections by local government. The flooding of valleys is the subject of other notable children's novels of the period, such as Mollie Hunter's *The Bodach* (1970) and Judy Allen's *The*

*Stones of the Moon* (1975) (discussed in Chapter 5). Yet to a great extent the drama of the threatened valley is not the subject matter of the novel: the children are not representative of the combatting discourses (Rachel's father, after all, is only an employee of the construction company, while the father of Lyn turns out, despite her own suspicions, not to be directly involved in the party of saboteurs) and the completion of the dam is never entirely in doubt. Lyn and her friend Peter's angry words against Rachel and the other workers ("I hope it pours with rain all winter and half of them get drowned in the Gam!" 23), in addition to the (accidental) near-fatal injury of the night-watchman, mean the position of resistance to industry is not presented in an equally positive light to the dam-builders. Despite Lyn's impassioned arguments ("They're drowning Wales! ... Birmingham and all those sorts of places. ... Why can't they build their own reservoirs if they have to have them!" 59), there is a certain weight given to the necessity of the reservoir for the services to Liverpool and the Wirral, and Lyn's great acknowledgement of the novel is an acceptance that it is too late for the work, so near completion, to be halted. Yet Porter strives to present Lyn as, individually, a principled young woman in the midst of an experience of eviction from a place that defines her identity. Her argument for the landscape, and against Rachel's perspective, is intrinsic to the novel's moral dilemmas, as well as Lyn's final sense of its loss. Like *The Scapegoat*, this is a novel about emotional disorientation in the face of change, though in this novel the changes are more momentous and fundamental to the children's sense of place, space and time.

The reconciliation of the two school-girl enemies takes place on a school trip to a ruined village nearby. In an overt demonstration of the "geographer-citizen" ideal of children's responses to place (see Introduction), Porter indirectly shows the

schoolteacher, painstakingly introducing the schoolchildren to the history and geology of the place:

She showed them how the tracks of quarried slate had gone rolling down the mountainside on the little railway, a thousand feet down into the valley, to Blaenau Ffestiniog. She gave them a short account of the history of Porthmadog, of the rise and decline of the slate industry, of the geology of the area. They searched for different colours in the slate fragments, for lumps of quartz beside the track, for different sorts of moss amongst the bogs. Then she walked them in tidy groups up to the ruins of the quarry buildings and told them to disperse, to make notes on anything that they saw of interest, that would be incorporated into their project essays in the weeks to come.

No one made any notes. (*Carreg-Wen* 43)

The teacher's authoritative, archaeological discourse is delivered without interruptions; in an understated flourish, Porter depicts the children's blithe rejection without words, either spoken or written as schoolwork. Instead, and to the disappointment of the teacher, the children deploy their own typically irreverent spatial practice and play, chaotically, in the ruined buildings. The roles of the two central children, and their appreciation of place, is reversed here with some irony. Rachel the outsider seems to cultivate archaeological feeling more than the local children. Lyn and her friends take the archaeological grandeur of the place for granted, and spend their time trying to tip a rusted slate cart on its side. Rachel is smugly irritated by Lyn's lack of feeling for the past: "It's just a mouldy old building, that's all," Rachel hears Lyn say. "'Oh no, it's not then!'" said Rachel to herself indignantly. 'You just don't use your eyes nor your imagination, Lyn

Morgan. That's your whole trouble!'" (45). Following this private indignation, Rachel leans back against the wall of the "mouldy old building", feeling "dreamy and romantic, and superior" (45). The reader may reflect that such self-conscious archaeological feeling is as much an element of their rivalry as their discussions of the dam.

Soon afterwards, however, the girls are inadvertently reunited, alone in the midst of this disputed landscape. Although directed by their teacher, the children move like *mearcstapas*, completely outside the discipline and direction of authority, even retracing their steps. In fact, the chances of Rachel getting lost – going back into the hills for a forgotten camera – are the reason Lyn is sent after her. In this shift into a highly subjective mode of experiencing place, the pair of them emerge almost simultaneously onto the crest of a hill and stand, mutually captivated by the view of the landscape. Porter describes it as both attractive and disconcerting: "Here the mist was drifting before a small uneven wind, and they were suddenly startled by a glow of sunlight. The whole quarry sparkled and shone. [...] It was a strange brilliance, with the moorland mist twirling around the edges of it, and almost sinister" (47).

Porter uses this image of the girls' shared appreciation of the scene as an insight into their essentially Romantic natures, stressing their similarity. They betray their feeling through impulsive, unconscious utterances: "from [Lyn's] heart, 'There's lovely! Oh, there's lovely for you!'" "[Q]uite forgetting that she would not be welcome" in Lyn's company, Rachel makes a similar outburst: "Yes, that's one of those things you'll always remember, isn't it? ... [Like] a photograph in your mind, only better really, because you keep the feel of it as well" (48). It is symbolically important, though Porter makes no remark on it, that they are here and now because of a camera, and also that neither of them even considers using it to capture the

moment. Instead, conversation, inspired by the landscape, is presented as the solution to their mutual alienation. “Lyn suddenly began to talk quite naturally, as if their moment of shared pleasure had introduced them to each other, as it had” (48): and the girls talk familiarly on the walk back to the coach, and the journey home. The experience of viewing landscape, in one flash of Romantic insight, heals their emotional divide and they are joined in discourse now: it is not through the historical evidence of the scene (signs of the decline of industry, of the material composition of the area, as their teacher would have them focus upon) but the strange apprehension of what is at risk, not quite comprehensible, which unites these two warring teenagers: the “strange brilliance” that is “almost sinister”, which even defies the visual beauty of a photograph, representative of the fleeting moment and a wider sense of loss.

Lyn’s reconciliation with herself and her community occurs through a markedly Neo-Romanticist scene in the conclusion of the novel, and produces to a de Certeauian sense of being-there heightened through place-awareness and the sense of imminent loss. In the final pages of the novel, Lyn looks out across the valley she will soon leave, which is so full of mist that it gives the artificial and false impression that it is already flooded. This optical illusion prompts Lyn’s reflection on time and place, indirectly reported in such a way that it emphasises her intersubjectivity and sense of her own otherness (and that of her community). She considers how “each leaf falling in this autumn was happening for the very last time and therefore important”, that her brother “would be the last baby of all to laugh in the Morgans’ cottage, she would be the last girl to sleep in her little room. No roses would flower in her grandmother’s garden after all these roses died, and the grass would be dead in all the fields she knew so well by this time next year” (114). She

feels a particular satisfaction that a neighbour's house will be flooded instead of its being made a holiday home, its cultural authenticity not to be degraded through visitors' use of it. Lyn envisions her own sense of the valley's authenticity and history becoming focused and crystallised in the moment of its loss; Porter effectively crystallises it here, through this surreal premonition of its fate. Like the view of the ruined church which "belongs to itself" in *The Scapegoat*, Lyn's developing ability to read place with an archaeological imagination means she already understands that the flooded valley will exist in a different category of place, beyond conventional narrative or legal ownership. The Neo-Romantic feel of her envisioned future is emphasised in the way it will be "beautiful then in quite a different way" (119). It is and will be, "silent and secret and lost", and this sacralised image of loss inspires a stronger, contented sense of self and agency (114).

Both novels are undermined by a tendency toward the monological. Despite Porter's attempt at intermingling multiple perspectives, positions of authority are not critiqued and voices of rebellion are undermined or ineffectual. In *The Scapegoat* the constant return to the perspective of the novel's authority figures (Carys and Alison's parents and teachers), reassures readers that despite Carys' insecurity, these moral guardians are reasonable figures capable of recognising the inherent faults and virtues of the people in their charge: this is crucial to the novel's quiet resolution after Carys' confession. This admixture of voices is ultimately more monological than dialogical because of the characters' mutually shared perspectives: the only perspective the characters might find significantly other to their own is Carys' secret self, which remains voiceless. *The Valley of Carreg-Wen* similarly reassures its readers by undermining the more rebellious voices of the novel and affirming a sense of inevitability to the growth of industry. Its message of resigned, philosophical

acceptance supports the novel's bias toward Rachel and her family. In this, the two novels are typical of Porter's work in ultimately conforming to the conventional narratives of the self that are highlighted by McCallum. Yet both make interesting use of the archaeological imagination as a counterpoint to discourse leading to fixed and stable ideas of place, and as a way of illustrating wider, more existential models of identity and as a perspective on loss. In this, they resemble her earlier but more complex novel, *Nordy Bank*. Since that novel makes overt references to ideological questions raised by the historical fiction genre, I preface my analysis of that text with some exploration of those ideas.

### **2.3 Subject Identification, Historical Fiction and Rosemary Sutcliff**

These novels, with runaway Carys and disaffected Lyn both welcomed into the community after all's said and done, exemplify the 'coming of age' narrative in children's literature. This should hardly be surprising, given Watson's claim that the theme of maturation "saturates children's stories and colours narratives of every kind" (1). Surveying children's novels from E. Nesbit to Jan Mark, he argues that the theme of 'coming of age' can be found constantly reiterated in children's fiction, its "small eddies of progress and clarity [being] likely to emerge in the narrative languages authors employ even when they [are] not self-consciously tracing their characters' currents of growth and development" (40). Where development of the self is the fundamental focus of a text, it has "especially attracted writers who have been fascinated by narrative and language and its relation to truth" (2). Porter's novels are typical of their era, with little attempt to subvert their overtones of didacticism in such conventional tropes: the understanding parent and teacher, and



convenient devices of plot, coerce the reader into identification with the protagonist, and leave the balance of power as they found it. This reflects McCallum's argument that the conventional narrative of subjectivity in adolescent fiction, of infant solipsism exchanged for integration with society, and defined by an essential and reliably recognisable human self, operates in defiance of the existential and contingent model of the self that was proposed in twentieth-century philosophy. John Stephens has written about similar instances of self-consciously literary or *avant-garde* texts which disrupt the process of reader identification, and avoid generalised narratives of selfhood, knowledge and history.

As described in my Introduction, Stephens is wary of texts that quietly manoeuvre young readers to identify with the implied reader, and to accept uncritically the ideological assumptions innate to it, a hierarchy of writer and reader that is at the heart of Rose's critique of children's literature. Historical recreation in a novel is, in Stephens' evaluation, particularly problematic, being liable to inviting naive identification with the implied reader, and transmission of ideology in the form of humanist universals which commonly provide the basis upon which historical fiction is understood as meaningful. The ideology of historical fiction also rests on engendering an unquestioning attitude to the relation of language, mimesis and authenticity. Porter's approach to historical consciousness in her realist fiction is, as we have seen, the point at which her characters open their imaginations and, fleetingly, transcend the pressing problems of their everyday lives. In *Nordy Bank* (1964), such imaginative transcendence is given greater significance.

As discussed, the protagonist Bronwen Jones closely resembles the model of the sensitive reader (in the words of Crouch), arguably idealised by the children's literature establishment of the early 1960s. At the outset of the novel, when she and

her friends are readying themselves for a camping expedition in the Welsh Marches, Bronwen takes great care in selecting her reading material for their camping holiday; her friend Margery is worried it will rain a lot, in which case their time on Brown Clee will be uneventful. Instead, the children have good weather, build forts and enjoy toasting things over camp fires; they also have the excitement of an escaped police Alsatian in the area. For Bronwen, usually known as Bron, the holiday is more eventful, as she finds herself subsumed by the personality of one of the hill's Iron Age inhabitants, from the ancient camp ("Nurdy Bank") alongside which the children make their modern, temporary one. It is an experience of dispossession, taken further than Carys' in *The Scapegoat* but not to a gothic pitch: indeed, most of the gang see her as just antisocial. Only Bron and Margery share with the reader the sense of looming catastrophe; and Bron's choice of reading matter, *Warrior Scarlet* (1958) by Rosemary Sutcliff, is of great significance to the entire narrative.

Sutcliff is one of the major figures in children's historical fiction in the Second Golden Age and since. In 1965, reviewing her fifteenth novel, *The Mark of the Horse Lord* (1965), the *TLS* marked "the flowering since 1950 of a remarkable talent which enchants readers, old and young, exercises critics and makes irrelevant the notion that the historical novel is barely concealed didacticism". *The Mark of the Horse Lord*, wrote Margaret Spencer, will, for "those who submit willingly to the magic ... cast its spell no less powerfully than any of her books since *The Eagle of the Ninth*." *Eagle's* indirect sequel, *The Lantern Bearers* (1959) was the recipient of the Carnegie Prize, part of the trend toward historical novels remarked upon by both Chambers and Pinsent. That decade also saw the publication *Warrior Scarlet* (1958), a Bronze Age novel concerning young Drem's frustrated quest to take up spears as a warrior alongside his brothers. The *TLS* published a review by archaeologist and

historical novelist (for adult readers) Alfred Duggan, in which he describes it as “a well-imagined story which teaches a sound doctrine, and at the same time giv[es] a fascinating picture of a strange way of life.” Bron, in *Nordy Bank*, describes the novel as “my favourite of Rosemary Sutcliff’s” (44). She spends a great proportion of the novel reading *Warrior Scarlet* to herself, and even aloud for half an hour to her friends around the camp fire, “and they all enjoyed it” (44). All the children, but Bron in particular, “submit willingly to [Sutcliff’s] magic,” as Spencer had it.

Some idea of Sutcliff’s standing as a children’s novelist, and the character of her work, is given in a 1971 survey by Frank Eyre, a former editor at Oxford University Press, who describes her as “still the most outstanding of [a] new kind of historical writer for children” who represents history accurately yet engagingly, and whose narratives “give the reader an extraordinary sense of involvement, of being personally concerned with a deeply felt series of events and emotions that is being projected from inside rather than written about from the outside” (109). Similarly, in her monograph on Sutcliff, and specifically regarding Bron’s favourite, *Warrior Scarlet*, Meek praises Sutcliff’s handling of universal themes that modern adolescents will recognise “in clear outline against the background of an heroic age where the demands of the tribe are unequivocal” (Meek 57).

*Warrior Scarlet* is the story of Drem, who is alienated and then exiled from his Bronze Age tribe amongst the Downs of Sussex. Yet this unforgiving culture comes to repent and amend its hard rules for Drem, who marries another outsider, Blai, daughter of another tribe. In this resolution, which very much defies the unequivocal demands of the age described by Meek, Drem and Blai represent the “individual and unusual” historical narrative which may, anachronistic though it is, be more valuable than something “safely representative and typical” in the view of

Butler and O'Donovan (84). Indeed, Butler and O'Donovan, along with Stephens, praise Sutcliff precisely for estranging details that complicate the process of identification. It is valuable to consider how critics of the era praised her for the reverse, and, indeed, for a depiction of the endurance of the land suggesting enduring universal values (Meek 58).

*Nordy Bank* challenges its reader to make intertextual links with Sutcliff's work and this seeming contradiction of othered historical figures and the enduring material discourse of the land. If Sutcliff's work promises identification with the past, but with certain major conditions placed on the partialness of archaeological imagination, Porter's novel moves into a fantastic mode to explore the complexity of that promise. When Bron reads the shape of the land, as intuitively as she reads *Warrior Scarlet*, her identity appears to become subject to that of a woman from another age. At the same time, Porter makes a further intertextual connection, assuming her reader's acquaintance with the work of Sutcliff, as Bron undergoes a parallel narrative of alienation from her tribe and return to socialisation, guided by her affinity with a wolf-like Alsatian.

#### **2.4 Anxieties of Selfhood and Regression in *Nordy Bank***

The incidents of *Nordy Bank* focus on the chronotope of the children's camping holiday. This is a conventional trope of twentieth-century children's literature exemplified by Ransome's popular 'Swallows and Amazons' series, and particularly popularised by Enid Blyton. Redolent of the geographer-citizen trend, the trope licenses child independence whilst emphasising their contact with the countryside. In

the opening chapters, Bron is a quiet figure, while her friends, Anne, Margery, Peter, Robin and Joe plan their encampment on the secluded Brown Clee hill. Her only contribution is, as a signal to the reader's idea of her character, the response to Margery's statement that "[t]he Titterstone Clee is full of quarries and the Stretton hills are full of energetic summer visitors" (4). The Brown Clee, Bron says on impulse, is full of "quietness and dreams", but she immediately blushes at the attention this gathers, the epitome of a shy, bookish child (4).

As well as the holiday encampment, the novel features repeated overt thematic and textual references to child development and socialisation. Bron begins the narrative as someone who privately "never minded being alone, and in fact liked it more than being with other people" (21), moving to the point of admitting "I'm frightened of people" and then qualifying that as the "silliest of all" possible reasons to be scared (84); in the conclusion of the novel she is confident enough to face living on her own in Ludlow, with her parents in Paris. We also see her making conversation with strangers about her adopted dog, and are told she "needed no encouragement" to keep "all three of them entertained for a good part of the journey" with stories about him (114). Entwined with this narrative of development, Bron experiences a temporary, extreme and existential sense of personal disorientation. Margery becomes conscious of this problem, and is concerned enough to discuss it with a doctor, the father of a friend: "It's just that since we've been in the camp, she's changed completely" (75). Doctor Turner begins by expressing concern, but ultimately lays the blame on "homesickness or an upset stomach": the inference being that changes in personality are natural and inevitable (76). Bron's change in personality, as Margery and the reader are aware, is unnatural and inexplicable: a reversion of personality, apparently with some psychic link to another identity,

meaning she knows how to build an effective Iron Age camp, but is also so terrified of the stray Alsatian she meets that she tries to kill it with a stone. The novel is haunted, therefore, by the fear of retrogression and unhealthy change. In the same scene in which Margery speaks with Doctor Turner, Mrs Turner greets the group of visiting children with repeated reference to their development:

She kissed the children as they came in, uttering the usual joyful cries: “My, how you've grown, Peter!"; “You're more like your dad than ever, Margery!"; “There, Robin, so you're not a baby now!” Peter was extremely pleased that Joe had stayed at the camp. (74)

Mrs Turner's “joyful cries” and the resentment which Peter feels in response (not to mention the slightly absurd compliment of saying Margery looks like her father) suggest that Porter is parodying the crude adult discourse of development that children themselves must situate themselves within them, with difficulty. Bron's difficult narrative, including her fear of complete loss of self, is provided as a more accurate depiction of experience (with Doctor Turner's “homesickness or an upset stomach” as a similarly unhelpful discourse counterpointing his wife's).

By contrast with these simplistic narratives, Bron's identity is not glossed as a single, continuous narrative of development. Even from the beginning, she identifies herself in at least two versions: when others discuss her, she is frequently Bronwen, but she never uses that form herself, preferring Bron. When she enters the long adoption process of Griff the Alsatian, she is more often Miss Owen. Porter foreshadows the fantastic aspects of the plot in an early scene of the novel, accentuating Bron's different constructions of selfhood. While she waits shyly, reading alone on the Brown Clee, she begins to feel “strangely uneasy and [ca]n't

stop herself turning every few moments to make sure that no one [is] standing behind her” (22). She remembers Margery saying that the hill “seemed to be watching and waiting”, a personification that does nothing to reassure her.

Paradoxically, her means of comfort go to produce a strange sense of disassociation: she tells herself she is alone, then says it aloud, marking a distinction between interior and expressive dialogue, then speaks to herself again: “I’m quite alone. No one else can be watching me, because no one else is here” (22).

Perhaps following on from Margery’s personification of the hill, she views the camp from the position of the hill itself, “it wasn’t watching *her*, little Bronwen Owen sitting in its lap” (22). She has tacitly undermined the logic of her own sentence: no-one else is there, but Bron can and is, intersubjectively, watching herself. The strangeness of projecting this view of herself (a subtly unsettling depiction of self-consciousness) is exaggerated by, again, using the more formal “Bronwen Owen” (suggesting, by association with its other uses in the novel, the voice of an authority figure) and the stress on the word ‘*her*’, which emphasise the strange alterity of Bron’s own identity to herself, even as she attempts to describe her invisibility. It is Bron’s quiet shyness and sensitivity that, in Porter’s depiction of the scene, originates this sense of her own alterity. Porter links it directly to the sense of being-here that is fostered by her attentiveness to the material yet historically ambiguous hillside and camp, and Bron’s attempt to process her feelings of heightened subjectivity through, as Bakhtin would present it, internal dialogic productions of self. As the novel continues, the fantastic elements of such alterity and dialogism are rendered through Bron’s confused and confusing expression of the archaeological imagination.

The scene on the hill is the first presentiment of a major strand in the novel: the growing, private and indeterminate, internal alter-ego of Bron: the identity of a figure from the Iron Age. The presence of this other personality is, as Bron seems privately to describe it, her “dark shadow” (109), a personality that frightens her in its ability to overwhelm her and dominate her normal behaviour. It enters the reader’s awareness through an act of archaeological imagination from Bron, and throughout the period of her possession by the other identity she makes frequent pronouncements on scenes of the hillside’s past. The other children in the camp decide to play at building an Iron Age fort, a depiction of imaginative play re-reading landscape that echoes *Swallows and Amazons*: Bron dismisses all their ideas by “saying loudly and rudely, ‘Don’t be ridiculous!’” (41). She says their fort will not protect them from slings and spears, and when they tell her (trying to be politic) that it is just to protect them from the weather, she responds:

“You should have seen it how it was.” She spoke quietly, in a strangely sad way. “These banks were steep and high then, and topped by palisades. The ditch between the banks was deep as well, and muddy with stagnant water. It’s only a ghost of what it was.” (42)

Porter’s use of the word “ghost” not only suggests the supernatural overtones of her dispossession, but invokes ideas of disembodied identity which haunt, not only Bron herself, but also the empty, non-human hillside. Like the drowned valley and lost room of the novels already described, Porter presents the view of the vanished fort as a chronotope in which the viewer is displaced from the present moment and experiences a strong, subjective feeling of alterity. In this instance, not only is that experience of archaeological imagination prolonged, but it is also inseparable from the expressions of self-identity that the viewer makes elsewhere (as ‘Bron’,



‘Bronwen’, ‘Miss Owen’ or intersubjectively, ‘her’). If Carys and Alison, in *The Scapegoat*, briefly entered the role of *mearcstapas* by negotiating, from a physical boundary, the line between fantasy and reality, past and present, Bron here enters the role alone, moving between modes of being and temporality, as well as striations in her sense of self. In this case, unlike that in *The Scapegoat*, the *mearcstapa* role offers no promise of reorientation and return to the present moment. Instead, it threatens complete dissolution of one identity into another.

Initially, the alternate identity is produced through Bron’s narration, like a scene from *Warrior Scarlet*, of the known facts of the place. The use of specialised language such as ‘palisades’, and the way that she speaks regretfully of a past scene she could not have seen, support this sense of another identity. Yet, uncannily presented as such specialised language is, this discourse does not, in itself, threaten Bron or her friends: it is simply out of place. It could, in fact, be read as an intertextual invasion from Sutcliff’s novel. As it continues and deepens, the emotional and intuitive aspects of her character which allow this imaginative reach, appear over-developed, and she regresses to an infantile or near-animal identity. The Iron Age identity, never fully identified as discrete from Bron herself, is increasingly violent and fearful: it is the threatening spectre of emotional regression. Bron, a dog-lover at home, is terrified by the first appearance of the Alsatian, which she misidentifies as a wolf. Bron’s over-identification with the Iron Age identity, first through its sense of place, then its sense of loss and finally its almost uncultured sensitivity (almost inhuman) describes her difficulty in reconciling different discourses of place-knowledge. It resembles, in fact, a fantastical, fictionalised version of the dangerous reader identification, typical of historical novels for children, and which Stephens and McCallum are so cautious of.

Bron has another alter-ego in the text, Griff the Alsatian himself. Porter mirrors them when she has them both alone and anxious (with Bron's identity almost animal) on the camp at Nordy Bank: "She stopped suddenly. The Alsatian stopped suddenly" (74). The similarity of their behaviour (their fear and violence) emphasises that Bron's change in personality is not just one of perception but of social interaction: her sense of identity is defined by an entirely different society. Like Bron, the carefully trained animal reverts in the course of the novel to a state of fear and alienation from which he might not be coaxed back. His successful rehabilitation is another narrative echoing the theme of development, and Bron's empathy and sense of responsibility for him are the start of her shift back to a modern, more human identity, within the space of a few pages; the first time we see her again, from another's point of view, "She looked quite a different person altogether from the sullen girl he had left earlier in the day" (76).

In the light of her possession, the fabrication of her own discourse of self, and of its discursive nature is made clear. At one point, Porter presents the complexity of self-identity, and Bron's residual sense of reorientation, with a neat exchange at the training centre, referring to the dog as a "nervous visitor":

"You're not nervous, are you? Is it Miss Owen?"

"No," said Bron. "I mean, no, I'm not nervous. Yes, I am Miss Owen. I mean, I'm Bron." (103)

Interpretation of this incidental dialogue requires understanding on the part of the reader, not only of social codes (the polite expression, "Is it Miss Owen?") and of Bron's determined self-definition ("I mean, I'm Bron"), but also of the implicit question of Bron's identity as a "nervous visitor", and the way the trainer anticipates

Bron's response with his question. The hesitations and confusions in this short dialogue are textual signifiers of multiple discourses of selfhood being sifted and selected. Griff barks angrily in his state of nervousness, but Bron, though nervous too, refuses the role of "nervous visitor" as a description of herself.

The archaeological imagination is exercised and depicted constantly throughout the novel, and its effects are not always disorientating. The novel stresses proper correlation of discourses, from the imaginative to the scientific. An ex-children's librarian, Porter is surely not discouraging the reading of Rosemary Sutcliff, which Bron does with pleasure for much of the novel: reading is occasionally depicted as both rewarding and sociable, and may form another metatextual reference to Ransome that address a particular kind of reader. The scene in which Ransome's character, Titty, recites a line of Keats to herself, is echoed in Margery's inspiration on arriving at Brown Clee to recite Housman's "The Welsh Marches". It is significant to Porter's depiction of these characters, though, that Margery can't manage the whole poem and that Bron knows it by heart. Archaeology per se is depicted repeatedly as a rewarding perspective on place – when Bron says, and a friend agrees, that holding an ancient axe-head "feels exciting in your hand ... Alive and powerful" (58). A real, famous archaeologist of the time (the late John Norton MBE) even receives a walk-on role to corroborate Bron's pronouncements about the camp. Although it is frightening for Bron to experience such extreme alterity of self, her more socialised identity seems to associate the strange episode of the "dark shadow" with the realist narrative of self-development. There is even a submerged theme of Bron's self-identification as half-Welsh, mentioned briefly at the start of the novel and alluded to in a concluding scene. Overlooking the scene, Peter says, "It's easy to imagine the Celts manning this fortress: swarms of little wild

people rushing about with woad on!" (94). Porter implies that this is a teasing statement from Peter, but it is not clear if he is referring to her recent tendency to imagine the past so clearly, or to her own, unstated, Welsh identity.

Bron's response to the challenge is, in any case, hotly presented;

"They were not little wild people and they did not rush about with woad on!"

Bron stared at Peter indignantly, and then smiled when she realised that he was teasing her. "No, but they didn't, Peter! [...] In fact in many ways they were more clever than we are now. All things considered." (94)

"All things considered!" Joe repeats incredulously, and this exasperated phrase appears to illustrate the novel's intertextual critique of historical fiction: the absurdity of effacing such differences in prompting identification with historical figures, and the naturalness of such identification in the face of such evocative sites as the camp on Brown Clee. In its brevity and its idiomatic power, however, Bron's own initial use of the phrase demonstrates the other subtext of the novel: that a continuity of human identity exists between figures remote from modern experience, that such effacements or elisions of difference can be made imaginatively, by characters like Bron, inspired by places like Nordy Bank, and that successfully correlating such interrelated discourses can be productive work.

### **Conclusion**

The changing attitudes to Sheena Porter's work exemplify some of the shifts in production and criticism of children's literature in and since its so-called 'Second

Golden Age', particularly regarding the place of narratives concerning historical landscape and sensitive protagonists. Although *Nordy Bank* goes unmentioned by Chambers in his critique of the Carnegie Prize, a useful guide to the ideals of the children's literature establishment, it certainly shares some of the tendencies receiving his criticism. In this, and her tidily resolved dramas suffused with (as Pearson identifies, in the specific case of *Nordy Bank*) the attitudes and ideals of the middle-class establishment, she is representative of children's literature publishing and the ideals of its critics in the early 1960s. Despite her stated intentions, Porter's work frequently possesses a streak of didacticism, the varying viewpoints of children and authority rendered in monological discourse which does not sufficiently articulate the Other or represent its power. To the extent that they embody the Neo-Romantic sensibility, her work is never successful as a critique of orthodox or authoritative discourse.

Yet I would argue that Porter's work is progressively more adventurous in her choices of theme. Though never returning to the existential material and fantastic genre of *Nordy Bank*, she explores experiences of shame, dispossession and mortality, often from politicised or socially engaged positions. Despite a tendency to depict individuals overall with a stable and unambiguously fixed sense of personal identity, there are some interesting uses of landscape as images of secrecy and transcendence. Historical landscape is 'lost and secret'; it belongs to itself, or as the last pages of her most ambitious and neo-romantic novel have it, "Nordy Bank was there, but it belonged to the hill's past now and she belonged to herself" (122). This refiguring of absence and loss, still recoverable to the sensitive viewer, adds a complexity to the apparently simple recurring motif of the child looking out at a landscape scene and enjoying its beauty. The child must respond to that 'secretness'

in some kind for that viewing experience to be truly meaningful: the risks to selfhood involved in such imaginative acts in *Nordy Bank* are also explored in her realist novels, though the emphasis is always, reassuringly, the rewards of a shared emotional experience

*Nordy Bank* (1964), however, combines its human, supernatural and animal-story narratives to produce a contemplative narrative with overt intertextuality, and it is valuable to consider that Porter herself had first-hand experience of children's reading habits, of a kind that Chambers refers to in his critique. I therefore propose *Nordy Bank* as a text actively engaging with its role in children's book culture: its threat of destabilised identity resembles themes of Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967) and Lively's *The Wild Hunt of Hagworthy* (1971), alongside whom Porter was responsible for producing a strong trend of children's novels concerned with landscape as a major subject and theme. Her greatest influence, in her own description, was the writer William Mayne, whom she follows in focusing on tiny details and modes of speech, and in making historical landscape so richly significant to the children who inhabit it. Yet in his work of the 1960s and 1970s, Mayne was to embrace the fantastic mode in ways which explored the neo-romantic sensibility, and its consequences for ideas of selfhood and the child 'in place', which go beyond Porter's more stable and reassuring texts. Mayne's work is considered in the following chapter.

### Chapter 3: “The Eyes of a Stone” The Novels of William Mayne

A hugely prolific writer, William Mayne was controversial even in his day, dividing the opinion of children’s literature professionals. In a review of his novel *Earthfasts*, Rosemary Manning declares herself an admirer, but “cannot forget the exasperated words DOWN WITH MAYNE, reported to have been seen on the blackboard of a particularly well-read class of eleven-year-olds” (*William Mayne: Writer Disordinary* 1080). His novels are quiet and subtle, overwhelmingly concerned with how rural children see the world, and use the fantastic mode in sophisticated literary experiments. Unlike Sheena Porter, the reasons for Mayne’s erasure from the canon are clear. After a distinguished and committed engagement with children’s literature (as an anthologist, as well as contributor to publications such as *Puffin Post*, besides his many novels, novellas and picture books) he was convicted in 2004 for eleven charges of sexual abuse with young girls, whereupon he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison and placed on the sex offenders’ register for life. I will argue that Mayne’s sophisticated written work, though likely to remain off children’s bookshelves with good reason, informed and influenced the climate of Second Golden Age children’s literature and its contemporary critical reception. I will also argue that his novels bear sustained scrutiny and contribute to a broader understanding of the body of writing I term Children’s Neo-Romanticism.

In this chapter, I will look primarily at three novels of William Mayne’s published in the era circumscribed by this thesis: *A Parcel of Trees* (1963),

*Earthfasts* (1966), and *It* (1974). I could equally have included (and will refer to, where appropriate) a variety of other interesting texts by Mayne which also approach the subject matter of place, archaeology and myth, such as *A Grass Rope* (a Carnegie medal-winner in 1957) which features a group of children in a Yorkshire valley who solve an ancient historical mystery through the scientific analysis of a local legend, or *Cradlefasts* (1995) and *Candlefasts* (2000), sequels to *Earthfasts* which expand its more obscure ideas into a wider scientific cosmogony that even reaches into the future. *Hob and the Goblins* (1993) is a fantasy adventure revolving around a folkloric spirit, while at the other extreme of style, *The Twelve Dancers* (1962), *Sand* (1962) and *The Battlefield* (1964) exemplify Mayne's depiction of archaeological practice and children's intuitive ability with it, none of which utilise the supernatural or fantastic. The texts I will examine span the period of this thesis and feature three contrasting protagonists dealing with various problems of place: legal and fantastical, marvellous and uncanny. They demonstrate Mayne's distinctive approach to characters and discourse, and his depiction of 'ways of seeing'.

As in my exploration of Porter's work, I will critique these texts informed by dialogical criticism: in Mayne's instance, I will be analysing the ways he deliberately frustrates attempts at univocal, objective descriptions of place and identity, and the way in which he interprets the archaeological imagination, as both a challenge and a mental state which are both defined by their instability and ambiguity. I propose that Mayne's enduring contribution to this era of children's literature is his use of the archaeological imagination to explore the multiple layers of selfhood as well as of place. His quite literal spirits of place link landscape, subjectivity and the irrational and demand active responses from his characters.



I begin this chapter by broadly sketching Mayne's biography and literary career, both as a writer and folk tale anthologist. I progress to a comparison of Mayne's more regular uses of archaeology in his earlier novels (treasure hunts such as *A Grass Rope*, *The Twelve Dancers* and *The World Upside Down*) with the innovations of *A Parcel of Trees*, and then look at his Neo-Romantic approach to the child's experience of place as site of contemplation. I continue by looking at the different strata of identity Mayne shows to be revealed through this dreaming, fantastical relationship with place, identifying how his various child protagonists find themselves in two minds or more, with pleasing or disturbing effects. Continuing with an exploration of techniques used by the author in subverting subjectivity, including visual language and related methods of calling attention to the instability of the text. Finally, I focus on *It* and Mayne's use of the spirit of place: an informed utilisation of folk cultural objects which allows for another, stranger voice in the polyphony of approaches to place, history and culture.

### **3.1 William Mayne: A Survey**

William Mayne's standing has undergone a huge, foundational and almost totally obliterating earthquake. In 2017, Mayne's work is out of print and generally unknown, yet in his 1971 survey, *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century* (mentioned in Chapter 2), Eyre could write with confidence that William Mayne was "the one living writer of real stature who has already established a secure reputation" (139). Mayne's name appears repeatedly throughout the survey, a fact Eyre acknowledges as unavoidable in any discussion of current children's literature, not only because "all critics agree that it [his work] is important, but also because he has

written so many different kinds of work, for so many different ages” (99). In a similar study published that year, John Rowe Townsend, seminal advocate of children’s literature, describes Mayne as “remarkably prolific” for a “quality” writer, and compiles a bibliography comprising forty-two works of fiction, plus short stories and editorship on five anthologies for children: in 2010, his obituary rounds this body of work up to “well over 100 titles”. In an interview published at the time of Eyre and Townsend’s surveys, Mayne is asked whether “a writer of top quality ought not to be so productive.” He replies, “I should have died at thirty-six, like Mozart, then it wouldn’t have mattered” (“A Discussion with William Mayne” 48). He also characterises his attitude to work as profoundly concerned with intersubjectivity, in which the child reader is almost a matter of ambivalence: “All I am doing is looking at things now and showing them to myself when I was young. If anyone else wants to look over my shoulder, that’s alright. If they don’t, that doesn’t matter either” (49).

That he was important and, despite his workmanlike productivity, a so-called ‘quality writer’, is taken as read in criticism leading up to the 1990s, but as that exchange implies, Mayne was not universally welcomed amid the changing values of the children’s literature establishment, and the question frequently arises whether his writing was sympathetically received by younger readers. “William Mayne appeals strongly to adults with an interest in children’s books, but frequently fails to arouse a response in children, even highly intelligent ones,” writes Townsend (*Sense* 130). Meanwhile Eyre admits, “There are still many people who argue about William Mayne’s work, who say that children don’t like his books; that they sit on library shelves; above all, that children don’t *talk* like that” (130). *The Cambridge Guide to Children’s Books in English* describes him as “widely regarded as a difficult author

because the language he uses is unusually precise and economical,” and dialogue “rarely takes the form of informative conversation, particularly between parent and child where each often seems preoccupied with private concerns,” whilst Alison Lurie calls Mayne’s dialogue “Pinteresque”, and states that even between children, a sense of empathy and connection is rare in his stories (“William Mayne” 369). He would be guilty of Aidan Chambers’ charges against the typical Carnegie winning novel of the 1950s and 60’s as “intellectual, sophisticated, over-written” and “conservative in its theme and content” (*Reluctant* 67).

Nonetheless, this cool, dry, detached approach to writing is one aspect frequently highlighted as part of Mayne’s sophistication. In her chapter on Mayne, in the study of subversive children’s literature, *Don’t Tell the Grown-Ups* (1991), Lurie is one of several critics who stress the pedagogic value of his morally complex works to young readers. In such arguments, the linguistic difficulty of Mayne is commonly viewed as a marker of the progression of children’s literature from the previous generation, in which “commercial and practical difficulties of the period created an unfertile soil for the growth of the genuine writer for children” (Eyre 78). Pearson, citing a reference by Webb to principles of ‘literary excellence’, suggests that Mayne, along with Garner and Pearce, represent this perceived ideal in work “characterised by linguistic sophistication and nuanced stylistic and narrative modes” (91).

Another implicit reason for Mayne’s ubiquity in Eyre’s survey is that he embodies the most significant development in post-1950 innovations in children’s literature: that new books disdained the tidy categories of conventional genre, instead representing fusions and new forms: adventures that were without simplistic heroism, school stories that went beyond conventional ‘Tom Brown’ stereotypes,

fantasies that were psychological, rationalist or in some degree realistic, and stories which transcended conventionally segregated audiences: portraying boys and their relationships with girls, children and their relationships with parents and teachers. All of the above are typical of Mayne's writing (in fact, they can all be seen to be represented together in certain of his novels): it is another reason why critics of the time appear agreed that his work will remain a niche taste. It is equally an indication of Mayne's important position in changes of publishers and critics in promoting writing for children that was more unorthodox and literary, less obviously commercial. The award of the prestigious Carnegie medal to Mayne's *A Grass Rope* is evidence of the high critical esteem in which he was held among critics and school librarians: as discussed in my Porter chapter, the list of Carnegie medal-winners can be seen in retrospect to particularly champion novels with an historical or rural theme. His protagonists are, in the majority, identification figures for the sensitive reader, and when he departs from dry, literary realism, his work could generally be described, as Crouch did *Nordy Bank* (1964) of "[treading] delicately the frontier between the real and supernatural worlds" (*Chosen* 25). His protagonists walk the same borderline: *A Grass Rope*, which won the award, emphasises folk belief, and the more credulous child characters hear phantom horns and seek fairies down mines, in ways that may cause the reader to hesitate and consider their significance within the wider, realist text. The novel has a strong archaeological theme and is immersed in a sense of rural place, but given this description, many other Mayne novels could have been considered for the Carnegie prize. As will be argued, those themes become typical of Mayne's work, though his treatment of them would come to be less conservative as time passed.

Mayne was born in Hull in 1928, and was a pupil at Canterbury Cathedral Choir School, one of a select number (roughly half a dozen a year) who continue to board in a sixteenth-century house adjacent to Canterbury Cathedral and are taught in an atmosphere heavy with tradition and purpose, called upon to regularly perform at Evensong amongst other church services. This uncommon childhood experience formed the basis for his novel *A Swarm in May* (1955) and three sequels. However, his first novel *Follow the Footprints* (1953) like the outright majority of his novels, including *A Grass Rope* (1957), describe a very different experience of childhood: steeped in the life of a village of small town, undistinguished academically, quiet and even overlooked. Very few of his novels are set in truly urban environments: his characters are usually as Lurie describes them, “unsophisticated, half-literate people separated from the contemporary world in some way: they are gypsies, uneducated servants, and labourers, farmers in remote Yorkshire villages, or inhabitants of an earlier period of history” (371). Arguably, Mayne makes a deliberate and consistent choice to foreground the experience of rural children: the mode could even be characterised as pastoral.

The county of Yorkshire, where he returned to live and build a house in Wensleydale, figures the most often in his work, and differing from the predominant plot motifs of the era’s children’s literature, its protagonists are not visitors to the area but inhabitants. So Mary and Nan in *A Grass Rope*, or Lucy and Jack in *The World Upside Down* (1954), spend much time in their respective novels walking solitarily up steep hillsides and through woodland, but with a confidence and sense of belonging. They are frequently involved in their parents’ business, for example assisting in the bakery (*A Parcel of Trees*) or on the farm (*A Grass Rope*). Mayne’s novels display a preoccupation with history, as Lurie describes it, a “sense of

landscape intertwined with an almost archaeological sense of the past” (“William Mayne” 372). His young protagonists are repositories of local knowledge, and although the narrative of many of his earlier novels concerns the solving of a riddle or mystery, this is usually related directly, and limited to, an episode of local history and landscape which is likely in some way to restore some lost property to its rightful inheritor. The pace is usually gentle, the drama subdued. These are evocations of nurturing, nest-like communities, frequently located in the steep well of a Yorkshire dale. Despite the stereotypes of the county’s literary heritage, there are no Gothic travails across a wind-blasted moor for Mayne’s characters, though weather is always exquisitely described in the course of his painstaking evocations of atmosphere.

Beginning with 1953’s *Follow the Footprints*, the first decade of his writing (comprising nearly twenty titles alone) is dominated by treasure hunts. In *The World Upside Down*, for instance, Lucy and Jack are intrigued by the local story of jewels hidden during the Civil War, casual interest growing deeper when they uncover a lodge built into the hillside which provides an important clue to the treasure. The lodge is known to the local poacher, and so the children find themselves at the hinging point of three separate storylines, all of which finally resolve in restoration of the treasure (and a lost grandson) to a local land-owner.

*A Grass Rope* (1957) also features an old story of lost treasure, albeit involving unicorns and phantasmal hounds in place of civil war soldiers. Once again, the children (Mary, Nan, Peter and Adam) come across a clue to the treasure quite unexpectedly, while Adam is cleaning layers of paint from an old pub sign (Mayne’s child protagonists frequently include those types, like Adam, who are to be absorbed in eccentric projects, whether it is the restoration of the lodge in *The World Upside*

*Down* or analysis of an unearthly candle in *Earthfasts*.) On learning the local legend of the hounds and the unicorn, Adam works hard to reinterpret it as a treasure trail, but it is Mary who provides the final clue, by setting off determinedly down an old tin mine where she has been told the fairies live.

*The Twelve Dancers* (1962), set in a Welsh hill village, provides another variation on the formula. Here, a long-lost cup belongs to a tradition of symbolic rent payments on common ground. The means to recover the cup are found to be encoded in a folk dance performed by children around a local standing stone. However, recovery of the cup becomes the object of competition between the current landowner and the villagers, with the threatened possibility of his withdrawal of the ancient 'lease'. The schoolchildren are temporarily caught up in the middle of the competition, with the day of the dance approaching. However, Mayne chooses not to sustain the tension between the two groups, and the novel rolls uneventfully to its conclusion, with the cup recovered and the tradition re-established.

Novels of this kind recall the Blyton-esque adventures described in Chapter 1, which dramatize conflicts of discourse over treasure and the responsibility of the authorities to respect local tradition. The child's view of events, depicted conventionally as concerned with justice and pragmatism, tends in each text to overcome adult cynicism or standing feuds. Mayne's children themselves are typically portrayed as less powerful and heroically active than Blyton's. Published within two years of *Five go to Finniston Farm*, *The Twelve Dancers* has a pronounced forlorn quality, and its protagonist, Marlene, is a solitary newcomer, working class, and more of an observer than a participant in events. Otherwise, these novels are filled with the same sense of security: what initially appear to be contradicting voices of tradition, history and children's play are commonly resolved

into one homogenous outcome at the conclusion. Where folk belief makes an appearance, as in *A Grass Rope*'s unicorn legend or the fairies of *The Twelve Dancers*, a rational discourse inevitably comes along to efface it. In the novels' climaxes and discoveries, the discourse of superstition and folk belief ultimately belongs solely to the youngest children, as with Mary, who concludes *A Grass Rope* saying "And all because I believe in fairies," happily unaware either that she has solved the mystery of the lost treasure or risked her life in the process (*Grass* 121). Meanwhile, the older children (a head boy, in *A Grass Rope*, even a teacher in *The Twelve Dancers*) resolve the legend through a rational interpretation of riddles and legends into historical fact, the pedagogical subtext resembling more overt use of a riddling treasure hunt to teach a lesson in landscape history in "Klaxon" and "Euphan's" *South Country Secrets* (1937) (see Chapter 1).

Mayne's interest in legend and folk-tale is evident from his 1960s anthologies, successive *Hamish Hamilton Books of... Kings, Queens, Heroes, Giants, and Ghosts* (ranging from 1964 to 1971). His work as anthologist is ambitious, not only wide-ranging in their selection but extensively glossed in comparison with other entries in the series: "When I was putting it together," he writes in one Introduction, "I often felt that I was tackling big heavy things that did not want to move where I wanted them to go. The giants kept standing in the wrong order. But I put them in a tidy line at the end" (*Giants* 13). As a representative example, the *Giants* anthology (1968) (later republished by Dutton and ultimately Puffin Books) features stories by Hawthorne, Swift and Wilde, as well as folk tales from Ireland, Scotland, Scandinavia and South America (a story given in a version by Mayne himself under his 'Charles Molin' pseudonym), and his biographical entries for authors suggest a widely experienced, deep and committed knowledge of folk tale and fantasy. His



novel *Earthfasts* was a critical success at a point where he appeared to have begun to lapse into formula, and shows a different approach to both local legend and the fantastic itself.

The novel begins with schoolboy friends Keith and David following the course of a strange drumming sound from under the earth as they walk on the Yorkshire Dales. They propose several scientific theories to each other, but ultimately the source is revealed as a drummer boy who has ‘time-slipped’ forward from the eighteenth century. He carries a candle, which the boys come to realise has an obscure connection with the time-slip, which has caused other supernatural upheavals in town. A force connected with the candle seemingly kills David, but Keith’s rational treatment of irrational concepts ultimately leads him to an underground chamber in which King Arthur and his Knights rest in ageless sleep, and by returning the candle here, he restores David and the town to their usual state.

Mayne then makes more frequent and confident use of the fantastic mode, specifically using the features of folk and fairy tale, including time travel (*Over the Hills and Far Away*, 1969) and dragons (*The Worm in the Well*, 1993). *A Game of Dark* (1971) also features a dragon, in this case as part of a sublimated fantasy of a boy’s disgust, guilt and hatred concerning his father. Lois Kuznets takes it as epitomising the psychofantasy genre, a novel that is “not a work of fantasy *per se* but uses fantasy as a device within the realistic problem novel” (17). Its fantastic aspects are not reduced to the status of metaphor but a composite work which invites nuanced, detached interpretation of genre markers from its reader.

Mayne’s 1977 novel, *It*, is an accomplished fantasy which once again deals with the strange ancient power of landscape. On a solitary walk, exploring the small

hill her grandfather calls “the Eyell”, Alice seems to ‘pick up’ this spirit – which she calls ‘It’ – who causes her increasing trouble. ‘It’ doesn’t like her going to church, and often keeps her from the door with a localised hurricane. When she does get inside the church, the spirit knocks furniture over and rips things up, while at home it pulls down shelves, breaks eggs and even locks her father in the loft. Alice comes to realise that ‘It’ isn’t trying to master her but come into her service, and whilst trying to reconcile some disquieting visions with accounts of local history she realises that it must be formally released in some form of pagan ritual, which also means the restoration of a buried boundary marker from the Eyell to the edge of town. Despite some resistance from the local clergy, she manages diplomatically to rearrange a traditional procession and ‘It’ is at last exorcised.

Besides *Earthfasts* (adapted for television in 1994, and expanded into a trilogy in 1991 and 1996), Mayne’s biggest commercial success was his series of text-heavy picture books about a household spirit, Hob. Illustrated by Patrick Benson, published in four collections, they describe the modern-day fairy (invisible to adults, but known to the children) and his repeated defence of the family home against the invading forces of Black Dog, Hinky Punk and Sad, among others (1989).

Steadily prolific, Mayne increasingly diversified from his more common themes and subjects, and came to win the Guardian Children’s Book award for a science-fiction adventure set in New Zealand, *Low Tide* (1994). Despite his reputation as a difficult read, Mayne was consistently promoted by Webb, Puffin Books’ most prolific editor, and one of the defining curators of the ‘Second Golden Age’. His 1963 novel, *A Parcel of Trees*, discussed in this chapter, was exclusively a Puffin book, which Kaye Webb describes in her blurb as “written especially for us”

(1). He was frequently and enthusiastically involved in the readings and outings of the Puffin's readers club, and contributed articles and competition challenges to its magazine, *Puffin Post*. In her blurb for *A Book of Heroes* (1967), Webb describes him as "a heroic Puffin author himself" (1).

Following his 2004 conviction, Mayne's work continued to be praised by some enthusiasts, notably the then Archbishop Rowan Williams for Mayne's treatment of young adult psychology, describing *A Game of Dark* as "one of the most searching essays in this genre"<sup>9</sup> (20). But as Dennis Butts and Peter Hunt describe it, the wider cultural establishment took the attitude that "books *can* be infectious – the man is the book, and the book is the man," and William Mayne's written work was universally withdrawn from sale (138). His place in the canon of twentieth-century children's writers, always complex, has been transferred permanently from the arena of the enduring, still-read children's classic to the quieter realm of academic scholarship. Yet even in this area, interest in Mayne has been minor, though he remains a feature of the *Cambridge Guide* and Daniel Hahn's latest revision of the *Oxford Guide*. Mayne appears to have featured prominently in no published academic paper since Andelys Wood's 1999 comparison of *Cuddy* (1994) with Robert Westall's *The Wind Eye* (1974) and their depictions of religious saints.

In the next section I will begin my argument for William Mayne as a writer of Children's Neo-Romanticism through his presentation of the child as inheritor of liminal space, a theme particularly crucial to his 1963 novel *A Parcel of Trees*.

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Rowan Williams would not have read Mayne as a child – *A Game of Dark* was published when Williams was in his early twenties. There are scant testaments to Mayne's strengths as a writer from those who read him as a child.

### 3.2 Representations of Place in *A Parcel of Trees*

With the exception of *The Worm in the Well* (2001), a retelling of the Lambton Worm folk-tale, William Mayne's novels avoid the tropes and tone of high fantasy. The passages describing a dragon-hunt in *A Game of Dark* (1971) are pointedly juxtaposed with realist passages which imply the other world, obscurely, to be a semi- metaphorical dream-space. Where Mayne employs the fantastic, it is predominantly in works of fantastic realism, in which the irruption of unreal elements produces disorientation and forces reconsideration of the tenets which define real life. Two of the novels to be considered in this chapter fall into this category, featuring what could respectively be described as restless spirits and a form of possession. Like *The Scapegoat* (1968) and *The Valley of Carreg-Wen* (1971) novels explored in Chapter 2, however, *A Parcel of Trees* (1963) is a Neo-Romanticist novel in a realist mode, and like *Nordy Bank* (1964), one of its main themes is a young girl's inner reckoning with identity. Its tone is dry, its subject matter a mundane battle with a national corporation, and though it comes to behave like a detective novel, Mayne strictly avoids the conventional markers of genre fiction. The setting in North Yorkshire is scrupulously mimetic, and the novel's inference throughout is that the protagonist must give way to the relentless legal discourse of authority. The novel is an account of a young girl's legal dispute with British Railways over a small orchard by the railway line, the titular "parcel" of apple trees. Yet Susan feels an intuitive affinity for the orchard (on the grounds of which she attempts to lay her claim) and this is presented in irrational terms. Its

value in and of itself is like that of Carys' secret room in *The Scapegoat*, of a liminal space offering perspective and meditation.

Susan's parents run the bakery in the Yorkshire village of Burwen, and being called upon to work in the shop in her school holidays, and to share a room with her territorial younger sister (who divides the space exactly in half with white tape) Susan begins the novel on the look-out for an "out-of-the-way" space to call her own (9). In the loft, she uncovers a set of old documents showing that an orchard on the other side of the railway lines was once a part of her parents' property. Her experience of the solitude of the orchard is almost ecstatic; however, she is apprehended as a trespasser, and receives a stern letter from the railways, which binds her in the inflexible legal discourse of land ownership. The ownership of this small piece of land is disputed, though, as the railways have never made use of it, so a retired lawyer friend of Susan's advises her to find evidence that someone else has made use of the land for the statutory period of twelve years, at which point the corporation will be unable to claim it.

The orchard turns out to be littered with mysterious evidence: a concrete block sunk in the floor, the bones of a horse, several gravestones of dogs. All these things in turn lead Susan to interview other Burwen residents, and she comes to learn their (generally rather unprepossessing) secret histories connecting them to the place.

After a decade of novels by Mayne roughly following the treasure hunt plot described above, this novel makes an interesting contrast. The historical details that Susan uncovers are local in time as well as place, covering only the twelve years she investigates. Unlike in *A Grass Rope* or *The Twelve Dancers*, the local community has nothing to gain or lose by Susan's success, and the orchard itself is of negligible

value to her. A matter of principle is being contested, involving the loss of an object (with which Susan strongly identifies) to a disembodied entity (that was unaware of the land and has no use for it). Symbolically, the novel depicts a threatened displacement of children from the landscape, particularly from enjoying it in the romantically idealised manner of convention. It does this by contrasting their discourse: in the place of a local legend, Susan must riddle with the discursive power of the corporation, the bemusingly obscure language of land ownership that in Susan's opinion is not even English: "It was all indre and words like that" (38). Their legal position is patently unjust and nonsensical: "I think it's silly if they can't give away something that they don't want and didn't know they had," says Susan, in vain (57). The railways' discourse operates autonomously and inhumanly, represented but only ventriloquised by their agent. Mayne allows no possibility for Susan to claim the orchard without legal consent from the authorities: the realist mode of the novel does not permit alternatives or reinterpretations of the legal discourse.

The plot of land does have a value to Susan, but, as with Carys and the hidden room in *The Scapegoat*, it is as a site without value, a blank space. However, in this more overtly Neo-Romantic narrative, Susan's experience of that liminality is rendered in the language of dream, memory and the irrational sense of *déjà vu*.

Susan first discovers the plot of land, in a way that Geoffrey Grigson would approve of, poring over an old map. Even before she physically visits the site, she reads the word "Orchard" and "Lodge" within it, and finds herself imaginatively inhabiting the space, walking among the trees to the lodge, as if she had already been there. Visiting the site is important, not only in itself, but through its activation of mental images and the uncanny sense of *déjà vu*. Through a slight repetition, Mayne

suggests Susan's state of reverie and the infinite looping back of experience into her mental impression of it, saying "Susan suddenly felt it was like a dream, as if she was still, when she woke, in a place she had been dreaming about" (29). The truth, even at this stage, is clearly that she *is* in a place she had been dreaming about; by the end of the novel, the reader is even more aware of the relationship between physical place and imaginary place. The lodge is now a ruin, the lawns overgrown; even before her detective work has begun, Susan's emotional engagement with the site involves the archaeological imagination, as she struggles to understand her intuitive feeling for the place.

Her most enjoyable experience of the place is when it is at its least geographically specific, almost apocalyptic:

The orchard was in no land. Beyond its walls was the universe only. A train went by, almost invisible. [...] Susan felt melancholy rise in her like joy. Here she was alone, but there was a way back. Here she was not in the year that surrounded the rest of the world, but in the first year and the last year of time. The visit was perfect. (106)

The archaeological adventures of Mayne's previous treasure hunts rely on a sense of continuity and historical specificity: the ability for a message from the past to be translated comprehensively into modern day experience, the symbols of folk tradition into the facts of historical record. Irrespective of the potential treasure trove at the end of the process, this misrepresents archaeological endeavour inasmuch as the process is generally marked with indeterminacy and the unknowable. Here we see how the sense of loss is given its own distinct value, melancholy rising like joy and loneliness as a pleasure. It is clear to see the influence on Porter's *The*

*Scapegoat*, but also the similarity with Jacquetta Hawkes' opening reverie of *A Land*, in which the hard ground of the author's garden allows her to "rest awake" and contemplate the trains and people unseen, in the dark (as they are here, in morning mist) as "figures moved about the map by unknown forces ... all irresistibly impelled to the achievement of this moment" (7). In both instances, the heightened sense of being-here is prompted less by the clear shape of history in the landscape as the invisible sense of immanence that is the archaeological imagination. The result is not a clear sight of historical movement but an intensified, sublime sense of subjectivity and the present moment. In the underground lodge of *The World Upside Down*, the children orient themselves in the landscape; in *The Twelve Dancers*, a stone circle points out the steps of a folk dance, but here the orchard is not defined by its history but its ahistorical properties, the sense of indeterminacy (running throughout the novel: will *anyone* claim this parcel of trees?) is so total that it becomes sublime: beyond is "the universe only", that is, a state of existence without purpose (*Parcel* 106). The concept of geographically mapping and therefore parcelling up this corner of the universe is made synonymous with specifying the time: the year is spatial ("surround[ing] the world", 106). Both means of understanding this place are inferior to the one Susan experiences on this "perfect" visit. The irony of this atemporal, sublime valuation of the place is that it is therefore automatically excluded from the discourse of land ownership with which Susan must engage.

Rather than the opportunity for historical pedagogy, this is a contestable, fluctuating place for a child to exercise their imagination and aesthetic sense. In its wildness, it resembles the pure iconography of the pastoral ideal, and there is an echo of Francis Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* in its being secretly occupied and



tended by children while adults have disregarded and disowned it (though railway engineers are seen to habitually visit the space when their train is waiting at a signal, reemphasising the orchard's identity as a place between places). Unlike *The Secret Garden*, which implies a relation between the natural growth of a garden with the socialisation and development of Mary and Colin, this pastoral ideal is an escape into atemporality, a retreat from narrative progression. It even reconnects Susan overtly, through legal process, with half-remembered events in her past. In spite of its atemporality, the pastoral aspect of the orchard is significant as a signal toward a fantasy of wholeness and fulfilment; it is the site for Susan to behave in a way that she cannot elsewhere. It also offers psychological restitution, underlined by a curious twist in Mayne's plot which emphasises the power of the archaeological imagination to reflect buried aspects of identity.

Susan's last interview, which concerns the sunken concrete block, is with two men who clandestinely used the space as a launch-pad to test home-made fireworks of increasing size, the last of which went badly awry, burned down the lodge and killed a bull in the adjacent field. What Susan is surprised to learn is that she was there that night, having suppressed the memory. This explains the mystical sense of *deja vu* earlier in the novel. In a final twist, we find another detail Susan has forgotten: signing her name in a register of the "Orchard Gang" that night. In the eyes of the British Railways legal representative, she has been technically in occupation of the site for the required twelve years, and the parcel of trees is hers. This technicality is the final absurd word in a satiric portrayal of legal practice: equally, in the satisfaction of justice and narrative resolution, this represents Susan's physical inscription of her sense of ownership as a metaphorical claim. Out of

unconscious feeling has come a random, written sign that coincidentally satisfies the discourse of corporate legality.

In her *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), Farah Mendlesohn uses Mayne's 1987 novel, *Tiger's Railway*, to help characterise what she calls the liminal fantasy, "a form of fantasy which estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist" (219). Like *A Parcel of Trees*, *Tiger's Railway* plays satirically with bureaucratic procedure, imagining a railway authority that is satisfied with accurate timetables, even if there isn't, in reality, any railway service running. The power of the fantastic in such a text depends, in Mendlesohn's argument, on "an element of knowingness, in effect, a conspiracy between author and reader", in this instance ironising the ideal fantasy of a world perfectly rendered and stabilised through linguistic discourse. I have established that, like *Tiger's Railway*, *A Parcel of Trees* ironises this fantasy relationship of thing to sign, revealing the interanimation of discourse in material place. On the one hand, the reader is presented with the discourse of a child, which is irrational but accurately represents experience of place, and the logic of land ownership that is nonsensical, and in conclusion, through a device of the unconscious mind, the child claims the disputed plot of land. I now argue for his use of such a site to represent multiple discourses of identity and the fantasy of resolving it.

### **3.3 Representations of Self in *A Parcel of Trees* and *It***

Previous critics have explored the work of Mayne as typically constituted of dialogue and therefore powerfully dialogic, irreducible texts (Hunt 1991, McCallum

1999). His more overtly dialogic texts are stark juxtapositions, either of the child in a new place (*Salt River Times*) or of fantasy with realism (*A Game of Dark*). His more understated novels can bristle with competing points of view, and irresolvable voices. In a progression from the pattern of his earliest treasure hunts, which tend to involve groups of children, Mayne presents Susan in *A Parcel of Trees* as an isolated and alienated figure. Outside of the orchard her communication with others is continual, but tends toward misunderstanding and misdirection, a common device of Mayne's. Her relationship with her sister is strained, and her conversations with her parents, though affectionate, tend to the combative. In this example, Susan has just come in out of the rain:

“You wet, then?” said Mum.

“Not so very,” said Susan. “Are you?”

“No call to be pert,” said Mum. “It isn't clever, and if you can't be smarter than that, say nothing.”

“It's quicker to speak,” said Susan. (14)

Such a dialogue requires a nuanced interpretation from the reader. It is necessary for us to see that Susan is joking with her Mum, but not in terms that her mother wishes to participate in. Also, that her mother's disproportionate response to Susan's joke is not entirely serious, being part of the familiar, repetitious language of the parent, and that Susan's response, though impertinent again, is again modified by a comic overtone. It is a conversation which shows the intimacy of the characters, but also the non-communication between them: the two are playing to their expected role, showing their awareness of it, and otherwise quite dispassionate in their

relationship. This is the strange register that Lurie described as “Pinteresque” (369), a description which fits many other conversations in Mayne’s work. The half-resentful, half-playful language Susan exhibits here is a marker of one of her identities, and one which she hopes to escape by claiming the orchard as her place of escape.

Susan begins the novel conscious that facility with language can be a marker of the development of the self, having found an old schoolbook of hers, with writing exercises full of errors: “A vivid glance”, “a momentary town”, “a momentary moment” (17). There is an indirect observation that the younger self whom she views with some bafflement and some sympathy (“The last one should have had at least a little mark, she thought”, 17) is the same age as her antagonistic younger sister, implying the impossibility of communication between them is due simply to a difference in development of articulacy. Part of the satisfaction of visiting the orchard, and experiencing its liminality, is the freedom to explore another aspect of herself, in which she is not only solitary, but proprietary (she walks among the trees with an apple, daring a passing train crew to look down and see her). It is reinforced by her strange sense of having been there before, and knowing it, intuitively, on a level she cannot articulate. Returning home from her first visit to the orchard (as far as she is aware, at least), she has “another glimpse of it as if she were a different person” (33).

Susan seems quite prepared to play different roles, as when she visits the gravestone maker and is mistaken for three subsequent and different customers but is too polite to point out this out, and throughout the novel when she keeps the orchard a secret from her parents, hiding in the ambiguity of language. She concludes the novel by discovering the strangeness of her own name, appearing out of the

mysterious past but in her own handwriting and therefore impossible (and not desirable) to deny. More so than Bron Jones in *Nordy Bank*, Susan seems prepared to explore intersubjectivity and to actively examine different aspects of herself. The parcel of trees functions as a metaphor for this multiple self: different in meaning to everyone she speaks to, its ruins, stones, detritus and the passing trains all representing another unique perspective, and further secrets buried in its past. Susan's investigation of the orchard, interviewing the old man who buried his dogs there, the men who kept a racehorse there illegally, the boys who experimented with fireworks, reveals the discontinuities rather than continuities. In archaeological terms, it is like the geological strata that Hawkes imagines as aspects of global consciousness, or the equivocal landscape of Mary Butts and John Cowper Powys, with the archaeologist faced with the task of correlating it into a whole. Rather than draw a series of historical events together, as in Mayne's earlier treasure hunts, Susan's understanding of the orchard is as a place constituted of identities which do not form a meaningful whole, and certainly have no authoritative discursive voice: it is characterised, rather, by secrets and silence. The most discontinuous of these is, of course, the repressed memory of her visit to the orchard. Many voices make up the opposition to the unequivocal voice of the law, but Susan's identity itself is polyphonous, the strata of her sense of self even being separated in multiple times and places, inasmuch as it is constructed by others' behaviour toward her, or the sense of license derived from solitude. She has inhabited the plot of land, investigated it and inherited it, reconstructed its use and experienced it as place beyond time. It has functioned as a stable site and a place of exciting disorientation. One of its most valuable aspects is its impermanence, as Susan says at the novel's conclusion, she doesn't have to stay in any continuous relation to it or her family: "I

can eat the apples and think of the dogs, and then go back. Then, when I've got back I can come home" (155).

Alice Dyson, in Mayne's novel *It* (1977), also becomes conscious of this sense of polyphonous self. During the novel, she comes to experience an intense otherness towards her own material body, particularly her hand (with which she has made contact with something otherworldly) and her throat (where she visualises unspoken things rising up). Mayne describes Alice *knowing* things in her hand or throat, and having conversations with them. Early in the novel, when she feels a compulsion to dig on the ancient mound of the Eyell, her attempt to order her thoughts is depicted as very consciously an attempt to impose a hierarchy on these other aspects of herself, and control one aspect of herself with another:

She went on having a temptation to put her foot in the same place, but she thought that the part of her listening to the idea, or creating it, was as silly as her throat, and not something she could be quite responsible for, or keep in order, quite. (50)

Like other works of Children's Neo-Romanticism, *It* is about awakening some force from the past through physical contact with an archaeological object, in this case the ancient spirit attached to a buried stone found on the Eyell (the lonely hillside in Alice's town). Like some of those works, this is a frightening novel, and more than those, a novel about the experience of being frightened and alone. The spirit's attachment to Alice is powerful and violent, and through its powers she becomes increasingly isolated from people who can help. Alice's friend, Raddy, is frequently the object of its attack as it attempts to isolate Alice from her, and Raddy's faith in the continuous nature of Alice's essential self, despite the strange

behaviour engendered by her possession, is a steady light of hope throughout the novel, though continually disputed by Alice herself and the events of the novel. When Raddy's mother makes a mistake with Alice's name in the street, Raddy is quick to reassure her, although in her playful tone she manages to increase rather than reduce the sense of disincorporation (my emphasis): "Just say hello, *like it was you* ... She knows you, she's just got your name wrong, haven't you Ma? [...] I knew it was you, Alice, *you're ever so much like yourself*" (65).

After his demonstration of threatened discursive breakdown, Mayne explicitly addresses the problem from Alice's perspective. In establishing the grounds of the difficulty, he gives her profound control of the situation, despite its disturbing effects:

"That's who I am," said Alice. But she wondered, all the same, which of the selves she was at any particular time, because every time you think of something you are changed. A moment before she had been a person in search of a cake; now, seeing Raddy, she recalled the book Raddy had talked about (at the same time as being Alison for Mrs Larkman's sake); all these things needed slightly different beings to manage themselves. (65)

The Bakhtinian sense of self constituted by polyphony, which in *Nordy Bank* suggested the threat of regression, here threatens disintegration, confusion and loss of agency. The task of correlating these different aspects of herself soon becomes crucial, as the threatening power of 'It' changes in emphasis: instead of making Alice its possession, it offers itself into her service. The spirit has no voice of its own, so Alice is left to interpret its offerings as they come, both the repeated gift of a

ring that Alice must refuse, and the fulfilment of Alice's unconscious wishes, which is harder to reject. When it helps her cheat at Monopoly by rolling the dice in her favour, or empties a window-ledge of snow over Raddy during an argument, the will of 'It' is at its most hard to distinguish from her own (as in *Nordy Bank*). Alice's unconscious impulses, like Susan's repressed memories in *A Parcel of Trees*, develop their own independent importance in these novels and cannot be disregarded any more than a body part could be, and the task to come to terms with them involves the establishing of a language with which to address them. Alice's name for her invisible spirit, 'It', is significant<sup>10</sup>. 'It', the word, has a strong specificity, and also a taboo quality, suggestive of those things which are understood but in some sense unspeakable. It also has a sense of futility about it: an attempt to address something that cannot be comprehended. Alice is conscious of the problem: to fully comprehend 'It' will be to inherit it, yet knowledge also offers her only chance of strength. The disintegration of the self into different aspects of Alice is not a threat in itself: it illuminates the discursive production of self, and suggests its potential absurdities and difficulties. The real horror of the spirit, which is that it threatens to overwhelm Alice's sense of herself with a role she has not chosen. 'It' encourages Alice to take on a role, like that in *Nordy Bank*, from the past: a will to control and mastery, and to see things in different terms, which 'It' responds to and emphasises. This process is represented by Mayne through instabilities in the text, not least the use of visual language and the reader's ability to interpret it.

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<sup>10</sup> For one thing, it recalls the title of E. Nesbit's novel *Five Children and It*, in which another ancient 'fairy' creature is dug out of the earth by a child, with much happier consequences. Like the name 'Alice', there is a suggestion that Mayne is writing deliberately against the 'golden age' heritage of children's literature.



### 3.4 Subversions of Perception in *It* and *Earthfasts*

Visual language has its own uncanny textual power. Far from being the key to empirical images, language related to visual description – such as ekphrastic discourse, the discourse of art and other visual media (such as ‘red’) – has a sense of linguistic incompleteness, always gesturing to an object beyond the text and simultaneously to the reader who interprets its description. Ekphrasis, in the view of W.J.T. Mitchell’s, suggests “something being used to represent something *by* someone *to* someone” (123). It therefore has the capacity to reveal the inherent artifice in representation. Just as the chronotope illuminates the relation between the text’s subject and its employment, and between its author and reader, so visual language is an intrinsic meeting-point of objective reality, subjectivity and text. In Mayne’s use it can be employed to subvert an apparently solid scene (a stone, a valley, a cathedral) and reduce it to an ephemeral, unstable image.

Mayne’s interest in the uncanny and even subversive possibilities of visual language is constant throughout his novels. In his descriptions of place, he always selects the unorthodox detail to evoke the scene in a way that avoids cliché. Elsewhere, the strangeness of appearances has a greater significance. *The Twelve Dancers* opens with young Marlene lying in bed and thinking, “Blue is the colour of the sky ... in a chalk drawing or a painted drawing, but it was not the colour of the sky this morning” (*Dancers* 7). Marlene then thinks of her teacher: “Marlene thought Miss Williams must be an artist, to see things differently from ordinary people. She could look at the sun, and make people draw it yellow (7)”. In Marlene’s view, which we share for the novel, the world has more subtleties to it than the conventions

of blue skies and yellow suns, but these conventions are rigidly enforced by her teachers. Mayne's ironic presentation of Marlene's ideas implies that hers is the artistic vision, rather than Miss Williams', but by way of contradiction, that it disturbs conventional ideas about representation. To view the world artistically, as Marlene does, is to see it in actuality, and vice versa, and this subjective view is not approved by the authorities.

This is the viewpoint that produced Neo-Romantic landscapes of scarlet hills and rocks staring angrily from the canvas: it implies that new visual vocabulary is required to express the subjective experience of perceiving landscape. In the English landscape, Neo-Romantic painters found an artistic subject in which to explore correspondences between nature, history and a surrealistic (and Romantic) concern with the unconscious. Nash wrote of seeking to "solve the equation" of monoliths, hills and wildflowers (Fraser Jenkins 12), while a similar set of "damn analogies" occurs in an apparently painful moment of Butts' *Ashe of Rings*, again relating place, monoliths and self (231). Standing stones play an important role in *The Twelve Dancers*, *It* and *Earthfasts*, and their fathomless archaeological mystery (due to their predating written history) has a particular relationship with the Neo-Romantic sensibility, which this thesis will return to in Chapters 5 and 6. In *It*, the standing stone on the Eyell is explicitly and repeatedly described as a boundary stone. Its significance, as I will argue, is directly associated with the sense of its being part of an equation of natural and unnatural landscape features with subjective feeling, an embodiment of the correlation of human and non-human in the Romanticist landscape. Mayne does not endorse a single, monological, elitist system of meaning, as Butts did, but irrational means of understanding landscape and self are endorsed in both his realist and fantastic texts.

Through his uncanny deployments of visual landscape, Mayne is able to suggest that an instance of perception may contain such a surplus of meaning that it requires an act of interpretation, particularly if viewed in the irrational, Neo-Romantic mode described by Marlene above, which, as already described, actually comprises a greater authenticity, albeit of a subjective and unconventional kind. *It* begins with an instance of this interpretive difficulty, which seems to satisfy his protagonist as much as it leaves the reader disorientated. “There was a strange sky for a strange day,” Mayne says (8).

The strange sky was like grey velvet, soft-looking cloud not far away, solid but streaked with light and dark so that it looked a little untidy and in want of steaming and ironing on the wrong side to become smooth. There was a hole somewhere, however, because a patch of sunshine was wandering over the town. (8)

Mayne alerts his reader to visual disruption with this intensely detailed description of a scene that is entirely natural but also, in the authorial description, “strange”. He uses the terms of physical, manufactured objects, disorientating all sense of scale and also suggesting the material reality of the image: it’s not just a swirl of colours but the effect of sunlight on cloud and stone. It is in this atmosphere that Alice first sees the Eyell, the little hill where she encounters ‘It’. This is “ordinary and mattered a great deal to her for some months”, but she also sees something that “was startling, and did not matter” (9).

[The Minster] seemed to have fallen into ruin, as if the sunlight just now upon it had truly been a flame that had destroyed it. It had no roof, and the windows gaped empty, the sky beyond showing through them. There was no

mistake about it: Alice had seen numbers of ruined abbeys eaten out by time, and this was the very appearance.

“Yes, it has gone,” she said to herself, out loud. (9)

The reader is obliged to pause and process this colossal and apocalyptic image, to understand it in terms of Mayne’s subdued tone and, moreover, Alice’s incongruously restrained response. “There was no mistake about it”, the reader is informed, but this follows a paragraph in which it is stated that a cloud wants ironing (and on “the wrong side” specifically, another confusion of perspective). Shortly afterwards, Mayne confirms what the reader may have suspected: that the “very appearance” of the Minster’s destruction is not the thing itself but a trick of the light:

Nothing had happened at all. The sky beyond it was the same colour as the lead roof, so that from this distance one merged into the other; and the windows, by some trick of light, and because they were half made of lead too, had looked like openings to the same sky. Still, she thought, it did fall into ruin, and just for me. (10)

“Nothing had happened at all” is an important statement. The uncanny effect is produced through the effort of the reader to identify what has happened, and where exactly it has happened with regard to Alice as its observer. Where does this illusion happen – in its scene, in Alice’s eye, in Mayne’s text? For the reader, the image of a cathedral destroyed by fire is vast in its significance, but until it can be situated within or outside Alice’s experience there is no reliable index to the meaning of the image: metaphor or character’s fantasy? The economy of Alice’s summary belies its deep ambiguity: to what extent did the Minster fall, and to what extent does the image of its fall belong to Alice?

The child's point of view is presented here as intrinsically archaeological, not simply in revealing the Minster's physical make-up but in taking apart the view itself, solidity and instability as different effects of light on the eye. This view of place is an intrinsically artistic one, but simultaneously one that demonstrates the artificial construction of the scene as perceived by Alice, from the clouds to the stones of the Minster. Mayne's use of textual instability is overt; the reader's interpretive experience is deliberately related to Alice's subjective interpretation of the scene, and in the resulting, shared confusion. The image of apocalypse and disintegration is produced through Alice's gaze, giving it power towards which she behaves passively, a viewer of her own act of seeing, almost. The power of such uncanny representations, and of the viewer's ability to acknowledge the insufficiencies of their own view, becomes growingly significant in the text (and indeed this chapter), related to questions of presence and visibility in this novel and others.

Mayne's play with visual language is directly related to Alice's experience of 'It', who is disturbingly present, its spectral hand in hers or its angry words rising in her throat, but cannot be seen. When Alice is compelled to dig out the old stone on the Eyell, she finds an opening on the side like a little doorway:

The opening was dark inside ... as if it showed another sort of universe that was there but could not be noticed. It was something that Alice's eyes could not understand, as if they got themselves focused wrong and were striving to interpret. (53)

Alice's eyes are described, as if independent of her own self, as trying and failing to understand the visual data they receive: the act of interpretation, associated

with the archaeological imagination, is here synonymous with the act of viewing. “Striving to interpret” is common in Mayne’s work, which is full of visual ambiguity. In *A Parcel of Trees*, the memory of a glittering fountain is revealed to have been a home-made firework; more sinisterly, in *It*, a piece of metal is a rusting pram axle or an ancient bloody dagger, depending on how you look at it. Again, the reader is involved in this indeterminacy through their own appreciation of what is textually presented as real, illusory or fantastic: as the novel progresses, and Alice seeks a reason for these events, the parallel of reader to protagonist reflects the other way, and she begins seeking the appropriate explanatory discourse, to be read in the right way. Mayne implies that the ambiguities of history and place require not merely a specialised visual language for written texts, such as *It*, but a specialised means of interpreting for the viewing individual themselves, a discourse to correlate rational and irrational viewpoints on place.

In *Earthfasts* (1966), the act of looking is continually disorientating for its characters, both in minor and threatening ways. The novel is full of strange visions, and despite David and Keith’s repeated efforts to compress them into a rational discourse, the visions persist in their confusing power. At one dramatic juncture, the boys see a man walking on a distant hill, but something is wrong with the view:

Keith moved his head. He was sure there was an optical illusion. The man must be on a much nearer ridge whose colour and perspective ran into the distant hillside. But it was not so. The giant walked over the crest of the hill, and went out of sight. (77)

The giant, we learn, has been displaced from his own era by a sort of earthquake in time. In David and Keith’s modern day, the giant has survived only as

one of the standing stones that David and Keith investigate at the outset of the novel: a direct link between legendary figures and the material substance of the landscape, typical of Neo-Romanticism, which is reiterated in the climax, when King Arthur and his knights revert to rock in a cavern beneath the Dales. None of the giants are ever directly spoken to: they are utilised purely as objects of surreal juxtaposition, the irruption of ancient things from the depths of the past, just as the eighteenth-century drummer boy walks blithely from out of the ground (though the giants, being giants, subtly imply the fantastic, unknowable otherness of the past). The strangeness of the encounter with the drummer boy is inscribed in a jostling of modern and antiquated dialect (“Keith understood what had happened, and what the boy meant, except for the word ‘dindling’, but he could guess it meant it meant something like dizzy, or shaky”, 16). He brings with him a subverted chronotope, a candle that does not burn down, and which comes to be the source of visual disruption that finally builds to massive hermeneutical importance.

Not only does the drummer boy’s candle not burn down, but its flame cannot be extinguished. The scientifically minded boys test it in a variety of methods to try and comprehend it, but finally David is compelled simply to look at it till dazzled and addicted. The candlelight holds a Faustian appeal, but its compelling otherness is couched purely in terms of looking and seeing:

“There’s things moving,” said David, “Inside the flame. And it’s not just rods and cones in my eyes. They’re there, you know, but they aren’t like sight at all. It’s like looking out into time or space or infinity. [...] It’s like looking at everywhere at once from everywhere at once.” (118)

The atemporal quality of David's vision allies it closely with what Alice experiences as a "universe that ... could not be noticed" (*It* 53) and Susan's view of the orchard in the mist: like Susan's view, it transcends the physical realm into the bounds of an existential condition, a state of being without shape or purpose ("the universe only", *Parcel* 106). Susan's experience of this sense of the sublime was joyful; the effect on David's vision is increasingly addictive. As with Susan and Alice, however, David's new sense of vision is directly associated with the countryside and is, at best, incongruous in town. It seems to become most potent when he is out in the Dales, viewing the Yorkshire landscape. When he goes back to the hillside with Keith, he "can see with the eyes of a stone, and think with its thoughts, and feel with its layers and strata, and I just stand whilst the world rushes by like a wind" (121). The atemporal view of landscape is presented here as belonging to the land and therefore transcending the landscape: it could be described as the *mearcstapa*'s view of the world, a perspective from a boundary space that presents the world without the differentiation of time, geography or stable reality. At this climactic moment, the forces glimpsed in David's uncanny visions descend and take him.

Mayne keeps the reader's point of view firmly with David's friend Keith: if we could describe David as a seer, Keith is by contrast merely an observer, and one whose view of events is partial at that. The force that manifests in David's altered view of the landscape appears to have clear delineation for him, but from Keith's point of view it is a visual disruptor, and textually his view is indirectly reported as the semantically obscure phrase, "a clear darkness", which like the unseeable visions of *It*, disturbs not only its viewer's ability to perceive and interpret it but the guarantee of language to represent it. To the rest of the world, David is destroyed by a lightning strike. In either explanation, Keith sees David symbolically destroyed by



his absorption in the sublime. Mayne treats the events afterward with a queasy sensitivity, portraying Keith's grief as incommunicable and deeply isolating. He returns to the hillside to look again at the scene of the incident, but there is nothing to be gained from that – no productive dialogue to be had (“[David would] never again talk to him or see him, or hold any traffic of conversation with him”, 136) and nothing to be seen. The only evidence by which meaning can be gained in *Earthfasts* is material observation and interpretation, and in the course of events, Keith's grief is articulated through an inability to see such vital, though unreliable, evidence: “There was no mark to indicate that here David had died ... He saw the whole world empty before him ... and nothing left in it for him, now that David had been pulled out from it” (136). The associated abilities to see and to communicate are key to all Mayne's novels: when they are enhanced, identity is strengthened; when subverted, the results are disorientating. In this moment of catastrophe, both are denied to Keith entirely. He experiences that sense of displacement from his own landscape, and relates it to the displacement of the eighteenth-century drummer boy from his own era: “[Keith] understood ... that the lost places are in this world and belong to the people in it and are all that they have to call home” (137). Like Susan and Alice, having engaged imaginatively with place, physical and emotional disorientation are directly associated for Keith and he is subject to other explanations and ideas about himself, his friends and his future. Keith's task toward regaining agency is not unlike Alice's in *It*: to establish a form of discourse in which the extreme subjectivity of that form of Romantic vision can be handled, comprehended and accommodated in the physical landscape. In the final section of this chapter, I will look at how resolution is found in each of these novels, through the search for new discourses and dialogues.

### 3.5 Seeking Objective Discourse in *Earthfasts* and *It*

The candle in *Earthfasts* comes to be directly associated with King Arthur, a motif used by Butts, Cooper and a wealth of Neo-Romantic literature for whom the Arthurian saga is the master narrative of British cultural identity. In Cooper's work, Arthur is an absent but meaningful figure: through him, the features of Cooper's own invented fantasy and its universal concepts of Dark and Light are linked to a broader sense of British heritage (Krips 82).

The mention and subsequent appearance of Arthur come as a surprise in *Earthfasts*: his historical specificity amid the folkloric giants and walking stones means an unexpected association between the pure, almost abstract visual material and textual matter. The way into it for Keith is the local legend associated with the hill where the drummer boy first emerged with the candle (a legend borrowed wholesale from Richmond Castle in Swaledale, where the drummer boy is said to have gone to live with King Arthur in his chamber beneath the ground). In Mayne's novel, vision is pre-empted by understanding, so that as soon as Keith has made this connection between object and story, he is able to see the knights gathering in an army outside his house. He leads them back to the cave beneath the hill and replaces the candle, returning them to their sleeping state of stalagmites and crystal rock formations. This is the literal matter of Britain – Keith does not engage with written, folkloric narrative, but instead his actions are articulated with rationalist vocabulary: with Keith as the focaliser, Mayne describes Arthur as the “cause” (161) of the strange visions he and David have shared, and compares the assembled knights to iron filings around the magnet (162). The actions of time and myth are presented as

operating impersonally, like waves of force, the knights and giants having been compressed like crystalline particles into standing stones and rock formations. In this energy equation of landscape and legend, the figures of integration are the stones themselves: the archaeological features of David and Keith's visions. Mayne's novel presents a physics-based approach to the Neo-Romanticist synthesis of scientific, folkloric and natural discourse exemplified in Paul Nash's *Equivalents for the Megaliths* (1934) or the gnostic utopia of Herbert Read's *The Green Child* (1935). The megaliths as giants of legend, and Arthurian electromagnetism, are best understood as a new iteration of the 'equations' sought by post-war Romantics to correlate subjective sublime experience into an objective language of correspondences.

In *It*, the discourses vying to explain and confront the force haunting Alice are a polyphony of pagan and Christian texts, as well as the less quantifiable rhetoric of folk-lore and historical anecdote. As well as stones and icons, this is a book about contact with old ways of thought. If the novel effectively represents the polyphony of Alice's town, the folkloric rules concerning 'It' constitute one more voice, in this case from another era. The history of Christian opposition to and rewriting of folk or pagan belief as unholy and superstitious is reiterated in the novel's negotiation of place, community and non-visible spirits in multiple discourses. It recalls the historical precedent, described by folklorist Katharine Briggs, that legends and folk customs regarding fairies and other spirits were reinterpreted in the era of early modern witchcraft trials, "fairies were [witches'] familiar spirits, and all those who saw things not seen by other men were liable to suspicion as witches" (168). Fairy belief itself, as Briggs reveals, is historically indeterminate: what came to be known as a boggart or hobgoblin was usually a spirit associated with the dead, and the fairy

as a concept may be a descendant of the ancestral ghost or “primitive heath sacrifice” (47). Like the archaeological imagination, the belief in fairies and other supernatural beings is a reckoning with indeterminacy and the beliefs of the dead: it operates retrospectively, always associated with beliefs of the generation before us. The historian Keith Thomas suggests that fairy belief was a cultural inscription of certain moral codes and censures (punishing domestic untidiness, upholding virtues of neighbourliness or attentive parents), also seen in belief in ghosts: he notes how such beliefs waned in proportion to increasing incorporation of the will of the dead in law. Superstitious discourse and belief in the supernatural can therefore be understood as the voice of the dead in the affairs of the living. William Mayne’s sympathy with this idea can be discerned in his Introduction to a Hamish Hamilton book of ghost stories: “On the whole, the actions of ghosts are the actions of people”, yet they can never be entirely incorporated into our rational discourse: “We do not know what they mean, we do not know what they are saying” (*Ghosts* 11).

Although there is a local tale attached to it, Mayne is very careful to make the indeterminacy of ‘It’ part of its power, an indeterminacy made present in the text through the visual language of non-visibility previously described. It is part of a “universe that was there but could not be noticed” and which demand reader and Alice to “striv[e] to interpret” (53). This striving is enacted through a series of physical excavations – all of them non-textual, some of them purely image-based – which Alice must interpret and comprehend in the context of their discourse. There is the old boundary marker from the soil of the Eyell, and a broken piece of the marker, as well as a medieval representation of ‘It’, the last two of which Alice discovers hidden away within the fabric of the Minster by the local vicar (who has deemed them unholy) in an attempt to contain ‘It’. Although Mayne does not

diminish the role of the church in this complex of relations, the vicar's interpretation of the image 'It' as merely 'unholy' is shown not to deal effectively with the power embodied by the spirit: a misinterpretation of the facts which Alice must correct and redeem. Her unearthings and the physical restoration of the boundary stones become part of that same Neo-Romantic interrelation of discourse, the equations of seemingly disparate objects into a field of invisible, mysterious forces. They also represent historically opposed discourses in Britain: folk belief's magic springs and superstitions having been, historically, eradicated or transmuted into holy wells and devils.

To lay the spirit Alice must arrange for the stone on the Eyell to be fully excavated and restored to its proper place; more difficult than that, however, is the task of rerouting the town's annual St Cuthbert day parade to follow its original route. This aspect of exorcising the spirit involves a certain amount of bureaucracy (more reminiscent of Susan's series of interviews with Burwen villagers and railway representatives in *Parcel of Trees*). The vicar strenuously objects to following the old route because it is pre-Christian: "You must only worship God"; Alice has a ready response, pragmatic and scientific as Keith's waves of force, and declaring her own agency: "I'm not worshipping anything ... It's just what has to be done, and it works" (165). In a marked progression from his effacement of folk belief in the conclusions of his early treasure hunts, Mayne here treats legend, folk and fairy lore not merely as a device but a discourse, with its own contribution to the interrelation of material and subjective ideas through which Alice makes sense of her place.

Alice, as *mearcstapa*, does not prefer one explanation to another or attempt to resolve them into a single rational or irrational approach: she walks their borders, and engages those voices in dialogue. It takes a series of discussions at meetings

with authority figures for Alice to have her way, including conversations with the Bishop himself, who recognises the integrity of the child's point of view and accedes to her plan. The novel is concluded in festival spirit, with the redirected St Cuthbert's Day parade correlating the discourse of the church, pagan magic and the archaeological objects which define the boundary of the town; the tone of the parade is one of pleasure, with several comic notes throughout and free orange squash for all the children attending.

Like the standing stones and geological formations that fascinated the Neo-Romantics, Mayne presents the folkloric object, with all its indeterminacy intact, as an atemporal figure representing other humans' negotiation with non-human landscape: a true spirit of place. Through Alice's visionary, archaeological engagement with the constructs of her local history she has re-established a continuity and made a symbolic restitution of her sense of self (the novel concludes with Alice sitting an exam that the reader knows she previously sabotaged on purpose). From place-consciousness to historic-consciousness, she has solved the equations suggested by the work of the Neo-Romantics, and the troubling presence of the past as well.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the effect of later revelations regarding William Mayne's character, and contemporary questions over his place in children's literature, it is clear his work and his approach to literature was overwhelmingly endorsed by the children's literature establishment at one of its most formative stages. This chapter has attempted to

articulate some of the major themes and tropes that characterise his work, to explore certain continuities between him and his peers, and to consider their ideological basis. His dry, textually unorthodox texts depict crises of identity, selfhood and agency.

In his early work, we see an archaeological impulse, which follows clues and evidence by rational means to material rewards. Mayne's most progressive development is the removal of this sense of security. The history of the use of Susan's plot of common land reveals the alternative significance of undeveloped, uninscribed green space as a site of contemplation, impossible to account for in orthodox evaluations of land use, but revealed through the Romantic viewpoint of a child. This Romantic intuition for the sublime in nature is rationalised into an earthly discourse of land ownership, but in the process, it offers an archaeological approach to the self which reveals it to be multiple: an accretion of discontinuous events, and a polyphony of different personas to be inhabited in differing ways.

This advanced self-awareness, linked to the sense of a deeper knowledge of place that suggests a powerful sense of inheritance, is mirrored in repeated experiences of the sublime. These child protagonists experience a view of place that transcends space and time, afforded them by the archaeological imagination. The inability to communicate such subjective experience is shown to be socially isolating; the threat of disunited self requires an effort of self-understanding and coherence; the spectre of ancient power and non-linear experience requires non-rational systems of meaning. I have argued that all these themes have also been explored by writers and artists of the Neo-Romantic sensibility.

This sublime experience cannot be described through the rational discourse of “the year surround[ing] the world” or even the discipline of the Church (*Parcel* 106). The irrational voice from the past which the children experience as legendary figures, ghosts and spirits, must be engaged in dialogue with rational voices: this, Mayne portrays as the dialogic, and therefore most authentic, experience of place. The task of correlating these discourses, and seeking a Neo-Romanticist viewpoint from which to integrate them, is presented as an act of nuanced reading, of the kind that Mayne implicitly addresses to his reader through textual instability. As Alice explains, she’s not worshipping anything, just doing what works: it means leading everybody in a new spatial practice. In the next chapter, I propose that John Gordon overtly links Neo-Romanticist spatial practice with concepts of childhood, exploration and terror.



## Chapter 4: “An Owl in the Bog” The Novels of John Gordon

Though not a literary prize-winner like Sheena Porter and William Mayne, John Gordon’s prolific output had a high profile during the Second Golden Age period, and he has continued producing children’s fiction since (his most recent, *Fen Runners*, was published in 2009). It is relevant to this thesis’ narrative about canonical texts that Gordon’s success was related by contemporary critics to that of Alan Garner. His first novel, *The Giant Under the Snow* (1968), not only shows the influence of Garner<sup>11</sup> but received an enthusiastic review from the *Brisinghamen* author himself in the *New Statesman*. His second novel, *The House on the Brink* (1970), confirmed the approach he would mostly follow thereafter: an understated, atmospheric combination of teenage romance, class-based friction and the supernatural, combined with a strong sense of place. Again, critics of the time were quick to point out its resemblance to Garner’s work. Gordon’s work has suffered somewhat by such outright comparison with that of Garner, despite some major innovations of his own which this chapter will highlight.

By 1973, the themes, approach and violent content of Garner’s novel *Red Shift* suggested the author’s will to address readers beyond children’s literature (and “whether or not *Red Shift* is a children’s book will no doubt remain a controversy” in

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon has denied this in an interview from 1995: “I had not read a word of Garner before I wrote the book. But I have read him since, and I admire him greatly. Like [ghost story writer M.R.] James, he is part of the climate, and the influences of both are pervasive” (*Ghosts and Scholars*, accessed online)

the view of Neil Philip, 109). Gordon, by contrast, has shown a continued engagement with children's literature and the child reader, including three volumes of ghost stories for children. After *The Giant Under the Snow* his fiction moves away from myth and legend into the world of the uncanny and even the undead, and in fact, he has been regularly anthologised and admired by aficionados of ghost stories and the horror genre. More than other writers in this study, Gordon links the archaeological imagination to tropes of the supernatural and uncanny. Whilst he receives occasional mention in works by Peter Hollindale and John Stephens, which signify his ubiquity in school libraries up till the end of the 80s, Gordon has received no individual critical appreciation, yet his work exhibits the ambition and nuance typical of the Second Golden Age and continues to bear academic scrutiny. It is particularly interesting in the context of this thesis.

This chapter will first give some details of Gordon's biography and a survey of his work and its critical reception at the time. It will then explore how the idea of child-as-*mearcstapa* relates to the archaeological imagination in Gordon's debut novel, *The Giant Under the Snow*. The chapter will continue by looking at Gordon's adoption of the techniques of the ghost story genre, particularly in his second novel, *The House on the Brink*, to trouble the concept of perception and to make the very prospect of historic landscape the source of uncanny effects. Gordon's choice of Norfolk as the setting for most of his fiction has a personal significance, particularly in terms of the outsider's view, but also allows for a thorough articulation of de Certeauian ideas of place and space, with particular relevance to *The House on the Brink*. The chapter will continue to examine these themes and ideas, and particularly the *mearcstapa* as a form of resistance to the powers of authoritarian discourse, as it considers his fourth novel, *The Waterfall Box* (1978).

#### 4.1 John Gordon: A Survey

Neo-Romanticism is sometimes liable to conservative fantasies of landscape. Some of these are present in the work of Butts and, to a lesser extent, Hawkes, discussed in Chapter 1, with the conflation of sympathetic response to landscape and a claim on its use in leisure or architecture. The film-makers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger were directly engaged with propagandist projects during the Second World War, and despite an internationalist approach, their most Neo-Romantic work (such as *A Canterbury Tale*, 1944) repeatedly stresses the pastoral continuity of landscape from antiquity to the view of here and now. The trend toward highly subjective visions of landscape, seen already in Porter and Mayne, confers a sense of authenticity and significance upon the landscape through its material integrity and permanence. Garner's first novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) imagines the fantastic aspects of English folk culture, the fairies, driven out by pollutant human activity, while *Elidor* (1965) presents urban life as hollow and bereft of wonder; Lively's *The Whispering Knights* (1971) meanwhile, reincarnates Morgana le Fay as sponsor of new industrial projects which threaten the countryside. All these fantasies depend on landscape as naturally embodying a stable sense of place.

Such arguments cannot easily be framed in the countryside of East Anglia, the setting for the majority of Gordon's work, which is intimately associated with a history of landscape management and shifting identity. As a character with archaeological interests in *The House on the Brink* explains to the children, the landscape has a fundamental instability: "Dry land? No indeed. Go down but a foot or two and all the land hereabouts is ... [s]o full of water, in fact, that it is still

flowing” (117). With none of the conventional inscriptions of modernity (such as the power station) it is nevertheless an engineered landscape, haunted by towns physically or metaphorically diminished and lost. Open to the ocean and vulnerable to flooding, constantly saturated with water, the fens and marshes have been drained, dug and channelled for centuries in a bid to wrestle back some workable farmland. Resistance to the project from indigenous working people (the ‘fen tigers’), whose livelihoods depended upon the peculiar conditions of the marshland, make it illustrative of the many arguments surrounding intentional landscape change: ecological, ethical, and aesthetic. Lacking the ores required for heavy industry, the once densely populated region (in which Norwich was one of the largest cities in England) seemingly ‘escaped’ the Industrial Revolution, coming to be defined by agriculture and, latterly, tourism. Gordon repeatedly makes a feature of the landscape in his novels. The proximity of Norwich to the ‘backlands’ of nearby woodland, and the city’s association with antiquity, in *The Giant Under the Snow*; the water and mud that links the town of Wisbech with the coast in *The House on the Brink*, and the house itself, where the owner, Miss Knowles, can see the town from one window and the river from another; the history of the almost-built summer residence, in *The Edge of the World*; and the silent expanses of the fens, in many novels and stories, including *Fen Runners* (2009) and the story, ‘If She Bends She Breaks’ (1982) which both stress the nearness of darkness and death beneath the ice of a frozen waterway. As will be discussed, Gordon also makes use of the landscape’s unstable character to illustrate the interrelation of discourse that, as I argue, define this trend in children’s literature.

Like that of Mayne, however, Gordon’s writing about children is not nostalgic or predominantly autobiographical. His use of Norfolk, and particularly the

town of Wisbech, is deliberate and meaningful, and may be related to his own complex relationship with the town, but his own childhood was spent in the north-eastern town of Jarrow, and treatment of place is accompanied by themes of class, displacement and the ambiguous nature of home. Although a site of huge historical and religious importance, Gordon experienced the town of Jarrow during a period of extreme and biting economic hardship. Its shipyards and steelworks were closed, compounding regional problems of poverty, high mortality rates and seventy per cent unemployment. Gordon knew this world of poverty intimately yet also, as a teacher's son, knew it as an observer. In his 1992 contribution to Walker Books' 'Teenage Memoirs' series, *Ordinary Seaman*, he writes: "Boarded up shopfronts were normal, and so were the groups of men at street corners sitting on their heels, "on their hunkers", pitman fashion. This was all so commonplace that I thought all towns were like that..." (15). In 1936, two hundred men and the town's MP, Ellen Wilkinson, marched on Parliament to protest the situation. After twenty-five days' walk, itself an act of resistance through spatial practice, the marchers were pointedly ignored on arrival by the then-Prime Minister. The Jarrow Marchers made Gordon's childhood home synonymous with that period of post-war economic depression, and must have been a significant influence on the writers' developing identity. That summer, however, Gordon's family had already made a decisive break with the town of his birth and moved two hundred miles to Wisbech.

It seems unsurprising in retrospect that Gordon's fiction would have such a strong sense of place-consciousness given this childhood transition, and that class-consciousness (and sometimes antipathy) would be one of its related themes, given the context for his family's move and the nature of their new home. Although Wisbech was once a coastal town, progressive silting moved the coastline further

north and left it set in the midst of the Cambridgeshire fens. In writing about it, Gordon suggests a sense of escape and of sudden change: “On our first morning in Wisbech we went to look at the river ... It was a bright morning, and I remember the breeze was making a ring of dolphins spin at speed around the golden galleon weather-vane on top of a spire in the centre of town. And the tower had a carillon that rang out a tune on the hour. It wasn’t Jarrow” (*Ordinary Seaman* 13). At Wisbech Grammar School, Gordon was teased for his Geordie accent (as Garner was later bullied by his teachers for using Cheshire dialect at Manchester Grammar). In *Ordinary Seaman*, though, he writes about how an early love of words was encouraged by schoolteachers; he “got drunk on words” (25), “went hunting for words” (26), “began to write at such enormous length that even [favourite teacher] Mr Dimock told me to cut back on the number of pages” (28). He describes being called up for the Navy at seventeen, in 1943, serving on battle cruisers and visiting London, Greece and the Middle East, but reading Cecil Day Lewis’ *The New Anthology of Modern Verse* (1941) in his hammock. Returning to Wisbech, he turned down the chance to study at university, but in time he was studying at an evening class in English Literature, sending away for the Surrealist Manifesto and beginning a club with friends, “a literary and debating society with dandyish pretensions” (*Ordinary Seaman* 110). At this time, he was working as a local newspaper reporter.

In 1968 his first novel, *The Giant Under the Snow*, was published by Hutchinson. According to a recent feature on Gordon in Wisbech Grammar’s school magazine, the idea for *Giant* came to him whilst working as sub-editor on the West Evening Herald in Plymouth: seemingly yet another shift in location (“Gateway to a World of Wonder”). It is the only of his novels to be set in what would be his home,

the city of Norwich (although unnamed it is identifiable through frequent use of street names). At the end of Christmas term, on a school visit to the ‘Backlands’ (seemingly a pseudonymous Foxley Wood, the largest area of ancient woodland now remaining in Norfolk) schoolgirl Jonk Winters storms off to be alone and uncovers what seems to be a gold piece of Anglo Saxon treasure; shortly afterward, she is pursued by a large and unearthly black hound. Rescued by the mysterious Elizabeth Goodenough, Jonk returns to town with her friends, Bill and Arf, but the hound and its shadowy owner continue to pursue her. The children have been caught up in a conflict between Goodenough and the supernatural forces of an ancient warlord, who rises atavistically from the ground in a final battle on Christmas Eve night. Gordon’s debut novel was widely reviewed. In the *New Statesman*, the novel was welcomed by Garner, who, a year after publication of *The Owl Service* (1967), was now emblematic of the new children’s literature. Recommending the novel in a review in the *Financial Times*, Norman Culpan praised the use of fantasy, implying Gordon’s mix of urban and ancient tropes: “Magic is made credible because it is mingled with everyday life, with transitions through fog, darkness and desolation; because it is consistent with itself; and because it is rooted in folklore and legend” (13). The long view of the *Times Literary Supplement* identified a debt to William Mayne and Garner, but its reviewer even hinted that Gordon had something of an edge over them: “Less intoxicated with the sound of words and with topographical details than the early Garner, he is more muscularly concerned with plot” and “takes great pains to freeze the blood”. As well as plot and thrills, the reviewer felt that “there is poetry in the theme and in the telling” (Unsigned *TLS* Review 1367).

Two years later, Gordon’s second novel, *The House on the Brink* (1970), was published. The title refers to the North Brink of the tidal River Nene, which bisects

Wisbech on its way to the coast; Miss Knowles' house, based on Wisbech's eighteenth-century Peckover House, faces out toward the fens as well as into town. In the novel's opening pages, Knowles and a friend are walking by the coast when they encounter a half-buried object, which strangely resembles a body. Two teenagers also encounter the bog oak 'Thing', which appears to be moving toward Miss Knowles' house by some weird means. Knowles turns out to be at the core of the fantasy, but in ways that are obscure to the reader: having consciously ascribed Manichean qualities to the dirty water of the river and the brightness of the coastal water, it is implied that Knowles has imbued them and their contents (such as the Thing) with an ineffable magic that brings them to life. The reader is left to resolve whether the symbolic exorcism performed by the teenagers, with water from the coast, operates magically or psychologically. Reviewed again in the *Times*, this time by myth-concerned novelist Robert Nye (in a feature entitled 'Worlds of Mysterious Menace'), Gordon was again compared with the headline children's author of the day, being explicitly described as almost in "the Alan Garner class when ... it comes to evoking a world of mysterious menace whose bones poke out here and there, as it were, from a tense skin of language covering otherwise 'ordinary' events". Nye considered the novel a game of two halves, "extremely exciting and exactly [confirming] that promise" of being Garner's equal in the first half. In the second half, Gordon's "writing stays good and strong – if anything it gets perceptibly tighter, imparting an hallucinatory quality to scenes that are otherwise melodramatically forced – but the book disappoints the expectations aroused by its early chapters" (15). Hardly damning overall, Nye's comments, like the *TLS* reviews of Porter quoted in Chapter 3, are less an indictment of Gordon's work per se and more a look toward his future success. He was already becoming well-known.



Stephens indirectly refers to the ambiguities of its conclusion (is it a body? is it haunted? is it all the fantasy of Miss Knowles?) in his seminal *Language and Ideology in Children's Literature* (1992), suggesting its rich potential for group discussion in schools, and implying a strong reputation amongst children's literature professionals such as teachers and librarians.

Gordon's third novel, *The Ghost on the Hill* (1976) did not capitalise on his earlier promise, though it was still significant enough to be reviewed in the *Times*, for whom it "veer[ed] between familiar rural melodrama and tensions more subtle" and was "an unusual story for older children, young adults, who want more from books than light relief" (*Riots of Invention* 14). His last novel of the 1970s, *The Waterfall Box* (1978), like *House* and *Ghost* concerns nascent teenage rivalry, but alchemy and ancient magic are innate to its drama. Young Bran inherits an old clay box when his parents both die in a road accident; he gets the story of the box when he goes to stay with his aunt and cousins in the country. The box goes with a small ceramic phial, two of the effects of the famous Potter Waterfall, whose 'waterfall glaze' helped institute the potteries and hence the whole town. These two items are priceless, and working-class Bran could now be a moneyed teenager, but he is faced with a moral quandary, whether to honour his mother's promise and sell the box to the sinister and mysterious Mr Harman. Bran's cousin and her friends weave a skein of further trouble between them, complicated by their preoccupations with class, money and jealousy, and the drama of the novel's conclusion is less successfully presented than those of its predecessors.

After the 1970s, Gordon continued to produce novels for younger readers, with four published in the 80s and four again in the 90s. This fruitful period included *The Edge of the World* (1983), which plays upon genre conventions of secondary

worlds by overlying its fantasy landscape onto the fenland, like a virtual reality experience. In March 1982, then-Young People's Librarian for Tameside near Manchester, Chris Kloet, praised Gordon's novels for *Books for Keeps* magazine, as "piercingly accurate portraits of developing boy/girl relationships ..., a persuasive comment on the way the rural landscape ... shapes the character of people (and) finely observed studies about social class barriers which affect us all". It may be coincidence that Kloet later became editor-at-large for Walker Books, for whom Gordon was published in the 1990s. His novels of this later era generally return overtly to the supernatural material of his 70s fiction, reflecting the popularity of horror YA, exemplified by the success of Point Horror books. *Fen Runners* was published in 2009, and won a favourable review by Amanda Palmer in *The Times*, among others.

In 1974, Hollindale included both *The Giant Under the Snow* and *The House on the Brink* in recommendation lists for *Choosing Books for Children*. Three years later, Townsend included *The House on the Brink* among his two hundred selections representing a quarter-century of children's literature at an exhibition staged by Booktrust (then the National Book League); in 2002, it was among the eighty-seven titles still in print (this is no longer the case). Overall, however, it is his first novel that has come to be John Gordon's most enduringly popular novel: described as a "marvellously spooky classic" by Amanda Craig (2010, 8); selected by novelist Michelle Paver as her favourite underrated novel, "eerier than Susan Cooper, more gripping than Alan Garner" and "vivid as a lightning flash ... so compelling that you just can't stop turning the pages" (*25 Best*). Despite its popularity, and availability as an e-book (as well as a new Catalan translation, *El Gegant Sota la Neu*, "a classic of English literature read by generations of children", with new illustrations), it is not a

well-known text. The most sustained critique of Gordon's work is Peter Bramwell's critique of themes of landscape and ancient magic in *The Giant Under the Snow*, in his study of pagan themes in children's literature. Otherwise, references to Gordon's work in children's criticism are rare.

Gordon's subject matter, as Chris Kloet describes it, focuses repeatedly on boy-girl relationships and matters of class. Often class difference is signalled (though not always discussed) as part of a heightened sense of alienation and self-consciousness; whether in *The Ghost on the Hill* (1976) (when a young man deliberately and smugly presents himself to two girls in a rural village as a moneyed University student) or *The Edge of the World* (1983) (when a young man risks trespassing to visit the farmer's daughter). *The Waterfall Box* is particularly fuelled by class antagonism, and Bran's sense of disorientation after inheriting from his parents. As well as the landscape of East Anglia, other motifs recur: telepathy, irresponsible parents and other malevolent adults, and various magical kinds of flight. His own memoir aside, Gordon writes in a fantastic realist mode, with an emphasis on fear and the supernatural.

As will be seen, fear and deliberate use of the horror and ghost story genres are integral to Gordon's work for children. His strongest influence here appears to be the antiquarian and storyteller Montague Rhodes James, and he shares with the Victorian a sense of trespass, the loneliness of place and of boundaries guarded by uncanny forces. However, Gordon's protagonists cross boundaries for better reasons than James', and their approach to place is as meaningful as it is uncommon. This *mearcstapa* spatial practice will be illustrated through an exploration of Gordon's 1968 fantasy, *The Giant Under the Snow*.

## 4.2 Children's Spatial Practice and *The Giant Under the Snow*

### i. *The Mearcstapa Role as a Form of Spatial Practice*

In this chapter, I return to the concept of the *mearcstapa* role as childhood-focused spatial practice. In my opening chapter, I discussed de Certeau's characterisation of place as continuously reiterated through its inhabitants' usage and narratives. Within this context, the child-as-*mearcstapa* figure (which I expanded from Carroll's use of the term) is significant in relation to chronotopes of development in conventional narratives of childhood. If a child is understood to benefit pedagogically from visiting, as in Gordon Copley's *Going into the Past* (1955) things to be seen in the open air (such as an Iron Age hill fort), then Sheena Porter's character, Bron, in *Nordy Bank* (1964) (who visits a hill fort and has a highly subjective shift in personal identity), illustrates the transgression of boundaries in time and selfhood that such experiences imply, and the sublime sense of subjectivity that they entail. Porter dramatizes the alienating consequences of such experiences, as much as she valorises the experience with Romanticist overtones: to the extent that they find themselves in *mearcstapa* roles, her child protagonists normally fulfil a conservative ideology by confirming the boundary's stability and impassability.

De Certeau refers to narrative itself as delinquent, by nature never settling on one element of space or time but moving only between its own constituent elements. The conventional association of the term 'delinquency' with that of 'juvenile' informs the irony with which I adopt that term here. I consider the acts of

delinquency by protagonists of Children's Neo-Romanticism as their own spatial practice, after de Certeau. Such forms of spatial practice receive variable emphasis from their authors. In Porter's novels, Lyn and Rachel occupy their *mearcstapa* role by leaving the rest of the school group (albeit at their teacher's instruction) at risk of getting lost in mountain mists; Carys runs away from home after the shame of admitting her shoplifter role. In Mayne's *Earthfasts*, David repeatedly walks away from family and society, and only has his ecstatic visions when turned away from town (and his friend); Keith rescues him by sneaking out of bed and moving against the very flow of time. In *It*, Alice goes directly against authority, dealing at length, and with much persuasion, with bureaucratic bodies which reroute a local festival. Gordon's work, which has an older audience and protagonists, frequently depicts authority figures as dubious and younger characters as alienated from their peers. To achieve their objectives, Gordon's protagonists move delinquently, in secret and against common sense, toward mystery and danger, following uncanny signs and even through the air. Following Porter's interest in the child as reader, and Mayne's greater emphasis on the child as viewer, Gordon's novels embody the *mearcstapa* role literally by having his protagonists move, delinquently, across barriers of place, and seeing or feeling the material consequences.

ii. *The Bounds of Place and Fantasy in The Giant Under the Snow*

"Magic," says a character in *The Giant Under the Snow*, "consists of putting things in the right order" (77). This is the basis of Elizabeth Goodenough's explanation of the novel's events to Jonk, Bill and Arf, the children who have been caught up in them. Goodenough is a mysterious, ageless magical guardian and therefore speaks

with appreciable authority about such matters. Arf, the son of two schoolteachers, remains a sceptic. “All right,” Goodenough tells him. “*Science* consists of putting things in the right order.” The presentation of magic as analogous with science as an organising principle for establishing meaning is, like the landscape metaphors of Nash and Hawkes or Keith’s Arthurian electromagnetism in *Earthfasts*, an objective language to articulate abstract and imaginary concepts. In this case, the actions of the remote past literally shape the events of the future through the borders of town and country, and through the significance of buried objects coming to light. It exemplifies how, in Gordon’s first novel, the power and meaning of individual actions are shaped by their spatial arrangement in meaningful places; consequently, when things are out of (their appointed) place in the novel they lose their power.

The children’s home town is the territory of the Warlord, Goodenough’s enemy, having been his stronghold when he and his fighters first came to Britain in the eighth century, whilst Goodenough lives in the backlands, the ancient forested heathland well beyond the city wall. Centuries ago, we learn, the Warlord “from over the sea” marched upon the area, his men dragging their longship across the country to symbolise their dominance. Central to the novel is the Warlord’s magic belt which, having gone unopposed by Goodenough’s magic for too long, “had fixed itself in this country with many deep and devious links” (78). Goodenough fought the Warlord, who used his magic to create a giant effigy in earth – the Green Man – and rode it into battle. Goodenough explains how she managed to break the belt, and with it the power that linked the invader with the very fabric of the country. At the opening of the novel, in the present day, Jonk discovers the buckle of the belt in the backlands and revives the battle; she then has to physically reverse the position of

the belt at the right place and time to balance the powers between them and their enemy and gain victory against him.

The arrangement of talisman, effigy and territory is intrinsic to the children's battle against this ancient power, and sequence too is important; at the novel's close, Goodenough insists the children must receive a reward for their action because, "Patterns, remember? Things must be fitted into place..." (183) When the children finally defeat the Warlord and his giant it is significantly on Christmas morning: as Peter Bramwell notes, the implication is symbolic use of sacred time. This concern over configurations, correlations and territory can be understood in terms of de Certeau's theory of place, in which sites of predefined power-relations may be either enacted or resisted through their use by inhabitants. The invading power is inscribed into the very demarcations of place, and into objects of antiquity such as the belt-buckle and Green Man earthwork, whilst the novel describes the children's increasing awareness of boundaries instituted centuries ago. The action of *The Giant Under the Snow* moves repeatedly from the backlands to the city (identifiably Norwich) and back again, exploring its borderlands and secret spaces with due significance for the protagonists and the reader. Through the children's explorations and flights throughout the novel (literal and figurative) Gordon depicts the complexity and necessity of a child's outsider strategies for the practice of space.

The novel opens with a school trip to the backlands, a chronotope (also utilised in Porter's *The Valley of Carreg-Wen* (1971), of idealised archaeological feeling promoted as part of normative education. It's "a cold, wet day in December ... [t]he worst kind of day for the backlands", and the children are making aimless conversation in the darkness of the afternoon (9). Jonk has come on the trip wearing inappropriate clothing, been told off by her teacher and bullied by the other children,

and now storms off into the woods alone. As well as this failure of school authorities to evoke the ideal they expect from their students, Gordon shows how indirectly archaeological feeling is characterised as moral virtue, when one teacher confides to another that they shouldn't have come, and he thinks to himself that "he could have been happy if it hadn't been for that woman. She did not respond to atmosphere" (11). From this exchange, the reader may infer that the trip to the backlands – organised by Mr Roberts – is not merely an educational excursion but an attempt to stimulate the romantic 'response to atmosphere' that forms part of the Romanticist conception of childhood. In light of de Certeau's theorisation of space, the school trip to the countryside is a means of stabilising and managing child development through sites that are historically significant and in other ways merely aesthetic. Chronotopically speaking, it is the space-time of institutional, educational development, and responsive viewers are integral to it.

Events occur at the very end of the school year, another chronotopic device insofar as it represents the waning of educational authority over students' movements, and a turn toward a sacralised, festival point in time ("Last day at school before Christmas," Jonk observes, "Nobody cares [if you're late]" (32)). Traditional discourses of adolescent development depend on idealised spaces of education within which an identity can form, but the novel describes an alternative depiction, in which self-expression is not possible, and Jonk is bullied by her peers for the way she dresses and teased for her friendship with Bill. The children's confrontations with their teachers are also a recurring feature of the opening chapters. As McCallum proposes, the narrative of moving from solipsism to socialisation is the founding structure of most children's literature, but Gordon's novel (like others of the countercultural 1960s) implies the insufficiency of educational institutions to provide



‘coming of age’ experiences for young people. An interior or at least private narrative of selfhood, outside or even in opposition to the school experience, must be experienced by Jonk, Bill and Arf (who argue even among themselves for a great deal of the novel) as part of the development of their subjective identities. It is therefore significant and ironic that the backlands trip, an exercise in educational development, goes so awry: not merely rejected by both teachers and schoolchildren, but partly the cause of Jonk’s solitary exploration and discovery of the belt-buckle. Soon afterward, the Warlord’s spectral hound begins its pursuit of her, following Jonk and the school-bus back into the city. The school, conventional space of socialisation and development, is presented as insufficient to support or deal with the consequences of successful, Romanticist, imaginative engagement with place. The engagement has taken place beyond the bounds of safe, institutionalised experience. Hereafter, the novel is full of examples of spatial practice by the children that is in some way in defiance of, or very different to, the legitimate ones of the authorities.

iii. *Children as mearcstapas in The Giant Under the Snow*

The protagonists of *The Giant Under the Snow* trespass in places and times of day that they are not allowed to, or in places and times that are considered redundant, empty or dead. They are obliged to traverse the city in secret, “move warily” in public places, and lie about where they are going to adults; on a crowded bus, they feel “out of place” (102). Sometimes, as in their first return trip to the backlands, they operate in ways that are incomprehensible and suspiciously illegitimate to adults. The children do not have the luxury of a map, but move exploratively by instinct. There is “trouble with the [bus] conductor,” a figure of authority directly

linked to their movement around town, “as they [do] not know where they [want] to get off” their bus trip into the backlands; they must look out for features they recognise (61). This radically irrational mode of spatial practice, toward uncertainty and disorientation instead of away from it, incommunicable to adult authorities, even disrupts the conductor’s means of operating his ticket service, as the children have to pay retrospectively for their travel once they know where they are going. It is a means of exploring space that, even as they achieve their objective, leaves them totally disorientated. The conductor is keen to stress that where they have arrived is not, in his view, any sort of place at all: “Here? ... There’s nothing here, you know, ... Nothing for miles” (63). Whereas their first visit to the backlands was subject entirely to the discourse of authority, even to the point of being carried there in their school-bus, their deliberate return is contrary to all pre-existing guidance, and through such delinquent manoeuvres they experience a variety of strange visions.

Their delinquency throughout the novel is in defiance, and avoidance of, authority. In this, at least, it is not fantastical and could in fact be read as a depiction of their child identity throughout the novel. “So,” Arf realises, early in the novel, “not even parents are to be told”, and, in point fact, they are to be defied (58). As well as lying about where she has been, Jonk argues with her mother and then slips out of the house in spite of her, pleading the special circumstances of Christmas. Later still, the children sneak out of the house while their families are asleep. Gordon goes into great detail to emphasise the difficulty and danger of sneaking out this way, with Jonk struggling to draw back the front door bolt without making a noise. To prevent his teacher parents staying up late reading, Arf secretly turns the electricity off at the mains; such actions go beyond childish mischief into the realm of rebellious, disruptive behaviour. Unlike the adult authorities of Mayne and Porter,

to whom things are readily confessed, understood and forgiven (in *Earthfasts* and *It*, doctors and parents even speak quite reasonably about troublesome spirits), here the children's families never discover that they have been out adventuring in the night. In those novels, the discourse of otherness (whether fantastic or simply other) is incorporated into that of adult authority, compromising their dialogic power. In *The Giant Under the Snow*, the delinquent exploration of the city interrelates with rationalist discourse and only the children and the reader see how they operate together; the secret manoeuvres confuse ideas of interiority, as when the children "[try] to interest themselves in the preparations everyone was making for [Christmas] day, but *their thoughts were outside ...*" (144, my emphasis). Walking, as *mearcstapas*, the bounds of legitimacy and delinquency, real and fantastic, the children twice have to evade policemen patrolling the city, deliberately operating beyond the sight of the embodiment of the law.

The novel's repeated motifs of invasion and defence associate knowledge of place with ownership. It might be assumed that a space patrolled by policemen and traversed by buses, mapped out with cathedrals, schools and museums, would be a place of innate safety for the children to whose relatively modern worldview they belong. Instead, Gordon presents the Warlord (an enigmatic figure throughout the novel) as the inheritor and, increasingly, governing force of the city through an attachment with the site reaching back to the eighth century. Underlyingly, and archaeologically, power is magically associated with place, manifesting through talismans of ownership such as buildings and borders; buses and cars lose power as they cross the line between town and city, and Gordon even describes the borderline of the ruined city wall becoming corporeal again, the landscape reverting to its ancient form as the Warlord's power renews. Specifically, he occupies the derelict

areas at the edge of town, close to the flint ruins of the boundary wall and next to the river, where boarded-up shops and derelict houses await clearance. In a warehouse, close to the river, the Warlord makes a new palace, while stepping through the doorway of a “mean little house” on a terraced street takes the children into an entirely *unheimlich* space (159):

They had stepped into an immense hall. For the entire length of the street the houses had been hollowed out. A double row of regularly spaced windows, and a row of open doorways stretched down each side for as far as they could see. [...] Something rippled in the furthest moonbeam, then the next caught the movement and then the next. The base of each shaft came to life as though the floor was undulating towards them. (159)

The place has become the ‘barracks’ (military terminology, associated with uses of ‘territory’, above) of the Warlord’s soldiers. Everything homely and familiar about the house’s interior, the most conventional site in the city (Gordon implicitly contrasts it with the ‘front room’, conventionally occupied by the whole family) has become occupied and, in the most sinister sense, possessed by the enemy. Although the children are manifestly not at home here, and unlike the enemy, have no innate claim on either city or backlands, they become highly aware of such topology through their delinquent manoeuvres. Significantly, the Warlord’s territory is already well known to them. We learn that they “had often been to the old streets near the river and knew the quickest way there” (140); although their adventures make them penetrate deeper than ever into the strange landscape of cleared ground, they have explored this part of town before, and refer frequently to its street-names. When the children want to hide the magic belt-buckle from their pursuers, they know that the weather-vane on top of the cathedral is hollow: by daylight, they look at the

cathedral with secret knowledge. Implicitly, the fantastical, irrational use of the city space is both that of the magical beings and the child protagonists. The borderline of the fantastic and realist text, at which the reader and protagonist share a moment of hesitation and reorientation, is mapped onto these sites of trespass and delinquency; by visiting them, the children indicate their own delinquent spatial practice and their affinity with irrational, imaginative discourse.

In one major respect, the children's delinquent spatial practice shifts into overt fantasy, when Jonk and her friends are given the power of flight by Elizabeth Goodenough. Their secret knowledge of the cathedral, and its hiding place, derives from this gift (which comes in the form of individual backpacks, an object which, at time of publication, might have been more specifically associated with hiking). Gordon's description of the children's conquest of the air is one of the novel's great strengths: and, through its subtle evocation of their physical disorientation, it viscerally evokes the children's heightened awareness of their own physicality and relatedness to the material world. Here it is presented through the internal monologue of Arf, the most sceptical of the protagonists, emphasising his focusing awareness on his own materiality and his self-consciousness:

Was there a slight lift? No; just imagination.

Once more. [...] He went forward smoothly, slightly faster. His arms were arms, as useful as sticks. His foot caught a tuft of grass and he stumbled. His other foot came forward to take his weight – but it missed the ground. He lurched, seeking something solid with his feet but they sliced air inches from the ground. Down; he wanted to be down. The breeze pressed his face for just an instant. He was lifted gently backwards and sank to earth.

It's true! Don't look at anybody. Force yourself into the air. Here comes the breeze. Treat it like a wave. (91)

As well as an unusually rich depiction of his own physicality, the reader is made conscious of Arf's suddenly heightened interiority: "Don't look at anybody" (91). Like the archaeological imagination, Arf's attention to his and the landscape's materiality, and the contingent aspects of their relatedness, leads to a heightened subjectivity along with a new imaginative freedom (after this experience, he cannot be so sceptical). As well as a radical new perspective on himself and the world, Arf sees the other children as fundamentally changed: he calls to Bill and Jonk and their eyes glitter in the sun (like birds, we might assume), and "They did not look like his friends" (94). Perspective alters them superficially, so that they "seemed huge, their limbs stretching over fields, forests and roads. It was interesting to see them like this" (94). Meanwhile, Jonk flies in a half-dream, watching Bill, whose "head was on the horizon and his shape ... as dark as the earth beneath, but huge ... When he moved to begin climbing again it was as though he dug himself from the earth in which he was embedded" (116). The children's sense of self and one another has changed, along with their relationship with the physical landscape, in which they appear almost as giant and embedded as the earthwork at the centre of the novel.

They are re-enacting some of the developments in perception of place and space elicited by the expansion in powered flight in the First World War. In my opening chapter, I described how the archaeologist O.G.S. Crawford utilised aerial photography to engage the public in landscape archaeology via a new medium. The success of *Wessex from the Air* (1928) was partly responsible for the aerial view's adoption by Modernism, most famously in a high-profile abstractionist journal edited by Myfanwy Piper, where John Piper juxtaposed a Miro painting with an aerial shot

of Silbury Hill. Perception of earthworks such as Silbury and chalk figures (like the Warlord's giant) was intimately associated to this new approach to archaeology, and the aeroplane became a visionary object, connecting observers of the modern age with the matter of the past: Nash began to make repeated use of the flying machine as a mystic motif in his painting. This new, modern view of the landscape revealed unexpected elements of design and pattern which disorientate the viewer who is also (in a sense) the inhabitant of that unearthly landscape: similarly, Jonk and her friends experience a beautiful but strange revision of the landscape, in which the snow-covered "earth below [is] like the page of a book", a multiple disorientation for the reader, already looking at precisely that object (177). Seeing landscape as text, in de Certeauian style, is exciting but disconcerting and leaves them firmly excluded from the view: they "[cross] their own street, but it [is] like looking at a map – it was difficult to believe anybody lived there" (163). Nevertheless, they gain their greatest insight into the matter of the landscape from this liminal position: for example, "it [is] only from this height that they c[an] see [the giant figure] whole" (117). They also see "things which could not be seen from the road", discovering "a hidden land in the ordinary world"; hidden in plain sight, that is, a shared territory that reveals its secrets through their delinquent manoeuvres (95).

This strange, uncanny version of archaeology is legitimised by Elizabeth's 'reward' in the novel's conclusion. Returning in summertime, at Elizabeth's instruction, to the site of the fallen giant, the children find an Anglo-Saxon dish, uncannily staring up at them like an eye, seemingly disrupted in the course of their battle. The wider, public significance of the archaeological object is undiscussed and inarguable: they "kn[ow] they [are] not meant to keep" the golden dish, despite it being unambiguously promised to them; a form of social responsibility takes

precedence, even though on taking it to the museum, deflatingly, “the reward [becomes] something strange and almost impersonal because other people [share] in it” (186). What follows, reiterating the difference between subjective and objective experiences of place, is almost a mirror of the opening chapter’s institutional visit to the backlands, enhanced by the arrival of an “eminent” archaeologist, who “seem[s] to enjoy lonely places” and is “a bit like a more prosperous Mr Roberts” (187).

Although unnamed, he is a little like the guest appearance of John Norton MBE or Sir Mortimer Wheeler in Porter and Cooper’s work respectively, a representative of the orthodox, rational aspect of archaeological discourse. He instigates an archaeological dig, the result of which strongly recalls the East Anglian archaeological find of Sutton Hoo, the Anglo-Saxon hoard of ornaments, armour and sailing ship uncovered in “undoubtedly the most famous” burial mound excavation (Pryor 2009 224). The find is “Extraordinary!”, but does not exceed conventional archaeological terminology (“The Green Man, they were told, was a tumulus that because of its irregular shape had not before been recognised and had got on to no maps”, 187). Nonetheless, the children are able to partly direct the proceedings, informed by the experiences of the novel. The imaginative dimension of conventional archaeological practice remains a private but invaluable presence. Throughout the novel, the discourse of the real and fantastic (between magic and science, as Goodenough described them to Arf in her explanation) have been contrasted and, frequently, combined. Throughout the novel, and even in the conclusion, the fantastic and the irrational imagination persist as unspoken associates of the archaeological view.



### 4.3 Disturbing Visions in *The Giant Under the Snow* and *The House on the Brink*

#### i. *Visual Indeterminacy and Fear*

In the last chapter, I considered how the act of looking, in Mayne's work, can be dangerous. The very act of close attention and interpretation of visual data, particularly in the case of an archaeological object, makes his protagonists aware of their interpreting subjectivity and its limits, and of the strange, accentuated moment of interpretation in which their own sense of self is implicated. Archaeological objects such as Alice's Eyell-stone emphasise this visual ambiguity because they require the viewer to imaginatively extrapolate or recontextualise an object that, by its nature, resists objective completion. Like Mayne, Gordon also makes use of this ambiguity to create strange effects and disorientating experiences for the viewers in his novels, and for readers themselves.

Throughout Gordon's novels, visual indeterminacy is more broadly linked to his use of the ghost story genre: experiences of fear, dread and death taboos. As Pearce notes, in her study of the genre, until the 60s the genre of the ghost story was barely a feature of children's literature, despite its huge popularity in the early twentieth century (1995, ix). A lone collection in 1952 was the only real evidence of the genre before 1967, when Puffin released two anthologies, *The House of the Nightmare* and *Ghosts, Spooks and Spectres* (the latter edited by Mayne under a pseudonym). The same year, the first of twelve *Armada Ghost Books* was published. According to Aidan Chambers, whose collection, *Ghosts*, was published in 1969 for his own imprint at Macmillan, this supernatural trend in children's fiction was encouraged by evidence and research on children's tastes, from children's professionals and publishers respectively ("RE: You've Got Feedback"). The

phenomenon demonstrates the close relationship of children's professionals and producers of children's literature in this period, including the psychological necessity of fantasy in children's reading experience (discussed in my opening chapter), as well as growing competition (and populism) among children's publishers. It may also have been part of a reaction to the post-war anxiety over so-called 'Horror Comics' imported from America, which children's librarians and other professionals had great concern over but were initially ignored by government censors.

Puffin's ghostly anthologies include a number of 'good' writers who it may have been the editors' aim to interest children in via the popular genre of the ghost story (Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells, Walter de la Mare, Rosemary Sutcliff), but the books and Armada's competitor also feature a notable high volume of folk material, with four anonymous stories and an Andrew Lang retelling in Mayne's collection alone. The inference to be gained from this selection is that fear, the fantastic and certain death taboos were promoted in children's publishing, not merely to serve an obvious appetite for them but also to supervise the means through which child readers encountered them, and to emphasise either their literary quality or relation to folk culture. (In addition, Puffin published Aidan Chambers' *Book of Ghosts and Hauntings* (1973), which overtly divides ghostly experiences into trashy fiction and rational parapsychology, suggesting an ideological openness to subjects like parapsychology and mysticism, which is explored further in Chapter 5.) Gordon's first collection of ghost stories was not published till 1979, yet his use of the genre is explicit throughout his work and frequently emphasises either the literary or archaeological aspects of terror. Unlike the work of famous ghost story writers of the past, as well as his peers (Joan Aiken, Jan Mark and Philippa Pearce all published at least two collections of ghostly material) Gordon's ghosts are unmistakably the

spirits of the dead. Their capacity to disturb (both child characters and readers) manifests through their intervention in hermeneutic acts of textual interpretation: specifically, by disrupting visual language and visual indeterminacy in the precise figure of the human body.

As the *TLS* review has indicated, Gordon “takes great pains to freeze the blood” on several occasions in *The Giant Under the Snow* (1967). The disturbing possibilities of visual indeterminacy, material experience and visual language, also invoked in Mayne’s fiction, are here linked directly to ghostly manifestations and beings which seem to rest between non-human and human in ways that disturb and disorientate. Subverted acts of perception make the solid features of place unreliable and uncanny throughout *The Giant Under the Snow*; the reader is invited to notice the strange relation between appearance and identity when Bill and Arf make their first appearance, discussing deadly mushrooms (“No wonder fungus is poisonous. (...) It looks poisonous.” “The point is, ... does it kill you?”, 10). Throughout the novel, in various instances, the fantastic is a mode of altered perception. When Jonk and her friends fly above the landscape, it becomes the page of a book and then a map: the place of reliable knowledge becomes a space of ambiguity, possibility and strange emotions. Elizabeth Goodenough, living in the heathland, is another boundary-walker. Gordon deliberately presents her as visually transcending history: despite her fantastic nature, she dresses like a modern woman, wearing a black dress with a fur cover, carrying a black cigarette case and matches in an enamelled box, her high heels clean, despite her surroundings (72). Jonk is not sure whether she knows her or not: “There seemed something familiar about the face and the black helmet of hair, something she ought to recognize” (19). The Warlord’s dog is, itself, visible only to Jonk and Bill at first, and increasingly so as the Warlord’s power

grows; likewise, when the Warlord himself makes an appearance, his expression is unreadable, and there is “no sign of life in the man” (36). Elizabeth Goodenough is just as unreadable at points, “her eyes [becoming] such narrow slits that he could not tell what expression was in them” (73).

The most disturbing failure of perception for Jonk and her friends comes on their first return to the backlands in the fog. Arf is testing a theory, that an illusion makes the trees appear to move when he walks among them. One tree “[seems] to keep moving although he himself [is] standing still. (...) He was about to test it when the tree moved again. But it was not a tree. A thin figure of a man was stepping between the trunks” (68). Another man appears, “[both] tall, both very thin, they stood like two carved images that had been placed among the trees”. When the children run, “the men (scuttle) with them like gigantic spiders” (69). The men, agents of the Warlord, pursue the children throughout the novel, often snarling at them with “a harsh sound, like branches splitting, cold and vicious” (70). Throughout this first appearance, the men are repeatedly compared to faceless, inhuman things, incapable of speech. When Bill draws near enough one to see it properly, he finds that their faces are repulsively inhuman:

The man thrust his head towards him, snarling. For the first time Bill saw him clearly. Chrysalis. Not a man, a chrysalis. Brown and wrinkled, a thin shape of a man covered entirely in leathery skin. Even his head. But the skin had shrunk to the skull and was smooth, so smooth that the head was faceless without eye sockets or mouth. Yet the head saw him and snarled. (71)

The men are thereafter repeatedly referred to as Leather Men. The term is perhaps more uncanny than it at first appears. Leather is, after all, not inorganic: it is skin rendered into a new quality through artificial processes. The novel explains indirectly that the Leather Men are the Warlord's soldiers of ancient time, their bodies reconditioned through mortality and age. What disconcerts the children and, by analogy, the reader, is the Leather Men's representation of the familiar human form, transfigured by mortality, a palpable depiction of human corporeality. The Leather Men have become objectified by the processes of history, and bring an attendant anxiety over interpreting and identifying them from the broader field of visual material, and perhaps also of actually identifying *with* them, as human or humanoid figures.

The image is repeated and its uncanny quality heightened in Gordon's second novel, *The House on the Brink* (1970). The novel opens on a summer day at the beach, somewhere on the East Anglian coast. A couple spot a stump of wood, "rounded but ungainly" in the mud (7). She thinks it must be a body; he seeks to reassure her by wading out to it, and Gordon's text focuses on his perspective, with the linguistic slippage of simile: "The stump was almost black. It lay at an angle, only partly above the mud, and dark weed clung to it like sparse hair. Like hair. But it was still too small for a body" (8).

Later, the two characters are identified as Miss Knowles and Mr Miller, and their reckoning with the Thing becomes significant to the novel. In this scene, when Miller faces the thing his face becomes set in a rictus of terror, the whole experience modelled upon nightmare conditions. "For the stump was moving, turning like a black finger to point at him. Slowly, slowly, and his feet were trapped" (8). Is it a dead body, moving unerringly on its own course? Or just a piece of bog oak, shifting

in the unsettled muds? Knowles calls it “evil”, whatever it is. Miller’s reply is important for the rest of the novel: “Your imagination! ... It even gets me going sometimes” (9).

The novel is set in Wisbech. Dick Dodds (a boy living in a terrace in a busy part of town) and Helen (who lives at her parents’ farmhouse in the fens), struggle to understand an ambiguous, dead Thing which seems to be making its own way across the landscape, leaving a palpable trail of psychic energy. The Thing is moving in upon the house of a wealthy widow, Miss Knowles, which stands symbolically at the borderline between town and countryside, on the brink of the river. The children come to theorise that Miss Knowles has imbued the Thing with her own hysteria, and at last manage to exorcise it through what Butts might have paraphrased as “damn analogies” (*Ashe* 231). The Thing is encountered repeatedly throughout the novel, up until its final confrontation with Dick and Miss Knowles, but its identification for the reader is not stable until the novel’s conclusion. Throughout the narrative, the question of whether the Thing is a dead body, an undead body or a piece of bog oak following invisible currents depends on the orientation of the reader toward the genre, as well as an interpretation of visual language.

Gordon employs the devices of previous ghost story writers, particularly M.R. James. The Jamesian ghost (seen in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* [1904] and others) is usually inexplicable, except by a series of inferences by the reader. It manifests in small details of growing significance to the reader. Even when, ultimately, they are foregrounded, James’ semi-human creatures are never seen clearly or entirely, but in a series of disembodied details, frequently reported indirectly. The influence of James is clear in the first references to the bog-oak thing in *The House on the Brink*: initially it appears as (as quoted above) an inhuman

object that suggests the human body, particularly when it moves suddenly in disturbed mud. Its second description comes through Helen's unsettling memory, which shifts in the midst of her description from humanoid to human: "I could just see something. A sort of shape. Just a black thing moving ... It was like a man all tied up, no legs and no arms. But it kept moving" (48). Later, out in the fens, Dick and Helen see it together, as reported by Gordon. As in Mayne's writing, Gordon here emphasises the complications of visual material, and visual interpretation, rendered in focalised prose:

Dick heard Helen's whimper. Heard it. Heard it as the bars and bolts of his bones shot home.

Her sob again. And then the flood of his own blood washing fear away. The head was an old post. He saw it. A black, smooth, round, bald-headed old post.

(...)

The bald black head, faceless, moved. (103)

The meaning of the visual material here is not just Helen's, but Helen's view apprehended by Dick, and the ultimate act of interpretation of the Thing and his viewers rests with the reader. Gordon applies the Jamesian style to his novel for young readers, animating the ancient, material landscape with the ambiguity of archaeological imagination, not merely concerning material objects but the materiality of the human form. As well as James, Gordon is here referencing a particular subject of archaeological study of growing fame in the late 1960s: the visually disorienting figure of the bog body.

ii. *The Bog-Oak Thing, the Bog Body and The Bog People*

As the reader learns in the closing chapter, when Dick has broken the psychological spell over “the splintered sword; the broken, spread-eagled bones of the ancient body”, the Thing is definitively identified as human distorted into a humanoid object, a body reconstituted by the chemicals of the fenland soil (not so unlike the Leather Men of *The Giant under the Snow*) (182). It is an example of the ‘bog body’, and therefore an archaeological object belonging inextricably and materially to the East Anglian locale. The strange properties of soil acids mean the bodies are remarkably well preserved when unearthed, often mistaken for victims of recent murders or misadventures. They are often the victims of strangulation by cord, and may be victims of violent assault, criminals after execution or the subject of a ritual killing. In the case of a man found in the Grauballe district, a body was misidentified by popular consensus as a local man who’d been missing for seventy years. Due to his remarkable preservation, he was literally inconceivable to viewers as a figure of antiquity: Professor Glob, who excavated ‘Grauballe Man’ was ridiculed by journalists and even by his fellow archaeologists were sceptical for years. In *The Bog People* (1965), a record of the discovery and his theories, Glob even quotes a satirical poem published in a Danish newspaper, referring to his “owl in the bog” (a play on a Danish expression for ‘something amiss’). Following carbon dating tests, Glob was vindicated, and the discovery of ‘Grauballe Man’ became almost as famous in its era as the Sutton Hoo dig alluded to in *Giant* (Glob in fact suggests the book was inspired by a series of letters from English schoolchildren). A clear influence on Gordon’s novel (as it has been on such writers as Seamus Heaney and Margaret Attwood), the ‘bog body’ has a scientific and cultural fascination which



Glob describes as the observer's "natural resistance" to accepting these bodies as archaeological finds.

The "combined identification and estrangement" give these transfigured human remains "a valence that is different than that of other archaeological objects" (Sanders xv). As the most empathetic and un-distorted example of an archaeological artefact, Purdy describes the bog body as a literal and revelatory chronotope in which, to an "extraordinary degree, the bog body allows us to see time" (97). Yet Glob's experience demonstrates the reverse: the intact bog body is not easily interpretable as ancient, forcing us to reconsider the natural features by which we interpret age, and which are here effaced. Indeed, it undermines our sense of temporality as dependent on certain images of natural decomposition: the result is an empathetic human figure whose transfiguration into something inhuman appears unnaturally halted. Until the bog body in *House on the Brink* is determined as such – after the abrupt moment of catharsis in the plot's conclusion – this archaeological figure hovers disconcertingly between identities, for both the novel's protagonists and its readers.

On each description of the Thing, the hermeneutic experience of excavation is re-enacted. The Thing is the object of textual ambiguity, foregrounding the subjective view of the protagonists. The reader, like Dick and Helen, is invited to critique and relate these multiple subjective viewpoints, while the archaeological object remains, for most of the novel, indecipherable and so mutely powerful. The identity of their subject, the Thing, becomes as much an ambiguity in the novel's text as it is, physically and visually, for its protagonists. Near the climax of the novel, the children find the Thing wrapped in a carpet at the home of Miss Knowles, seemingly brought there by her partner, Miller the archaeologist. The description

shifts between metaphors and similes to confuse the reader's sense of representation in the midst of subjective perception:

Smooth as a mummy in its shell, wrapped as tight as a black chrysalis, the log lay on the ceremonial zigzags [of the carpet], still with the sea sheen on the weed that clung to the round head over which he was bent. The weed reached to narrow shoulders, sea worn, and the log tapered to a jagged point where the mud had sucked its softer parts away. (162)

As Mitchell writes, overtly visual language reveals the artifice intrinsic to representation: the concept of something being used *to* represent something *by* someone *to* someone, and here Gordon articulates the archaeological object's power to disturb when its status as inert, inhuman and incomplete is somehow compromised and it threatens to become a living thing in the present tense. The reader is invited to consider their role in interpreting a text with such complexity of signification, and through interpreting the visual material and its multiple perspectives, orientate themselves toward the genre. For much of the novel, the children move through this borderland of the fantastic, infusing the otherwise realist text with a sense of instability and threatened irrational belief. The archaeological object, which invokes this instability, shifts in the eyes of reader through overt textual devices. The archaeological imagination, with the promise of completing the incomplete, here threatens to revive the dead or undermine rational thought. The novel succeeds in avoiding a single, monological discourse of authority, and comprehension comes to the protagonists by sifting multiple discourses: anecdote, observation, superstition. In one scene, an old water-diviner tells Dick and Helen that Knowles' fear of the Thing is all hysteria, fuelled by Knowles' partner, Miller; yet, after this rational discourse, the same character delivers the superstitious statement,

“[There’s] things that happened in the past that made a mark, [but] it’s my belief they can’t affect you if you don’t meddle with them” (89). This authoritative voice of irrational discourse, who overtly endorses parapsychological techniques such as divining, is convinced Knowles’ fear of the log is merely an interior matter.

The novel resists a straightforward explanation for events, but the inference is that some form of subjective engagement (like the archaeological imagination, or a close aesthetic action) is crucial, and that Miss Knowles’ irrational dread of the Thing at her first encounter with it (“I don’t care what it is, it’s evil” 9) invests it with power and autonomy. Dick visits Knowles early in the novel for a meeting of a writers’ group at the suggestion of his English teacher: as in the school trip which opens *Giant Under the Snow*, Gordon shadows his young adult drama with the spectre of institutional, managed and idealised models of teenage maturation and aesthetic feeling. Dick agrees with Miss Knowles that the dark, churning water outside her window is ‘bad’; Knowles explains this sense of moral characterisation to her other guests: “My house ... has a good side and a bad. The river is on the dark side. Everything it contains is contaminated. I saw something it had washed up the other day, a piece of wood, but the river had made it evil. (...) And out at the back of my house ... somewhere in the distance, there is [a silver glimmering] that when it appears always gives me hope” (11). Knowles’ restrictive interpretation, in de Certeauian terms, transfigures a fluid, changeable space into a fixed and inescapable place defined by Manichaean symbolism, within which the ambiguities of the archaeological object can only be read as sinister. In Gordon’s fantasy, such restrictive interpretations of place can be freed (in one sense, exorcised) when characters find objective correlations for such subjective feeling. Dick and Helen recognise the power of Miss Knowles’ subjective view of the landscape, but

correlate it with other views, including their own. They gain this ability to correlate and understand such difference through a liminal space, the *mearcstapa* role. Their close shadowing of the Thing, following it across the fens and into Miss Knowles' house, succeeds the flying scenes of *Giant Under the Snow* as a viewpoint from which the landscape becomes strange, ambiguous and disorientating.

### iii. *Perception of Landscape and the Mearcstapa Exploration*

As in *Giant Under the Snow*, there is an importance, not only to the meaningful arrangement of things and people, but to the *mearcstapa* role and moving delinquently through this meaningful arrangement that is landscape. Dick and Helen spend much of the novel moving in secrecy and defiance of their parents and other adult authorities. One of Dick's first actions in the novel is to steal a boat and float in secrecy, at night, down to the coast; he does this in rebellion against his English teacher and the poetry evening he has been obliged to attend. Later in the novel, the teenagers are repeatedly observed together and teased by their parents. This creates an accumulated sense of surveillance and control by teachers and parents, against which their secret movements become characteristic of their youth. They are warned off investigating further by Knowles' partner and the old water-diviner, but continue exploring despite them, even stealing into other people's back gardens to peer through their windows, and finally to enter Knowles' house uninvited. Such night-criminal trespasses are given license, narratively, by their role as interpreters and correlators of multiple discourses, observers from the liminal place of the child and *mearcstapa*.

This role is presented with its most acute importance in the tracing of the Thing's trail. It not only appears to cross the landscape but leaves a trail behind it, layered invisibly on the landscape. Dick and Helen, converging from different 'places' geographically and in terms of class, share a sensitivity to the trail and its associated psychological sensations of dread. In certain areas of the landscape they experience an immersive, physical sensation of terror: Dick describes it as being like "cemeteries opening up", and Helen screams on first feeling it (23). Despite this initial sense of terror, it becomes symbolic of their closeness and mutual curiosity: "The words came, and more and more and more his experience fit in with hers. [...] They were in a vast room [bounded by river and orchard] but their heads moved against the blue sky and they were gigantic" (54). In Gordon's rendering of their conversation, the rest of the world shifts perspective around them, as the psychological experience, bodily experienced, becomes their own invisible route-map of the fens. Rather than following another person's map of the district, or a rationalist survey of local history, Dick and Helen are guided by feelings of intuition. It directs them toward a highly subjective engagement with the landscape, the pair of them spending much of the novel looking, with an artist's focus and attention, at seemingly commonplace fields and fens. The sensation of the trail is indisputable, and for much of the novel it is their only certainty amid the competing perspectives on the Thing and Miss Knowles. As in *Giant Under the Snow*, inhabiting this liminal viewpoint, guided by subjective and irrational responses, provides them with insights into human and non-human landscape and their own relationship with it as both observers and inhabitants. In this novel, however, the teenagers are not only idealised perceivers of place, but also an idealised romantic partnership, contrasted with Miss Knowles and her partner. Their ability to explore, observe and to be

attuned to place, to resolve discrepancies in discourse and exorcise anxiety, is directly related to their development from alienation to socialisation and even partnership. In the closing lines of the novel, after the exorcising of the Thing, the sensation moves, with little commentary, from terror to eroticism: “His skin was on the point of shivering. It may have been the trail (186).” The last line of the novel leaves it on a note of ambiguity, and yet, complementing the narrative of teenage development, the terror-inducing trail of the Thing appears to have been exorcised, shifting the subject of Dick’s sensitivity and imagination from a dead body to a living one.

As *mearcstapa*-figures, Jonk, Bill and Arf explored the air over Norwich in *The Giant Under the Snow*, as a liminal viewpoint, unmarked by previous mapmakers. In *The House on the Brink*, which is characterised by the dangers of subjective viewpoints, the shared viewpoint (again unmarked and liminal) becomes the most conventional obverse of adolescent alienation: an experience of romantic unity. In this novel, it is part of the teenagers’ rereading of a landscape that was fixed into a pattern of fear. This chapter will conclude by exploring a separate application of these *mearcstapa* manoeuvres and the archaeological imagination, in Gordon’s *The Waterfall Box*, in deconstructing the economic and class differences that conventional narratives of place seek to naturalise.

#### 4.4 Place, Class and Archaeology in *The Waterfall Box*

##### i. *Place as Meaningful Arrangement*

At the beginning of Gordon's 1976 novel, Bran is used to life, in "a small town that sprawled like a carelessly dropped blanket over a few low hills" (7). He feels trapped and ashamed by their "dingy" home, with its front door swollen with damp, and often argues with his parents in explicitly self-conscious, resentful ways ("We can't help living here. We can't afford anything else." [...] "No. I suppose not. It's where we belong", *Waterfall* 10). His angry resentment of his parents' place, both literally and figuratively, informs his identity. Bran crosses borders of class and money with disconcerting rapidity when his parents are killed and he is sent to live with his aunt's family, wealthy owners of the Waterfall potteries. The trauma of grief is physically disorientating: in a severely short chapter (only a hundred and thirty-six words) Gordon describes how days pass meaninglessly, while Bran "did not know where he was", and the house "boxed him in a wooden universe" (56). Having lost his parents abruptly, all discursive production of self is frustrated, reflected in the suddenly minimal text: the transition to his aunt's house happens in an efficient string of words and detached tone. The use of the pathetic fallacy might suggest delirium or even a temporary lapse into an infant state, again focused on Bran's sudden transition to a new location: "And then it was another place. Cooler. On a hillside. It rained and the woods around the house wept as he lay" (56). Bran's escape from the town he resented is bitterly ironic, and articulates the complexity of identity, belonging, home and place. For the rest of the novel, Bran is still locked discursively with the words of his mother. She promised to sell an antiquarian, Mr Harman, the family heirloom that once belonged to the nineteenth-century alchemist and potter, Silas Waterfall. It is

Bran's moral decision whether to honour the promise now that the situation has changed: the huge fee, which would have changed Bran's life, is redundant among his new family. Also, Potter Waterfall's little clay box has its own significance beyond the aesthetic. It is one of several archaeological objects in this novel, the effects of Potter Waterfall, now belonging to Bran's aunt, ambiguous in meaning and (like the bog body in *The House on the Brink*) potentially magical.

Again, and more overtly than in Gordon's other novels, the arrangement of objects through narrative into place is revealed to confer meaning and stability. Bran's new town is "subtly out of scale; someone's private distortion" (14). In this case, however, the arrangement actually has a named architect. Everything in the town bears the influence of Waterfall: "It was he who had decided the shape of the village, built the houses, given work to its people. His influence was everywhere even now" (15). Silas Waterfall is not only the architect of the town, but the source of its industrial and economic foundation. It was the success of his unique glaze, we are told, that made the town's potteries what they are. In the town museum, his antique equipment is displayed beneath his portrait, in which he contemplates a mysterious clay phial. The equipment and portrait, a gift from the owners of the potteries today, suggest an arrangement of artefacts and knowledge binding the identity of a place together: they are "self-consciously, even sheepishly, displayed" to this purpose (17). In an early scene of the novel, a girl, Stella, watches a stranger (Mr Harman) as he studies the painting for clues. Even in this early scene we are aware that these characters are suspended within a constellation of objects, secrets, acts of looking and interpretation, which together shape a place and a narrative out of space. As she stands watching Harman, Stella sees him begin to exhibit signs of unexpected excitement: "As though some chemical reaction had begun, he was becoming



unpredictable” (16). It is chemical or magical reactions such as these, caused by the relation of characters within the arrangement of place, history and artefact, that drives the novel thereafter. The novel interrogates the worth of antique objects, objective, subjective and even fantastical.

The object of everybody’s interest is the phial depicted in the portrait of Silas Waterfall. For Bran’s uncle, the substance is “nothing more – and nothing less, mark you – than the secret of the Waterfall Glaze,” upon whom not only the family wealth, but the town and, indeed, Gordon’s narrative are founded. Just as the bog body in *The House on the Brink* required the reader’s narrative fluency to identify it, *The Waterfall Box* invites reader to consider the significance of an antique sealed phial, its nature and value. The liquid heard moving inside is unidentifiable without breaking the seal: again, the reader’s responsibility is to orientate themselves in relation to character subjectivity. Visually, the phial is the least interesting of the potter’s artefacts, yet Gordon makes continual reference to the deceptive appearance of things: Mr Harman “vanishe[s] into sunshine” (17), the portrait of Silas “has all sorts of clues ... for those able to read them” (23), and when Bran first meets Harman by the canal, the boy is experimenting with transfiguring the scene into pure aesthetics: “He let his eyes take it in ... It was like a painting. The air he breathed was not natural air but the everlasting, unexhausted air of a picture ...” (158) Then, a “vaguely man-shaped” piece of shrouded machine is “[o]nce more ... a man, short and square-shouldered. A hat brim cast a diagonal shadow across an almost featureless face” (159). Not only the phial but Harman himself (the two things being obscurely related) are disorientatingly ambiguous; like the Leather Men and bog oak Thing before him, an uncanny atmosphere is activated by this inability to gauge how human he is, and the ability of textual ambiguity to disguise the difference. He has an

aura of unnatural power, “his presence [growing] outwards like a crystal through the grainy night until it touched [Bran and Sandy]”, raising his hat to them “like a mechanical figure on a clock” (173). On more than one occasion, however, he also displays an unassuming, supernatural strength, for which an explanation is never explicitly given. The reader’s inability to fully perceive Harman’s significance as character is another textual ambiguity, modulating the fantastic mode in which the *The Waterfall Box* is read. Harman later praises Stella, making her his creature, by saying she has “clever eyes” (92), whilst his own are described by Gordon as “unseeing, reptilian” (68). As in Gordon’s earlier novels, seeing things as they are is only part of the process of understanding what they mean, and in the process the whole visual field is a space of dangerous confrontations. The last glimpse of the malevolent figure before his uncanny death is also concerned with sight and perception, just “one last blind, random glare that turned up into his skull and vanished” (191).

Alchemy’s science of analogies, like Elizabeth Goodenough’s magical theories is discussed frequently throughout the novel. It is, for Bran’s uncle, less powerful in realist than in irrational, metaphorical terms regarding the soul: “You could turn anything into anything else if you had the equipment. It’s only a question of altering structures. They knew it. Those old alchemists knew it, and it became uninteresting. Totally” (113). Gordon invites his reader to read the novel in these terms: structures and patterns of significance which alter and define others, depending on their arrangement and relation in space and time. The significance of these structures and patterns is normally belied by their appearance, or non-appearance, whether through inheritance, haunting, or reinterpretation. In one scene, two boys square off to one another over Sandy, and the scene is “a ritual”, a

“ridiculous performance” (128). It is one instance among many of delinquent behaviour: the teenagers of this novel slip in and out of the house (and even one another’s bedrooms) at night, steal Potter Waterfall’s artefacts and hide them, and finally, even run off to a hiding place in the hillside with them. In the previous novels of Gordon discussed, the archaeological imagination was prompted by excavations and emergent artefacts: in *The Waterfall Box*, it is through seeing the town itself, from the house on the hill, as a stable object revealed as a net of nigh-magical correspondences. In this novel, however, the liminal state invoking such *mearcstapa* transgressions is not delimited to a single point in space (whether the sky or a trail across the landscape). It is the condition of living in a town so overtly defined by a collection of artefacts and founding myths. As per de Certeau, the physical arrangement of town is not a natural, given fact, but the result of multiple contingent factors, emphasised in this novel through Silas Waterfall’s role as architect. Although there are no ghosts in *The Waterfall Box*, in their place are bequests, inheritances and promises to the dead. The will of Silas Waterfall, and his secret knowledge, reflect Bran’s sense of responsibility to his mother, as he decides how best to handle these ostensibly mundane artefacts. The specificity of home and place-identification is also the result of such contingent factors, and it is of this that Bran and his friends and family become conscious through exploring Waterfall’s effects in their multiple discourses.

ii. *Place as Social Construction*

The place-consciousness of the novel is directly linked to intersubjectivity, even shame, concerning social class. Bran’s angry arguments with his parents, and his

mother's consequent decision to sell her heirloom, have already been described. Bran's aunt, having married the factory owner and moved to the house on the hill, feels "there [is] still, after all these years, a great uncertainty in her about where she belonged in the village ... that [her daughter] Sandy could not resist prodding" (23). Sandy, Bran's cousin, feels a great security and takes pleasure in teasing friends and family about where they belong. Bran is her victim for much of the novel, and her exclusion of Stella from their class-based clique leads to her co-operation with Harman, putting her 'clever eyes' to work in stealing Potter Waterfall's artefacts for him. When Bran visits Stella's house briefly and remarks on how it reminds him of home, we see how all the teenagers there feel uncomfortable at his words: does 'home' mean where he grew up, or where he is now, in the house on the hill? In this moment of ambiguity especially, Gordon presents the difficult emotions entailed by identity's interrelation with place, and also the impossibility of separating one from the other, even when done legally and objectively. Place, in both positive and negative aspects, is innate in the discursive production of self.

The conclusion of *The Waterfall Box* is, like that of the *Giant Under the Snow* and *House on the Brink*, one of archaeological revelation. When Harman threatens Sandy's life, Bran breaks open the phial and flings it at the box. Not only are the phial's contents revealed, but the artefacts, like the earth giant and the bog body, are violently destroyed. The novel shifts momentarily into overtly fantastic mode when the artefacts, their worth still uncalculated, erupt together in an unearthly combustion. Antiques and antiques-hunter are both destroyed together, and the meaningless promised worth that bound Bran to Sandy is also cancelled. The fantastic aura of the phial, along with its other valuations, are all rendered null in this moment of exorcism, and Bran's friends are freed of the tensions engineering them into their

dangerous conflict. A brief coda alludes to Bran and Stella's starting a family together, "[m]any years later, and many miles away", producing a series of implied consequences and commentaries for the reader to interpret (192). The most significant of these, perhaps, is the characters' refusal to be fixed, placed or caught in what initially seems the only place for them.

### **Conclusion**

The materiality of the landscape in Gordon's novels is constantly unstable, and the source of constant disorientation, loss of perspective and outright terror. Just as the fens appear natural but are artificial, human beings are frequently unreadable, and some things are liable to emerge from the shifting mass of signifiers, which fundamentally disturb our conception of humanity and naturalness. Such emergent ambiguities are intrinsically archaeological and Gordon utilises some elements of the ghost story genre to bring these disturbing elements into the novel at a textual level, destabilising the relationship between reader, text and meaning. These frightening novels play with their readers' expectations of genre, authority figures and scientific discourse. They emphasise instability, ambiguity and interpretation for readers as well as protagonists.

Bran, Stella and Sandy in *The Waterfall Box* are (increasingly self-conscious) elements in a pattern directed by an artisan and public benefactor in the nineteenth century. The fact that Potter Waterfall happened to be an alchemist, as well as a craftsman, leads to an awareness amongst those protagonists, but also the reader, of the analogies and correspondences through which their situation – their sense of

place – does not have to be fixed, but can be continually reinterpreted and destabilised. Likewise, the protagonists of *The House on the Brink* are made conscious, through close attention to the bog body and the landscape itself, of the multiple perspectives engendered by the multivalent ancient landscape; through their bodily sensitisation to the landscape of the fens, they perceive it as both unearthly and earthly, subject to material shifts as well as subjective views. They intervene in the rereading of natural and unnatural features of landscape. Even in the ostensibly light adventure of *The Giant Under the Snow*, Gordon's protagonists experience the strange sense of alterity and identification that comes from the mixed natural and unnatural features of landscape. Each of these revelations, which partly narrates the development of self from alienation to socialisation, is prompted by the archaeological imagination and what Gordon emphasises as human and non-human elements of landscape.

To gain these alternate perspectives, Gordon's protagonists are constantly walking the boundaries of the world, avoiding teachers, parents, and policemen as well as enemies. These are the delinquent routes Gordon invites his readers to take through the unstable and frightening landscapes of his novels, to reveal their strata, patterns and constructedness. They depend upon the multiplicity of interpretations inspired by such archaeological sites as earthworks, bog people and ancient philosophies. In the following chapter, I discuss the changing face of such sites in the 1970s, the popularising of 'Earth Mysteries' imagery, and three children's novels that reflect that shift.

## Chapter 5: “The Age of Aquarius” The Novels of Judy Allen

This chapter, which considers instances of Children’s Neo-Romanticism from the mid- to late-1970s, looks at changing attitudes to the fantasy genre for children, and strong countercultural themes associated with the era. The longing for a lost sense of order immanent in the British landscape, which forms an integral theme of the Neo-Romantic sensibility, moved in the late 1960s into general discourse and later into popular culture. In the midst of financial catastrophe and growing ecological awareness, a new awareness of landscape informed by prehistoric culture gained popularity: the children’s novels (and television) exhibiting its influence present children’s view of landscape as involved in markedly modern, irrational ideas of power.

Judy Allen’s novels exemplify the changing attitudes to the archaeological imagination in the era of Green issues and the popularity of earth mysteries. Whilst embodying the tropes of Children’s Neo-Romanticism, they also demonstrate an ideological shift in terms of the child as *mearcstapa*, tracing or trespassing on the borderlands of place, fantasy and self. Whereas such borderlines manifested as textual instability in earlier works, here they are part of a pre-existent, revived discourse associated with mysticism and counter-cultural writing, overtly presented as such in references to Alfred Watkins, and John Michell. This chapter will weigh the significance of place consciousness’s growing topicality.

Allen is a prolific writer, and this chapter opens with a survey of her career. Her fantasy novels predominantly belong to the 1970s but her greater success – leading to reprints of those novels – comes in the 1980s and after. As well as reflecting broader ideas concerning landscape active in the 1970s in her work, Allen’s novels bring a new inflection to the narratives of child subjectivity and agency that, as I have shown, fluctuated in appearance from the mid-1950s onward. The chapter gives publishing context for Allen’s self-presentation and intertextuality, in a period I argue as the apex and closing years of the Second Golden Age in children’s literature.

Allen’s references to leys, dragon energy and lost knowledge reflect a general popularising of earth mysteries terminology, as well as a wider awareness of environmental issues. The chapter continues by exploring this period of revisionism, mysticism and activism. One of the developments in children’s fiction in the 1970s was an increasingly ambitious and experimental trend in British children’s television drama, and the influence of contemporary children’s literature, including its subject matter, is clear. As well as the folk horror genre in cinema, I explore the increasing popularity of themes of archaeology and pagan fantasy in children’s television drama in the 1960s and 1970s, including *Children of the Stones* (1977) and *Raven* (1977).

The chapter then considers the presentation of such material in Allen’s first novel, *The Spring on the Mountain* (1973), and its gentle satire of contemporary rural fantasies about the countryside as a place of enlightenment. It continues by exploring the ecological themes of this and her second novel, *The Stones of the Moon* (1975), in relation to Kate Soper’s theorisation of nature. The growth of environmental activism, and its move toward the mainstream, comprised a view of landscape and the place of human investment in the rural scene that resonates with



the themes of Neo-Romanticism I have proposed, particularly its emphasis on imagining a ‘new blueprint’ for the future. The chapter concludes with *The Lord of the Dance* (1976), Allen’s third novel and the most overtly concerned with ideas of place, space and magic.

### 5.1 Judy Allen: A Survey

Judy Allen is one of the most prolific writers in this study. Her first published novel was the landscape-themed fantasy novel *The Spring on the Mountain* in 1973, and her output since has been both constant and diverse. Still writing today, Allen’s work encompasses more than fifty published titles including travel guides, books for adults, younger readers and young adults, in addition to picture books and the *Encyclopaedia of the Unexplained* (2011).

*The Spring on the Mountain*, shows the influence of Garner and Lively.

Indeed, the dustjacket blurb for its first edition presents it as “the most mysterious and elemental children’s story since Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service*”, and the novel features a map of its territory, not unlike the map of Alderley Edge by Charles Green that prefaces Garner’s *Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. Three urban teenagers, strangers to one another, come to stay in a rural village with Mr and Mrs Myer, and soon enter the orbit of the local wise woman, Mrs White, who sets them on a quest. Undeterred by warnings from a mysterious stranger, the teenagers climb a nearby mountain, seeking to divert a magic spring into the village water supply for the benefit of all. Their quest entails a series of visionary moments which intensify their experience of the mountain, including a strange tower that seems to “exist quite outside time” (119) and communion with a stranger who calls himself Aquarius, who convinces

the young people to turn away from their quest. The novel concludes with mystical explanations for the site of a local haunting and its potential exorcism.

In 1975, this was followed by a second fantasy novel about landscape, *The Stones of the Moon*. Here, the teenagers are a mix of local residents (whose father works at the local textiles mill) and David, a visitor and the son of a Professor of Archaeology. The Professor and his team are investigating a Roman ruin, but David is more concerned with the local stone circle. His investigations bring him into contact with two local children concerned about local pollution, and Mr Westwood, an amateur archaeologist. Despite friction between these individuals, including Westwood's arrest for drug possession, it comes to light that the circle is an ancient engine to supply the local village in case of drought, activated by noise from the mill. In the resolution, the mill is shut down and a disastrous flood is averted.

A third fantasy novel followed in 1976. *The Lord of the Dance* (1976) also directly associated mystical ideas of landscape, place and archaeology with a subtext of initiation into ancient knowledge. Its teenage protagonist inadvertently inherits a Hermetic form of magical knowledge after a visit to a mystically aligned, unfinished building in his New Town. The boy is offered identification with one of two powerful Jungian archetypes, but whichever he chooses seems to fatally unsettle the balance of forces in his local community. The final part of his magical initiation appears to be to leave both archetypal powers poised in balance, and the novel concludes with him rejecting the magic entirely.

*The Dream Thing* (1978) shows a shift away from archaeology to ecological awareness. Teenager Jen never knew her father, who was a traveller: when a traveller encampment sets up nearby, Jen does all she can to evict them, fuelled by

self-loathing. A monstrous nightmare begins to move from dreams to reality (which she blames on a “gypsy curse”). Allen incorporates direct quotations from T. C. McLuhan’s anthology of American Indian testimony, *Touch the Earth* (1972), when Jen’s boyfriend counters her racism with historical accounts of dispossession. Despite a growing hope for Jen’s self-acceptance, the travellers are moved on as a result of her actions, and she is shunned by her boyfriend. *The Dream Thing* was the first of Allen’s novels to be reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, but Naomi Lewis expressed concern that it unintentionally demonised the traveller community. It is a bold but uncomfortable read, and is most notable in this thesis for its use of dream imagery and ecology-themed anxiety over claims to land.

Allen’s next published fiction, *December Flower* (1982) was for adult readers, and dramatized as an award-winning television play. Her 1988 children’s novel, *Awaiting Developments*, was a more significant award-winner. This overtly ecological novel won the Whitbread Award for Children’s Fiction in 1989, as well as the Earthworm Book Award established in 1987 by the green charity Friends of the Earth to award “environmental awareness and sensitivity in literature (fiction and non-fiction) for children of all ages” (Criscoe 49).

Allen’s work for children continued in this theme, with *Something Rare and Special* (1989), about a child of divorced parents who develops an interest in conservation, and *Between the Moon and the Rock* (1992), about the daughter of New Age, ecologically aware parents. Amidst Allen’s large output of fiction and non-fiction for all ages since 1992, *The Burning* (2000) is notable as a new fantasy of ancient magic, which showed Allen’s continuing interest in the hidden powers of place.

## 5.2 The Changing Place of Fantasy in the Second Golden Age

It may be argued that Allen's growing success as a novelist, in the 1980s and after, follows her subordination of the fantastic to realist themes. Despite a high profile, including promotion in the 1976 *Puffin Annual*, her work belonged to a strong body of fantasy increasingly neglected by contemporary children's literature criticism. Typifying the children's fiction in the decades before the 1970s, Hollindale and Sutherland write, "[w]hether refashioning existing legends or extending the store, the achievements in fantasy of this period mark a prevalent sense that perspectives of magic and the supernatural are needed to articulate a new and unfamiliar world. In these years, realism alone was not enough" (P Hunt 377), yet if we consider the landscape of awards it appears that realism tended to prevail critically in the 1970s. The 1970s are the era of Lively's first three children's novels, as well as the era of the "Dark is Rising" sequence of novels; yet the children's literature establishment appears to have been looking the other way. The social role of the children's book was emphasised over its poetic qualities: the institution in 1975 of the Other Award, to recognise socially progressive novels for young people, scorned fantasy overall, and in the Carnegie Medal's awards for the decade (which it is valuable to compare with the list given in Chapter 2) only one novel was celebrated by the Carnegie judges that dealt fully with a fantastic or supernatural subject. There were exceptions in the awards of the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, which highlighted John Christopher's *The Guardians* (1971), Diana Wynne Jones' *Charmed Life* (1978) and time-slip drama *Conrad's War* by Andrew Davies (1979). Otherwise, the three major awards were consistent in their preference against fantasy. The preference for narratives of the past's importance to the present was still strong, with more than half the decade's awards being made to novels that have a strong historical theme or

setting. Novels of this era celebrated by the Carnegie and other awards concern the ancient Greeks, a Buddhist monastery in the nineteenth century, the British experience of the Second World War, and the stories of the Old Testament. Although Cooper's work has been ever popular, it is significant to my argument that none of the "Dark is Rising" novels was recognised by the Carnegie award (it was awarded for its treatment of Welsh identity by the emerging Tir-Nan-Og award, and in America with the prestigious Newbery medal).

I argue that where fantasy is honoured by the children's literature establishment in this era, it is in forms which further emphasise its insufficiency by comparison to the realistic mode, either through an unserious tone or a clear, pragmatic social message which transcends the text. *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (1973), which did win the Carnegie prize, marks a change of direction in Lively's approach to her children's novels, afterwards tending toward urban rather than rural settings. One of the most unusual, distinctive and popular novels of the era, Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), explores an extra dimension of invented mythology and elements of fantasy, yet remains within the traditions of the animal story genre, its brutality signalling an essentially realist mode. Significantly its message is fundamentally concerned with ecology and the spectre of rural development.

In this decade, as Giles Clark and Angus Phillips describe, children's literature publishing was at its highest level of output so far, but in an environment that differed further, year-on-year, from the one that engendered even this Second Golden Age. Hardback books were generally too costly for these financially straitened times, and consequently the majority of children's literature titles were produced in paperback initially and in much shorter runs, generating an increasingly

competitive market: the role and judgement of the children's librarian and children's literature critic therefore came under further scrutiny and demanded from them a sense of shared principles and objectives.

### 5.3 The Changing Context of the Second Golden Age

#### *i. Judy Allen and Earth Mysteries*

Judy Allen makes an appearance in *Puffin Annual Number 2* (1976), amid features by Cooper, Cresswell and Leon Garfield (as well as the folklorist Katharine Briggs). This lavish publication is indicative of Puffin's dominance of the children's literature establishment, and its emphasis on the personalities of its writers and illustrators. *Puffin Annual Number 1* (1974) had included six pages of 'Authors and Places', emphasising the writer's biography and the significance of "real life places which they have used in their books" (79). It had also featured a piece by Jill Paton Walsh on the 'palimpsest' of Britain, comparing the marks of landscape as intermingling layers of text. "Look carefully," she writes, "... [and] you might notice that an unimportant footpath keeps in an unwavering, steady line from parish to parish, at the same distance from the brow of the hill. That track is very likely older than the parish itself" (46). Allen's piece in the second annual focuses on that same track, but unashamedly emphasising its mystic significance. Her article, "Dragon Paths", runs to nearly three pages and includes black-and-white photographs of burial mounds, the Rollright stones of Oxfordshire, and a stone circle in Northumbria, which resemble those of Gordon Copley's *Going into the Past* (1955). Allen's article reads like a subversive rewrite of those texts of Copley and Grigson that urge children to

practise mapwork and fieldwork. Her topic and guiding principle is Watkins's *The Old Straight Track* (1925). She also mentions the counter-cultural author, John Michell and his 1968 work, *The View Over Atlantis*, by name. Michell and his followers, she says, have been "verbally attacked by professional archaeologists", whose names she does not feel the same obligation to give (39).

In observing the changing character of children's literature, it is significant that both initial and reprinted editions of Allen's novels are more likely than previous texts to foreground their author to readers, featuring biographical and exegetic material, from prefacing material (typically beginning, "Judy Allen says...") to recommendations of Michell and Watkin's books (at the end of *The Spring on the Mountain*). In her first author biography, she presents herself as almost predestined to have an interest and receptivity to places of ancient British mysticism, saying, "My first visit to Stonehenge was before I was born," "I am fascinated by new approaches to archaeology and what they call prehistory", and "I found three days spent alone at Glastonbury very unnerving" (*Spring* 1973). Her biography, repeated on the flyleaves of novels, on websites and in the *Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, consistently states that she was born in Old Sarum in Wiltshire in 1941, an auspicious location, the long-acknowledged site of a prehistoric human settlement roughly eight miles from Stonehenge. Old Sarum Mound is mentioned in both Watkins' and Michell's works, as a notable point on the ley lines that they argue for, aligning precisely with the 'new' Salisbury Cathedral, and Stonehenge itself. Given that Old Sarum per se is not an inhabited location, and that most of Allen's childhood was spent in Hampshire, the mental image suggested by such biographical detail, of a child spent among standing stones, is probably misleading. It seems significant that in this period Allen repeatedly allied her writer

persona with such irrational modes of viewing landscape. As I will proceed to argue, though children's writers continued to utilise the archaeological imagination and prehistoric features of landscape, it was perhaps impossible now to claim this imaginative space as a blank site connoting disorientation and ambiguity.

ii. *Earth Mysteries and Environmentalism: New Ideas for the New Age*

Allen's novels patently belong to a trend in the Britain of the 1970s toward widening environmental awareness and, to an extent, an interest in prehistoric culture as a partial response to it, whether pragmatically, spiritually or nostalgically. Following economic disaster in Britain in the 1970s, a sense of disenfranchisement engendered various revolutionary stances, including a popular (and frequently parodied) strain of "New Age" thinking. This developed out of the remaining vestiges of 1960s counterculture ideas, as well as growing interest in environmentalism, disenchantment with development, and what Paul Heelas describes as an "intensification of subjectivities" (49). A rise in environmental awareness was frequently linked with ideas of social radicalism: in 1972, the year prior to Allen's first novel, *The Ecologist* magazine published a special issue, *A Blueprint for Survival* signed by leading scientists, selling hundreds of thousands of copies and arguing for a restructuring of society along the lines of pre-industrial, tribal communities. The environmental activist groups Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were just two and four years old respectively at this point. Such non-governmental organisations, frequently with pacifist and/or non-violent approaches to their work, are typical of the era's search for alternative means of conceptualising and attaining these goals, in place of the conventional mainstream values of the



government or church. Evaluating this era, Heelas describes “the expansion of consciousness; the Dionysian spirit of self-exploration; the magic sought through hallucinogens and music; the revelations of new horizons/new dimensions/alternative ways of living [which] all came to be regarded ... as *the* sources of significance...” (49). It was a period of interest in alternative forms of science, spirituality and conceptions of self, reminiscent of the inter-war search for secularised meaning that Neo-Romanticism was part of, as described in Chapter 1. In the midst of a new cultural interest in alternative forms of power, the alternative science of the ‘earth mysteries’ trend found an enthusiastic audience.

The innate revisionism of the earth mysteries movement was partly founded on a sense of textual rediscovery from recent history. Its core text, Watkins’ *The Old Straight Track*, was published and popularised in the 1920s but staunchly dismissed by archaeologists (such as Hoskins, something of a public figure) and ostensibly forgotten until readopted by such countercultural writers as Michell. For Michell and his followers, Watkins’ amateur and unscientific profile was crucial to his significance as a thinker outside the mainstream. He was, in fact, a travelling businessman who happened to come to know his own county of Herefordshire well enough to read, completely spontaneously, a series of ancient patterns in its landscape. In analysing his ‘discovery’, the alignment of prehistoric stones and tumuli (among a proliferation of other landscape features), Watkins theorised the existence of an unknowable prehistoric figure with a role not unlike his own, charting and parcelling the ancient landscape for a purpose only to be guessed at. This ‘dodman’ figure, constructed by Watkins out of a variety of folklore and names, is an example of the archaeological imagination at its peak: a figure embodying lost wisdom, perhaps concerning observable and enduring phenomena (such as the

landscape's relation to the stars), suggestive of deep history's promise of elevated meaning and sacralised space, but also characterised by the ultimate impossibility of its objective reassembly. This very literal *mearcstapa* figure plots out the geography of the landscape in Watkins' fantasy of place continuity.

Watkins' theories were revived and venerated in the work of Michell (born 1933), a Cambridge-educated Old Etonian who became engaged in countercultural activity in the 1960s: participating in the radical London Free School along with R.D. Laing and Pink Floyd, and writing *The Flying Saucer Vision* (1967) which combined multiple theories of so-called Ufology as part of his personal belief in an imminent historical epiphany for the human race. His 1968 book, *The View Over Atlantis*, makes less frequent references to flying saucers, but synthesises the theories of multiple individuals involved in Fortean studies in one broader theory to encompass global prehistoric culture, occultism, accounts of druids, and Watkins' ley lines. The 'dodman' of Watkins' work is here combined with the figure of the Druid, one of the most enigmatic and magically suggestive aspects of Britain before the influence of Roman civilisation. Intrinsic to Michell's view is the sense that a lost science once deepened the relationship of citizens to their landscape, and is potentially retrievable through close attention to enduring landscape features (particularly in the case of stone circles and other henges) and the cultivation of an irrational, imaginative viewpoint. The capacity for artistic intuition is, in Michell's view, approximation of a lost ability to perceive landscape which properly belongs to the Druids: "Like Alfred Watkins thousands of years later, they acquired a microscopic knowledge of the countryside. In flashes of inspiration they could glimpse some underlying pattern" (47). The significance of Watkins' leys, among other examples given by Michell, revealed to their viewers in a Romantic 'flash of

inspiration' from the unconscious "evoke an [aesthetic] response which is none the less real for being as yet undefinable" (27). Linking together Watkins, the antiquarian William Stukeley, Blake, Wordsworth and others, Michell echoed Nash's call upon the *genius loci* (see Chapter 1) but with connotations seemingly beyond the aesthetic:

The feeling they all shared was of some forgotten secret. They glimpsed a remote golden age of science, poetry and religion in which the vast works they saw in the landscape were accomplished. Each of these English visionaries knew that what he saw was but a fraction of the great mystery, the key to which had been lost. Britain, they felt, was the holy land under enchantment. (*View* 54)

The 'holy land under enchantment' reads as directly inspired by Blake's 'Jerusalem', and Michell builds to an apocalyptic conclusion, obscurely but emphatically expressed, which speaks of the slow death of the "earth" by a "contamination [that] is inevitably associated with many of the fundamental assumptions of the modern technological civilisation" (178). The sole response, he suggests, is "rediscovery of access to the divine will", a solution that, disconcertingly, "transcends human agreement" (178).

The earth mysteries ideology, heavily influenced by, but not necessarily synonymous with, Michell's work, demanded a complete rewrite of conventional ideas of prehistory and technological progress: in other words, a leap of faith. The concept of a pre-industrial civilisation of great, supernatural power, rooted in knowledge of and respect for the land, provided a new pre-lapsarian idyll in which to emotionally invest. At the same time, it thumbed its nose at convention, defining

itself in direct opposition to the authorities and mainstream archaeological institutions who denied its claims to credibility. In effect, it drew upon some of the central aspects of the Neo-Romantic sensibility: an emphasis on intuition and close observation over rationalist and mechanistic philosophy; a preference for myth and folklore as the source of deep insights; the search for objective discourse to reflect the insights of subjective experience. Foremost, perhaps, is the sense of the landscape as the scene of loss, and the opportunity for recovery through exercising the archaeological imagination.

At times, the mainstream scientific establishment appeared to acknowledge such ideas as seductive, if not actually acceptable to its own high standards of scholarship: in 1976 the ultimate in popular scientific magazines, *New Scientist*, published a positive (if sceptical) review of Francis Hitching's *Earth Magic* as "a balanced introduction to the subject" of prehistoric man's megalith fascination (Fleming 659). In the book, Hitching makes a point of giving his reader a balance of views of both archaeologists and "fringe prehistorians ... with an attitude (on my side at least) which is friendly and, I hope, dispassionate", though in the event his scepticism is rather under-exercised (ii). "To begin to understand [the forces inspiring prehistoric man]," he writes, "we must open our minds and learn to expect the unlikely and the extraordinary; perhaps even the supernatural" (108) Despite her presentation of such ideas to young readers in arenas like *Puffin Annual Number Two*, it is not always obvious whether Judy Allen herself is quite so dispassionate (toward either side of the argument) as Hitching aims to be: as we shall see, her admixture of invented mythology and genuine folkloric material pose questions about authenticity, representation and metaphor. What underlines Allen's novels is the same inducement to her young readers to open our minds and consider the

evidence outside of conventional, rational frameworks, and it is clear that culturally, this attitude enjoyed widening popularity in the 1970s whilst fantasy tropes were increasingly disregarded by the children's literature establishment.

### iii. *Earth Mysteries and Popular Culture*

New Age thinking and the resurgent taste for ancient magic were frequently combined in popular culture of this period, beginning with a major resurgence in the British occult horror film and the birth of the Folk Horror genre. In such accounts of ancient magic inculcated in the countryside as *The Devil Rides Out* (1968) *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970), and *The Wicker Man* (1973), Britain's "Green and Pleasant Land forever resists the onset of an Age of Reason" (L Hunt 86). Such films can be said to dramatize backlash against 1960s permissiveness and a related desire for social upheaval, but also a "growing popular interest in paganism [which] was bound up with uncovering a more 'authentic' national identity and culture" (Hunt 92).

British television drama was simultaneously negotiating such anxieties: in what feels a forerunner to *The Wicker Man*, *Robin Redbreast* (1970), a modern urban woman is "totally unprepared when the setting and the people begin to take on an ancient and terrifying meaning" (*Radio Times* 1970) and in *Penda's Fen*, "Stephen, in the last summer of his boyhood has ... somehow awakened a buried force in the landscape around his home It is trying to communicate some warning, a peril he is in; some secret knowledge" (*Radio Times* 1974): both were highbrow *Plays for Today*. The stories adapted as part of the high-profile *Ghost Story for Christmas* series (1971-8) consistently returned to the buried horrors of ancient magic, whilst heroes of science-fiction from the 1960s and 50s respectively encountered earth mysteries tropes and

ancient evil in *Doctor Who* stories *The Dæmons* (1971), *Image of the Fendahl* (1977) and *The Stones of Blood* (1978), as well as a downbeat conclusion to the popular *Quatermass* series. The picturesque English landscape had increasingly sinister overtones in mainstream culture throughout this decade.

Television for younger viewers followed the trend in film and television with repeated uses of earth mysteries themes, arguably acknowledging a new attitude to young audiences engendered, itself, by children's publishing; an audience receptive to radical style, hermeneutic complexity and poetic feeling. Children's television had been heavily criticised in the late 1960s for failing to serve its audience. Drama for children, in particular, which had been moribund on both BBC and ITV, saw a renaissance in the 1970s, with institutional support given to creators with a lighter editorial input.

Docherty and McGown's encyclopaedia of children's drama, *The Hill and Beyond* (2003), describes Brian Hayles' *The Moon Stallion* (1978) as "the archetypal BBC children's drama of the 1970s", saying "Horses, magic, mansions, period frocks and side whiskers, it's all here..." (168). The story of occult intrigue featuring a blind teenager in an adventure around Edwardian Oxfordshire certainly reflects the contemporary popularity of period drama and pony adventure. In its unambiguous use of mystic fantasy focused upon prehistoric earthworks such as Wayland's Smithy and, in a starring role as the eponymous magic beast, the Uffington Chalk Horse, it further typifies the 1970s in children's drama with a fusion of mysterious British folk culture and the swirling, rather undefined sense of pagan and Arthurian narratives with which the young protagonists must come to terms. In this, it appears to wholeheartedly embrace the Neo-Romantic sensibility this thesis has shown to be involved in the Second Golden Age of children's literature. The story features an ecological

sensitivity discussed later in this chapter, with the promise of humankind's self-destruction by their own industrial development, and a semi-mystical conception of such processes as cyclical. Despite the hotchpotch combination of popular television tropes, Hayles Neo-Romantically associates the archaeologically immanent landscape with a tradition of visions and insight. Despite its free hand with mythology, the story owes a clear debt to the 1969 adaptation of Garner's *The Owl Service*. This was the first colour drama production made by Granada, and the broadcast was given significant prestige: it would therefore be natural to assume that such a distinctive drama might have been taken as the template for similar dramas in the ensuing decade. Other notable influences helped produce this particular, peculiar genre, however.

Children's drama on the BBC was strongly associated with and influenced by the world of children's literature, with the popular series *Jackanory* (1965-99) (in which assorted luminaries read from classic or original children's stories) spinning off to produce Jackanory Playhouse, which featured work by such high-profile writers as Joan Aiken and Helen Cresswell. Literary adaptations were a feature of both children's and family viewing, both established texts such as *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* (1972) and *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1974), and more recent high-profile novels, with *Carrie's War* (1974), *The Changes* (1975) and *A Pair of Jesus Boots* (1976) being particular successes. ITV and its regional franchise holders were not averse to literary adaptation (including Leon Garfield's *Smith* and Cynthia Harnett's *The Woolpack* as *A Stranger in the Hills*, both in 1970, and Catherine Storr's *Marianne Dreams* as *Escape to Night*, 1972), and like the *Jackanory Playhouse*, their *Shadows* anthology series (1975-76) featured new, scary stories by a variety of major names in children's literature, including Cooper, Lively, and Josephine Poole. However, the era is marked by an upsurge in production of original drama serials.

The dark ages enjoyed a surprising new popularity, with “a surprisingly unidealised” *Arthur of the Britons* (1970-72), a starchy production of *Warrior Queen* featuring Sian Philips and Nigel Hawthorne (1978) and the comic misadventures of the magician *Catweazle* after his escape in time to the present day (1970-71) (Lupack 287). Horses, as Docherty and McGown implied, were popular (with programmes inspired by, but not adapting, the novels of Monica Dickens and Anna Sewell) as well as escapist sci-fi adventure (in the form of *Freewheelers*, 1968-71, and *The Tomorrow People*, 1973-79).

The era is also characterised by what Docherty and McGown describe as “many psychedelic eco-fantasies”, produced by a range of regional franchise holders eager to showcase their specialities and local assets with extensive location filming (as opposed to the modern, urban character of Thames productions) (111). The mystic-tinged story of *Sky* (1975) describes the arrival on Earth of a mysterious alien being with a Christ-like persona. Something has gone awry with Sky’s time travel navigation and he has arrived, not in the era of Chaos he expected, but in the era of ‘slow decline’ which anticipated it, i.e. the mid-1970s. The Earth is depicted in terms of a cosmic organism, which is seen to resent Sky’s technological presence: it manifests an antonymic figure, Ambrose Goodchild, to oppose his progress and prevent his escape into the future. This surreal and atmospheric drama was the work of HTV, the regional ITV franchise for Wales and the West Country (originally Harlech TV), and the evocative landscape of the West Country looms large throughout, embodied in all its most iconic monoliths: Glastonbury Tor, Avebury and Stonehenge.

*Raven* (1977), a production of the London franchise ATV, features less location filming but also deals with a stone circle, site of an archaeological investigation by Professor Young, who enlists the young Raven, an ex-inmate of



Borstal, to assist in his work. Young is convinced that his new colleague is a reincarnation of King Arthur, and investigation of a cave system beneath the stone circle make this inheritance apparent through a series of uncanny visions. The new Arthur's duty is the protection of the stone circle, and thereafter Britain, from the looming evils of British industry and specifically the coming of nuclear power. As in the case of *The Moon Stallion*, the indeterminacy of the stone circle's purpose is unproblematically, though meaningfully, associated with the legend of King Arthur and his role as protector of Britain's sanctity. The idea of reincarnation is suggestive of a noble inheritance, to be accessed through direct contact with the matter of the past. Once again, the hieratic quality of these sites is stressed: they are the inspiration for sacred visions, and thereby a resource of redemption for troubled souls like Raven, the epitome of mid-1970s disaffection.

1979's *The Boy Merlin* is another London production and consequently studio-bound, with sparing use of the moody woods and lakesides that dominate this genre. Its depiction of the Arthurian myth is, again, unidealised, and whilst its use of magic is unapologetic, the matter of these six episodes is more about the power struggles of King Vortigern's court. It is interesting to note that even in the case of Merlin himself, King Arthur figures as a heavily mythologised but absent figure, and the emphasis of Merlin's magic is on prophecy: a 1970s theme of mystic fantasy being the apprehension of some imminent transcendent insight or apocalypse (or both at once). Merlin, like Raven and Sky, inherits a power whose time is simultaneously passed and continually deferred. This strange temporality makes the modern-day landscape of industry and violence an ephemeral, temporary thing, while the iconic stones, hills and lakes of antiquity are eternal, inexhaustible and representative of an enduring hermeneutical purity. This theme is echoed by the 1975 BBC adaptation of Peter

Dickinson's *The Changes* trilogy, in which a semi-divine monolith demands acknowledgement of the idea that humankind is progressing technologically too fast.

The most enduring and iconic of these idiosyncratic children's fantasies is 1977's *Children of the Stones*, also written by Jeremy Burnham and Trevor Ray, and like *Raven*, produced by HTV. Filmed on location at the henge-ringed village of Avebury in Wiltshire, the six-part serial makes perhaps the most overt use of local colour in all of the 1970s children's pagan-themed fantasies. The monoliths of Avebury have the status of special guest stars, intrinsic to the events of every episode, and onscreen throughout the title sequence: a full one minute and ten seconds of the camera's unsettling exploration of the circle and its individual stones, lingering over the lichened surface and emphasising the semi-human formations (no human figures appear until the action of the episode commences), amid the atonal fluting and ululations of Sidney Sager's unsettling choral soundtrack. The story trades off the visual incongruence of the (relatively) modern village ringed with standing stones: historically, the village of Avebury is believed to have grown from a settlement during the early Middle Ages, built deliberately within the henge (the largest in Britain), but the story of *Children of the Stones* reverses the narrative: the village (renamed Milbury) has been in some way captured by the stones of the henge. The stones represent an ulterior philosophy, as frighteningly alien as the fervent voices of Sidney Sager's vocalists, the sound of which finally becomes enmeshed with the story when the villagers of Milbury walk entranced in a ring, chorusing that bizarre noise together<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Described by Stewart Lee as, "The most inappropriate children's television theme ever." ("Happy Days: The Children of the Stones").

Docherty and McGown give particular praise to the serial, saying “To call *Children of the Stones* ‘adult’ is a compliment ... The script is a fairly complex blend of supernatural horror and science-fiction which never talks down to its audience” [102]. The blend of the supernatural with the scientific is a result of the Michellian depiction of the stone circle as an astronomical device, created with the lost knowledge of our super-advanced Neolithic ancestors. In this story, the standing stones are found to be directly related to a black hole, providing the conduit for a beam of strange energy that appears to be able to alter human minds. Copious ley lines and a series of solidly scientific electromagnetic readings lead the protagonists to a sinister landowner who is brainwashing the villagers, making them a mass of depersonalised ‘Happy Ones’.

The drama, as Docherty and McGown (among many commentators) have pointed out, is unpatronising in its serious tone and narrative complexity. It shows the clear influence of science-fiction and horror works such as *Night of the Demon* (1958), and *The Village of the Damned* (1960) but also reflects the unsentimental, complex and sometimes frightening character of children’s fiction of the era. In its depiction of child protagonists who are made responsible for the rescue and redemption of an entire community from slipping into the past, it particularly seems to follow the children’s novels of Lively. As I have shown to be common in novels dealing with archaeological objects, there is a dominant note of ambiguity: the question of the stones’ original purpose and construction is never resolved, and the villainous would-be leader of the Happy Ones, Hendrick, is an indeterminate authority figure like the archaeologist in *The House on the Brink*, or the witch in *The Stones of the Moon*. The interpretive acts of reading required by the young audience is, therefore, entirely congruent with what is required for the antecedent Second Golden Age texts. Like *The Owl Service*,

*Earthfasts*, *The House on the Brink* and *The Stones of the Moon*, the drama has a markedly obscure resolution. In part, this follows the act of interpretation and supposition that is innate to the archaeological imagination dramatized in these texts, and the inexplicable mystery these objects of prehistory signify, and in part it is a common subtext, that interpretation of these objects will yield a deep form of comprehension which transcends being-here and defies narrative.

The combination of earth mysteries with outer space and the coming of a new consciousness resemble the ideas of Michell, particularly his *View over Atlantis*. It demonstrates the increasing pervasiveness of these ideas in mainstream popular culture, and as Stewart Lee argues in his affectionate radio documentary, Burnham and Ray “perhaps without even realising it, become increasingly sympathetic to Hendrick” and his philosophy (“Happy Days: The Children of the Stones”). The ‘Happy Ones’ are described by Matt’s friend Kevin as ‘zombies’. In their mindless pacificity they are more a reaction against the youth movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, of which the ‘New Agers’ of *Blueprint for Survival* were a high-profile example. In one among many esoteric visual devices, disobedient Happy Ones are seen to be transformed into the stones of the henge: the stones shift immediately from the signifiers of advanced Neolithic visionaries and craftsmen to emblems of inhumanity, now totally bereft of individual identity.

*Children of the Stones* continues to be well-regarded by critics, and is part of a characterisation of the 1970s as an era of unpatronising, radically stylised original children’s drama. As budgets increasingly tightened over the following decades, the quantity of children’s drama slowly reduced again, but it is notable that alongside stalwarts of urban realism such as *Grange Hill* (1978-2008) and *Byker Grove* (1989-2006), there were also adaptations of *Astercote* (1980), *Tom’s Midnight Garden*

(1989), *Earthfasts* (1994) and *Elidor* (1995). One of the first major television projects by award-winning scriptwriter Russell T. Davies was *Century Falls* (1993), in many ways a tribute to the work of Jeremy Burnham, Trevor Ray et al: it features an eerie village haunted by a terrible secret connected with ancient powers.

One of the most idiosyncratic approaches to these motifs, broadcast the year after *Children of the Stones*, was 'The Stones of Blood' by David Fisher, an adventure in the popular *Doctor Who* series, focusing in this case on a mysterious stone circle with a strange secret (filmed on location at the Rollright Stones in Oxfordshire, the setting for Lively's *The Whispering Knights*, 1971). *Doctor Who and the Stones of Blood* was novelised by Terrance Dicks for Target Books in 1980, part of a long-running and bestselling line. *Children of the Stones* was also novelised by its authors, as were *Raven*, *Catweazle*, *Freewheelers*, *The Tomorrow People* and *The Moon Stallion*, an indication of the increasing influence of other media on children's publishing in the 1970s and after. Even the storytelling series *Jackanory*, which might be viewed as a modest reproduction of the literary world, developed its own 'story book' range, leading to a further influx of titles from the world of television into the children's book market: *Arabel's Raven* (1972), *Littlenose the Hunter* (1972), and *Lizzie Dripping* (1973) being their major titles. Having made much of its influences from children's literature, television was now increasingly changing the territory for children's publishing.

One partial exception is the adaptation of Peter Dickinson's *The Changes* trilogy (1975), in which modern society reverts to a medievalist mind-set that perceives machines and technology as vile objects of witchcraft. Dickinson's satire of nostalgia for pre-industrial society is rewritten in Anna Home's adaptation to produce a drama more sympathetic to New Age thinking and earth mysteries: Merlin

is replaced with a prehistoric stone with psychic powers which longs for a rational balance in humankind, symbolised by a young family who seek to live an organic, pastoral lifestyle whilst maintaining their modern-day rationality. The ubiquity of such narratives and iconography in film and television, even in children's television, perhaps sharpened the seeming distaste for fantasy among the children's literature establishment. This evidence of a shift for tropes of the Neo-Romantic sensibility into the popular mainstream seemingly parallels a marked divergence in the outlook of self-consciously literary gatekeepers of children's reading from the more populist tastes of that audience.

Children's literature had never before had to respond so much to the images and narratives of children's television. Whilst the 1970s work of Cooper, Garner, Lively and Allen herself demonstrates that interest in such topics in the fantasy novel was still high, there seems less interest in such narratives from critics and librarians, particularly as they depart from the more ambiguously presented narratives (such as those of Porter, Mayne or Gordon) of highly subjective responses to ancient landscape. The significance of archaeological imagery was no longer entirely private: it was part of a more widely understood, more generally accepted network of significance.

Against this context, I identify Allen's fantasy novels as a continuation of Children's Neo-Romanticism in an environment of popular interest and knowledge of archaeological subjects and the ideas of earth mysteries. Though influenced by the work of Garner, Lively and Mayne, Allen's work is informed by the growing environmentalist movement and anxieties of spirituality and 'authentic' nature. Yet Allen's eco-fantasies exemplifies the closing of Children's Neo-Romanticism as a literary concern, its icons and imagery having altered in significance from the period

of its greatest critical appreciation. The counter-cultural spirit embodied by her youthful protagonists, walking the bounds of ancient place with their minds open to environmentalism, myth and new ways of being, would have been more widely recognised within and identifiable with mainstream images of youth than any of her predecessors.

In the next section, I critique Allen's first novel and its relation of landscape and prehistoric culture to themes of 'deeper knowledge' and retreat.

#### **5.4 Perception and Insight in *The Spring on the Mountain***

In its chronotopes, *The Spring on the Mountain* (1973) moves progressively away from the modern day and linear narrative, towards an ephemeral ideal of mythical time and human empowerment: from house, to village, to the secrets of the mountain. The spatial transitions also entail a shift in perspective, which is explicit in the text and directly linked to acts of perception, interpretation and intuition. As Mrs White explains, with ambiguous ramifications, "Haven't you learnt about perspective?" (*Spring* 2000 21). For Emma, Michael and Peter to 'learn about' perspective entails not only a ritualistic departure from the urban and domestic landscape to the wildness of the mountain, but also an awakening of their own subjectivity. Unlike the novels of the previous chapters, there is an overt sense of initiation to their movements, as I will argue.

Their first movement beyond the bounds of their experience is transition from town to country, dispatched by their parents in answer to an advert for holiday boarding, to the unnamed village with Mr and Mrs Myer. The Myers are,

themselves, recently retired from city work to live in “a peaceful life in a large cottage in a high moorland valley”, a cottage with views described as “picturesque”, enough to satisfy “anyone wanting to get back to nature” (1). In this, the house represents the quest of the disenchanting urbanites who welcomed the message of the Ecologist’s *Blueprint for Survival* (1972): it is a retreat for both the Myers and their boarders (and the ideals of the children’s parents, unseen) from the unnatural, mechanical world to the timeless, organic one. It is not a space belonging to mundane, productive time, being linked to the Myers’ retirement and the children’s holidays.

As well as images of leisure, it recalls similar rural retreats in the children’s fiction of Garner, Cooper (in her one 1960s children’s fantasy, *Over Sea, Under Stone*) and Lively (in *The Wild Hunt of Hagworthy*), and more generally, in the holiday adventures of Blyton. Yet, from the outset, such an attempt to progress through retreat is depicted as a non-starter. It will take the Myers time to progress to a sense of belonging in the village, while the children may not belong here at all. As Mrs Myer confides to Emma, she has a “strange feeling that the villagers were going to watch them very closely for the next two years before putting any warmth into their good mornings” (4). Simply removing oneself from the day-to-day world will not, Allen warns, automatically bring the ideals of the pastoral idyll, whether for the retirees, or the unseen parents, whose children, dispatched to the countryside, are having a rotten time. There is an overtone of parody on Allen’s part: the cottage itself represents the urbanites’ exclusion from the ideals of beauty and health that it represents to them; an attempt to emulate another lifestyle, like that of their landlady, Mrs White (whose more authentic country life extends to landscape-conscious witchcraft). Every action the children undertake in the cottage symbolically makes



them reenactors of experiences Mrs White has already undertaken. The children's evolving intuition of the house and its landscape becomes an index of transition from Myer-like mundanity to White-like awareness.

The novel makes frequent allusions to the unreliability of vision, and the difference between looking and seeing, already foreshadowed, is accentuated in the first shift into fantastic mode, with a glass object found in the Myers' (previously Mrs White's) house. The others dismiss it as a fisherman's float but it appears, to Peter, as a witch's crystal ball. The other children are obliged to play card games, but Peter refuses, glossing his anti-social behaviour with the offhand, thematically significant, "I'd rather watch" (9). He sits alone, considering the surface of the ball in a way that Allen directly links to his self-consciousness, reminiscent of Bron's detached, self-aware, dreaming state in *Nordy Bank*:

Now he could see his own face, poorly reflected and convex. Just as he had let his hearing become blurred, so that the canasta game was reduced to a murmur, he now let his eyes drift out of focus, too. This was something he often did if he felt out of place in his surroundings.

Suddenly he realised that the face in the glass ball was no longer misty but very clear. [...] He was looking down into a well and reflected in the water at the bottom was the face of an old woman, with the moonlit sky behind her ... Then he realised that in fact it was he who was at the bottom of the well, looking up its dark shaft, and the old woman was at the top, bending over the rim and looking down at him. (*Spring 2000*, 10)

The constant reversals of perspective, we are told, dizzy Peter; they seem intended to have the same effect on the reader. The repetition of 'looking' is one of

the disorientating shifts in viewpoint, and also accentuates the ambiguity of the experience, part of its interiority: it is unclear whether Peter is producing, receiving or being sent this image, and whether he is being seen, watched or merely acknowledged. Nonetheless, this depiction of shared, albeit enigmatic subjectivity has a significance and authenticity which stands out among the multiple perspectives and misreadings which, Allen establishes, are produced by the objective physical world. It is the first of multiple endorsements of irrational, interior vision over objective experience, significantly placed in the midst of the Myers' socially awkward holiday experience, and Peter's self-conscious retreat into himself means this awkward, "out of place" feeling in fact engenders his vision (10).

The Myers' treatment of the children, though well-meaning, seems to parody the trope of the sturdy authority figure in the holiday adventure genre, such as Gowther Mossock in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and his wife who, though no relative of their visitors, intuitively understand their charges and provide a less authoritative parental substitute. The Myers prove unable to interpret the children's authentic characters, make them feel uncomfortable, over-feed them and make them play games (including, at one point, with a startlingly inappropriate Ouija board). Convention suggests that the pastoral idyll that these satirised New Age retirees seek requires a Romanticist child figure as an essential constituent, and the Myers' inability to perceive the children as they really are is part of their wider failure to attain their desired ideals. Allen compounds this contrast of Peter's authentic, irrational interior self and the Myers' enforced canasta game with a telling moment: Peter, deflecting attention from himself, pretends to read a book; this deception, with reassuring connotations even in Allen's chosen milieu of children's literature, causes Mrs Myer to smile, by implication confirming her inobservance. In complete

contrast, on first meeting the witch Mrs White, Peter says nothing of their psychic contact because, in Emma's words, "She knew you knew and you knew she knew you knew she knew, you mean?" (19).

A great strength of Allen's writing is her relation of the fantastic to sceptical discourse, and *The Spring on the Mountain* contains a consistent, rationalist theme of interpretive failure in relation to its fantastic content. Peter's deepening vision and heightened sensitivity is dismissed by the thoroughly rational Michael as "an optical illusion" (19). In the village, an intermediary space where Peter feels that he is watched, Michael takes the rational view:

"[I] was born in London. And I know just how you feel. You go out into the country and on to open moorland and get a sort of exposed feeling. It can be nice and free or it can be overwhelming – it depends how you're feeling at the time, I suppose you feel exposed and – visible – because you're used to being one of a crowd of other people all swallowed up by buildings and streets. And because you feel visible you start to think you're being watched. I do understand, and I did feel it, but that's all it is – really." (*Spring* 2000, 54)

Michael's explanation would have been welcome reassurance to the protagonists of Mayne, Porter and Gordon's work. It is persuasive for its psychological qualities, but also for making common discourse, and thereby social, the interior experience of heightened subjectivity which, as I have shown, is a consistent trope of those novels. Again, gently satirising the romantic fantasy of the child protagonist's epiphany in the countryside, Michael's highly rationalist discourse presents the urban child's negative experience of the countryside as, on its

own terms, authentic, in contrast to the writers of the ‘geographer-citizen’ ideal, described in my Introduction. Without wholly subverting the fantastic elements of the narrative, Michael’s confident analysis of Peter accentuates the borderline between his discourse and that of Mrs White’s, along which Peter moves throughout the novel, seeking to understand his subjective experience of the countryside.

Initially, Mrs White mingles rational and irrational discourse, often with reference to the unconscious, unsettling the reader’s interpretation of the novel’s fantastic and realist aspects. She is not merely a landlady but a wise woman, “who I imagine in the Middle Ages would have been the local witch”, as Mrs Myer puts it, hence associated not merely with the fantastic but with historical misunderstanding of science (7). When Michael, the rationalist of the novel, confidently cites the evidence of his eyes, Mrs White’s comment on perspective and the curvature of the eye draws upon the vocabulary of science: “The lenses of our eyes are curved, Michael. We don’t see reality” (21). Notably, the talisman she gives the children on their quest up the mountain is a pair of glasses which she warns them not to use. Allen makes Mrs White a powerful figure, partly because of her knowledge and wealth, but also for her ambiguity. The reader is obliged to interpret and interrelate her discourse with others throughout the novel, and particularly the terms on which she directs the children to explore the ancient mystery of the mountain and its spring. In Chapter 4, I described the spatial progress characterised by these child protagonists as delinquent, yet in this novel the children progress as overtly directed by adult authority.

Physically gaining the mountain is overtly associated with deepening perception, and this in turn is presented as intrinsically archaeological. It is whilst surveying the whole village that the children’s imaginative agency is piqued, and

they intuitively recognise the alignment of mountain, church and standing stone (one of Watkins' ley lines, though not described as such in the text). Inspired by this moment of lucidity, Emma puts on the forbidden glasses, and finds herself accessing insights beyond the appearance of the world. At the top of the mountain is a castle of unweathered stone, but this too is not reality, as Peter, the seeming initiate, perceives. He explains that "It wasn't old, could hardly be new, must therefore exist quite outside time" (119). His gnomic utterances, reflected by those of the mysterious Aquarius, are like the sublime experiences of Mayne's work, which cannot be represented in prose, yet their coded quality suggests an elusive truth buried beneath. The child reader is invited, like Michael, to attempt interpretation of Peter and, particularly, Aquarius, whose wisdom exists, archaeologically, beyond the present moment, and more mystically 'outside time'.

Whereas previous writers using these tropes have explored contact with archaeological matter as an imaginative engagement with the self and the sublime, in Allen's novel the young protagonists are explicitly engaged in revelations of the 'deeper knowledge' of ancient cultures, treated sympathetically and with some of the pagan knowledge that was more widely available and recognisable in popular culture. It is obviously faithful to the countercultural writing of Michell's *The View Over Atlantis*. An authorial note at the end of Allen's novel makes an explicit recommendation of Watkins' book and *The New View Over Atlantis* (a revised edition of Michell) along with their publishers, should the reader like to "know more about them and about how to find if there is such a track in your area" (140). Like her piece in the *Puffin Annual*, Allen makes a personal recommendation, beyond the frame of the fiction, to explore these irrational ideas. Her notes make an interesting comparison with Garner's note at the end of *The Moon of Gomrath*, who includes

*The Old Straight Track* in a list of sources for his “grasshopper research”, and specifically singles it out as being “full of the most romantic elements of archaeology and folk-lore” (171). Despite this explicit link between romanticised archaeology and his fantastic fiction, Garner is more explicit about the borderline of real and fantastic: “[E]very thing and place mentioned, with the exception of Fundindelve, does exist, although I have juggled with one or two local names” (170). As Bramwell notes, “Allen appears to have no doubt that Watkins’ theory is correct and testable” (169).

Michell’s approach to his subject, and his fusion of poetic and scientific discourse (in which scientific advance, has historically, originated in “revelations from the unconscious mind”) is a clear influence on Allen’s emphasis on interpretation and intuition (Michell 26). In *The Spring on the Mountain*, the initiate Peter is the first to recognise the shape of the ley and the way the track leads straight up into the mountain. Mrs White and Michael’s references to the power of the unconscious are not, in this context, opposed to the discourse of the fantastic: in Michell’s and Allen’s work, poetic engagement with ancientness is the beginning of appreciating a larger system of scientific knowledge. It is not, however, a democratically administered system in Michell’s view and hence Allen’s. Mrs White’s plan, to reroute the magic spring into the water supply of the whole village, is barred by the mysterious Aquarius. It is “strong medicine, too strong for most”, and he administers it carefully to those who are ready to receive it (122). Mrs White is presented as less an archaeologist than an antiquarian, seeking to exploit the power of the mountain (including the creation of the magic glasses) and through the socialistic project of sharing its magic throughout the town, via the metaphor of the spring. Aquarius’ pronouncements echo Michell, not merely in their belief in a

geometric order to the leys, but in an organising intelligence and a tendency toward hierarchies, elitism, and idealised power that “transcends human agreement” (Michell 178). In this text, it is pointedly declared that the redemptive powers of such landscape epiphany can only rest with the naturally intuitive individual, raised above the weaker populace. Michell and, through his influence, Allen valorise a version of prehistoric culture founded upon a hierarchy of power and insight. The same sentiment subtly persists in other forms in this decade, such as the “Dark is Rising” novels, with their secretly elevated master race of ‘Old Ones’.

Mrs White’s ethically ambivalent quest to divert the magic spring is also, of course, an example of the dangers of human intervention in the landscape, though not industrial. Aquarius’ *sui generis* authority on the matter suggests an ineffable ‘earth consciousness’ which rejects human attempts to manipulate ‘natural resources’: an ecological theme developed further in Allen’s 1975 fantasy, *The Stones of the Moon*.

## **5.5 Earth Mysteries and Environmentalism in *The Stones of the Moon***

### *i. Two Views of Standing Stones*

Judy Allen’s 1975 fantasy continues to show the influence of John Michell, this time with the focus being a stone circle, the Weeping Stones, in another invented location. She counterpoints the authoritative voice of the archaeological community with that of the earth mysteries movement, represented by Professor Birch and the amateur enthusiast Mr Westwood. Westwood himself appears almost to be a fictional version of Michell, a divorcee who admits to drug-taking, and who lists his interests as,

“Archaeology, astrology, astronomy, geology, geography, mythology, folklore, mathematics and geometry. All very relevant to the problem in hand, and each one works of a lifetime’s study” (26). “Do you think,” he asks, describing the focal point of his study, “[the megaliths] could be understood with less?” Westwood is a mysterious, powerful but earthly figure, merely well informed and curious. Just as Michell’s work was antithetical to what might be called mainstream archaeology, Westwood’s perspective is anathema to Professor Birch, who repeatedly turns him away from his archaeological dig, saying “There’s no reasoning with people who want to put a mystical interpretation on everything” (94). The novel depicts the Professor and his concerns as entirely authoritative and principled, but overall articulates Michell’s argument that established scientific discourse opposes that of mysticism in order to suppress its own ambiguities and Romanticist components. Westwood’s concern is not with the Roman findings but the Weeping Stones, and the folklore recurring across Britain of stones that go down to the nearby river to drink at midsummer. His theories, though vague and incomplete, come to be taken seriously by the Professor’s son, David, and at the last minute by the Professor himself. It is only through the establishment figure’s acceptance of the irrational that disaster is averted.

Without making reference to the ley lines that form the focus of Michell’s book, Allen continues to show the clear influence of his approach to Fortean phenomena. It is enlightening to compare Allen’s approach to the subject with that of the Scottish children’s novelist, Mollie Hunter. Hunter’s novel, *The Bodach* (1970), concerns the flooding of a valley to power a hydro-electric power station, and the wise man of the village who tells the story of the stone circle that will be flooded along with the valley. Hunter presents the Bodach (the name of a Gaelic trickster



figure) as a storyteller, and the phenomenon of the stones as a metaphor of folk lore transmission:

“Once every hundred years, they say, these stones move from their places. They walk to the river and dip their heads in it, then they go back to their places and stand fast there for another hundred years.”

[...]

A little impressed in spite of himself, Donald asked, “And is that the whole story of the stones?”

The Bodach slid him a sidelong glance. “No,” he said quietly, “there is more to it than that; but only for some people...” (*Bodach* 42)

‘Some people’, it eventually becomes clear, refers to a line of initiates in a deeper knowledge of the supernatural, such as the Bodach himself and his chosen successor. When, at the novel’s conclusion, Donald sees the stones walk, the scene resembles what might be expected of a mystic vision, enigmatic yet revelatory and intensely subjective. Mist coils around the stones, and in the dim light they “were more like tall old men now than stones” (117).

Clothed in mist – or was it more than mist? – they were drifting towards the river through the smoky haze that filled the glen, drifting slowly, a long line of white shapes like tall priests walking in solemn procession towards the trembling, rushing white of the mist-hazed river. And like tall priests bowing before something he could not see, each of them bent as it reached the river, bent right down and dipped its head into the rush of white water. (*Bodach* 117)

In the midst of such romantically painted scenery, young Donald realises in a flash of insight that the Stones are “the Priests of ancient faith who gathered within the Circle”, “frozen into a magic stillness that could only be broken once every hundred years” (117). Hunter’s fairy tale register essentially reiterates the folktale itself, simply placing it against a modern background. The concept of “ancient faith” seems not to be synonymous with the mysteries into which Donald and the Bodach are initiated: it is simply the apprehension of them, and their otherworldly behaviour, that has been passed on to the boy. Donald’s insight is not shared with the reader, beyond the realisation that he has inherited the Bodach’s knowledge: a touching metaphor, perhaps, for the transmission of folklore from one generation to another. It is notable that nothing the Priests, Donald or the Bodach know or do has any influence on the flooding of the valley: the novel suggests the ‘ancient faith’ or deeper knowledge of the Bodach is simply a higher state of consciousness, at a liminal position within the community. As Bramwell says, the conclusion, which sees the valley flooded and the stone circle totally submerged, unequivocally suggests Hunter “does not favour preserving monumental heritage”, and implies a wider historical perspective in which such monuments play an ambivalent role (369).

Allen’s approach to the same material, which might be expected to follow such mystic and visionary effects after the episode of Aquarius’ timeless castle, is entirely different. In fact, in extra-textual material from the novel’s reprint Allen herself describes it as an attempt to find her own interpretation of the serially recurring folklore, and in the novel the entire frame of reference for her theory is pseudo-scientific. David puzzles over the folk tale of the thirsty stones, recognisably the same story as that in *The Bodach*, and a separate story (equally genuine in British folklore) of villagers who were ‘petrified’ by God for dancing on the Sabbath: he

reasons that some real explanation must lie behind the stories, encouraged by Mr Westwood's interdisciplinary approach. The rational explanations for the folktales are not, however, particularly rational. The stones themselves appear to give off a slightly electric resonance (“[I]n their way they were alive” (14)), and may be influencing the rising tide of the local rivers and springs, as well as strange feelings within David's friend, Jane. When Mr Westwood is arrested for possession of drugs, David studies the scholar's notes and connects his observations, deducing through imaginative reverie that the stones are a prehistoric machine for producing water in times of drought. He also theorises that the stones are activated by the harmonics of human voices, and would have been brought into use through folk dancing and singing.

The means by which the stones do their job is not clarified in the novel, but Allen's explanation does in fact derive from two separate theories described and endorsed by Michell. In one chapter of *View Over Atlantis*, he relates the lost “cosmic knowledge of the ancient world”, he relates the beautiful sand patterns derived from Ernst Chladni's acoustic experiments to “the ancient schools of harmony and proportion” (143). Michell's confident conclusion is that “sonic engineering feats by prehistoric magicians” were utilised by the builders of stone circles and earthworks to “[induce] terrestrial and celestial forces ... to respond to certain sounds, rhythms, numbers and patterns laid out on the earth”, reproduced on a huge scale by “placing Stonehenge with its inherent magical proportions on a particular spot in the landscape” (144). Earlier in the same book, Michell describes the experiments of Wilhelm Reich (best known today through Kate Bush's pop song ‘Cloudbusting’ which narrates the events of Reich's son's memoir, and his rain-making machine). Reich theorised that the universe was suffused by a mysterious

“orgone energy” through which “magnetic and gravitational forces manifest their influence” (71). Michell utilises these obscure, intuitive theories, again, to address the mystery of British earthworks. Allen’s novel connects ideas of ‘archaeosonics’ and Wilhelm Reich in what almost reads like a direct, constructive response to Michell’s book and the genuine folk tale of the thirsty stone circle.

ii. *Multiple Views on Ecology*

A narrative of multiple conflicts, *The Stones of the Moon* is a markedly dialogical text. Individuals in the novel are defined by their objection to one another’s viewpoints, separated from one another by their commitment to discourse of one denomination or another, and shown to progress in their self-knowledge only through interpolating the discourse of multiple disciplines in their attempt to understand the mute enigma of the landscape. David has repeated arguments with pragmatist Tim about the uselessness of ecological awareness when approached in isolation: it must also be politically, socially and historically engaged. In addition to this discourse, the voiceless landscape is given its own form of testimony, in the oblique form of folklore. Westwood explains to David that the circle is haunted by ‘water elementals’, and clarifying the term means an explicit discussion of the symbolic meaning of fairies as “spirits of place” (*Stones* 53). Although, as I established in Chapter 3, fairy lore has developed from a number of obscure sources, including forgotten deities, corrupted legend and more simply (as Thomas theorises) continuities of social cohesion, Allen’s presentation of fairy lore and its relation to place is accurate. Yet she problematises the reading of fairy lore as purely metaphorical when Westwood, an authoritative voice within the text, declares that he

“[prefers] the originals to the interpretations. It should be possible to understand these things without taking all the magic out of them” (53). Westwood’s outlook is narratively endorsed when it is inherited by David and employed in Westwood’s absence, resolving the problem of the flooded landscape.

It is within the context of this discussion, of magical beings and their interpretation, that David contemplates the folkloric motif of fairy food: the delights from which heroes in fairy tales must abstain in order to avoid becoming eternal prisoner to the fairies. Later, engaged in reading Westwood’s scattered notes, David equates it directly with Mr Westwood’s drug addiction. His interpretation of the symbolism refers, once again, to multiple subjects: the relation of British fairy lore to the Roman shrine to Diana, to Persephone in the underworld and the forbidden food of other myth. Allen depicts her protagonist interpreting the “fairy food” motif through a series of symbolic correspondences in an imaginative process, the analogous deductions of a reader: fairy rings, toadstools, hallucinogens. Yet, even with the negative connotations of fairy food, David is shown to read against simple metaphor, in effect, condoning Westwood’s drug-taking: “So,” David asks himself, rhetorically, “did the fact that Westwood had made that mistake invalidate all his ideas?” (83). Such a sentiment, which not only condones Westwood’s actions but undermines conventional authority figures such as his and Tim’s fathers, belongs particularly to this era of self-consciously progressive thinking, unlikely to have been found in the children’s fiction of the 1950s and 60s.

Overall, there is an obvious preference, at the most fundamental problem-solving moments of the narrative, for the Michellesque approach: evidence-based, but depending upon Romanticist ideals of insight, imagination and the symbolic language of pre-modern cultures. The greatest endorsement of this thinking is that

the mystery of the stones is discovered: the deduction that the circle once worked on archaeosonic processes, activated by chanting voices, inadvertently reactivated by the noises of the nearby textile mill. After showing David debating with, and often losing to, Tim, Allen seems to directly compare Tim's concern over chemical spills with David's interpretation, inspired by Westwood, which is more archaeological, more intuitive, and less conventionally rational.

*iii. A View on the Construction of Place*

Allen's presentation of the ecological theme in relation to her endorsement of the earth mysteries philosophy is illuminated by work in the field of ecocriticism. The objective of ecocriticism, also termed "green studies", is to reconsider in what ways the natural world has been rendered significant and its meaning articulated by literature. It challenges assumptions about the natural world's significance beyond its metaphorical or belletrist roles in literature and culture. As in the field of children's literature studies, an important aspect of the field is the conceptualising of what we talk about when we talk about 'nature'.

In her study *What Is Nature?* (1995), Kate Soper distinguishes three differing roles which 'nature' is called on to perform, within or beyond ecological discussion and literature: as 'metaphysical', 'realist' and 'lay' (or 'surface') concepts. As a metaphysical concept, nature is the "concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity", whether in articulating ideas of culture or spirituality (125). As a realist concept, nature comprises the "laws [to which] we are always subject, even as we harness them to human purposes, and whose purposes we can neither escape nor destroy" (156). As a 'lay' concept, 'nature' is used in reference to

“ordinarily observable features of the world: the ‘natural’ as opposed to the urban or industrial environment”, that which “we have destroyed and polluted and are asked to conserve and preserve” (156). Soper argues that the Green Movement in general most commonly speaks of nature in ‘lay’ terms, but that in its very appeal to protect or recognise nature, it intrinsically calls upon the ‘metaphysical’ concept: we (as human) are logically distinct from nature. As with other discourses, Allen’s Neo-Romantic approach to the archaeological imagination permits interrelation between these differing concepts, even in the same material object.

There is a distinction between New Age idealisation of nature and the more extreme discourse of earth mysteries in these terms. Though both viewpoints hymn the ‘lay’ concept of nature as rich in scientific and symbolic meaning, the earth mysteries philosophy places an exaggerated emphasis on the metaphysical difference between the natural world and human culture. Whilst objecting to the growth of industry and over-development of ‘green space’, the work of Michell and his peers is focused on the powerful potential of human intervention in the landscape: cutting tracks, raising stones, manipulating magnetic fields or stimulating the orgone in the atmosphere. Though it imbues the natural landscape with connotations of immanent power, their ideology excludes or subordinates the ‘realist’ concept of nature as characterised by Soper, denying natural processes of mortality and disintegration: whereas the ecological movements of the 1970s engage with ecologically compatible ways of living, the earth mysteries movement theorises deeper, more invisible aspects of nature purely in terms of power and inherence. In terms of temporality, too, the approaches differ: New Age narratives, parodied by Allen in the Myers, idealise a mythic, recurring temporality patterned on natural process; the earth mysteries narrative is linear, a human-centric historical model of deepening

knowledge and epiphany, with the objective of human self-empowerment and heightened subjectivity.

Allen's use of space and place in her fantasy novels is presented narratively as meaningful to her protagonists' acts of interpretation and experiences of intuition. *The Spring on the Mountain* utilises a series of sites to represent a progression of initiations, departing from human-defined spaces into ones of non-human meaning and deepening perception. *The Stones of the Moon* opens with David making his solitary exploration of the archaeological site discovered on a nearby hill, contrasted by Allen through his meeting with local children who disregard the stone circle, either as redundant or frightening. When Tim argues with David about his incuriosity regarding the circle, Tim's response is pragmatic and clear:

“Well – it's dead, isn't it?”

“Dead?”

“What else? It doesn't function. It isn't for people now. I'm not saying it wasn't very important when it was put up – I'm sure it must have been – but it isn't now. The [new] motorway is what's important now.” (48)

The irony of Tim's vocabulary is that, as the novel proves, the circle is not dead but 'alive' in ways its visitors cannot understand: the science of prehistoric culture not only enduring through these archaeological features, but available for use to modern people. By comparison, in David's view, the coming motorway promises only deadness: erasure of the archaeological traces his father is interested in, and the displacement or invalidating of the whole surrounding area: “[As] soon as the new



motorway link-up was completed ... this town would be for ever doomed to be on the way to somewhere else, never more a place in its own right" (8). The issues of the road's construction or the mill's operation are depicted by Allen as a failure to properly appreciate landscape. The archaeologically interesting locations are made implicitly significant by Allen, while those connected with industry are only seen from afar, if at all. It is a dichotomous opposition of ostensibly natural and industrial spaces, which are in fact all human-made areas, arbitrarily assigned different orders of authenticity by Allen.

The consistent mode is debate and discussion. David's experience of the stones is intuitive and Romantic ("He couldn't have explained why he wanted to find [the stone circle]" (10), "He was alone ... in a community of stone, an alien community which was somehow conscious in a way he did not understand" (14)) and like his father, he can be accused of abstracting problems. Tim's impassioned response to David's theories about the circle is: "You say it's 'interesting'. I think that's wicked. [...] You want to use a bit of sense before you try throwing people out of work for the sake of a stickleback – or some fairy story" (100). Yet David's curiosity about the stones, and his ability to absorb new information and combine it with other points of view, is presented as tenacious loyalty to the idea of stones' authenticity of place, whilst Tim's pragmatism comes to be presented to the reader as an insensitivity to place, whose imaginative narrowness ultimately endorses pollutant projects such as the mill.

The threat posed by the motorway is not faced in the novel's conclusion. It has been symbolically side-lined through the Weeping Stones' display of their ancient, inexplicable power. What appears initially as a novel informed by green issues is in fact unconcerned with the reality of nature or its laws. In its pursuit of the

supernatural, in fact, its emphasis is again on what is human in the landscape: narratively interesting, emotionally stirring, and immanent with power. The stone circle is described in the terms of human industry: “they were dangerous, unimaginably dangerous, just as heavy machinery in action is dangerous” (14). The threat of pollution has been invoked merely to accentuate the significance of the natural scene to the human viewer, not the significance of the natural world in itself. At the novel’s conclusion, what has been ensured by David and his allies is the area’s continued authenticity as historic place rather than evolving space. Mr Westwood, it is predicted, will receive “the first grant of his life”; the consequences for workers at the textile mill and motorway, despite Tim’s expressions of concern, remain unacknowledged by Allen (121).

In the following section of this chapter, I consider Allen’s uses of space and place in these novels of the 1970s, and the extent to which they endorse delinquent manoeuvres of the kind seen in prior novels.

### **5.3 Rural Fantasies and Spatial Practice in *The Spring on the Mountain* and *The Lord of the Dance***

*The Stones on the Moon* (1975) opens with David’s anxiety over the construction of a motorway by the site of the stone circle: he fears that when it is use, the town nearby will “never more [be] a place in its own right” (8). In de Certeauian terms, David’s concern could be interpreted as either conservative or anti-authority: if the area around the stone circle should cease to be a place of fixed monumentalism, it could become a space, characterised by movement and instability; conversely, the

imposed motorway fixes the means by which people experience, or indeed bypass, the hermeneutically unfixed stone circle. The confusion of Allen's novel concerning the threat posed by the motorway is matched by the lack of resolution in the novel's conclusion: the motorway is still due to be built, the factory is likely to reopen, and the archaeological work on the Weeping Stones seems liable to reduce their mystery to a mechanised industrial function, albeit a prehistoric one. Whilst the rewards of David's exploration are, as in Michell's philosophy, the starting point for a revolution in thought, such a revolution is perpetually deferred for her child protagonists, whose experience of space and place has not significantly altered.

Allen's third novel, *The Lord of the Dance* (1976), is overtly concerned with the ancient wisdom promised by the earth mysteries movement, and an attendant anxiety concerning its inheritance and use by young people. The subject of the novel is clear from the first appearance of a book called *Sacred Geometry and its Applications*; Mike's friend, Colin, is showing him the book in the half-built Civic Centre that he describes as "more than just a building. [...] This is a power centre", shortly before the floor of the building gives way (5). Mike, an unhappy protagonist with a difficult home-life, is sent down to the well-shaft that has opened up beneath the building works. Like *The Spring on the Mountain* and, less overtly, *The Stones of the Moon*, *The Lord of the Dance* is a novel of initiation. The well, which functions chronotopically like the mountain in Allen's first novel, is the ancient site for Mike's meeting with a mysterious figure, whose physical appearance is deceptive, and who shares mystic visions with him. The pageantry of these visions, and their symbolic depiction of initiation through sequential barriers, is also the subject of a project by local children, which Mike finds himself building props for and assisting with the script.

Yet the pageantry of the children's project, and the leader of the local youth group, are explicitly contrasted by Allen with other, more pragmatic figures. The New Town has a problem with teenage delinquency, and the council have employed a town planner to restructure its architecture to ease the problem: to some extent, emblematic of de Certeau's concerns over place and power. The visiting planner, however, is presented as an arch-pragmatist and Allen's text directly compares him with the youth leader; there is "something so solid and positive about Jeff that in his presence Mr Westcott seem[s] to dwindle", Jeff is "[t]he practical man fac[ing] the impractical man" (59). A recurring character, Magnus, is presented as the New Town's original planner, designer of the Civic Centre along hermetic measurements. Colin emphasises the archaeological knowledge of the planner, the intentional design of a "cosmic temple ... the dynamic centre of the spiritual forces of the whole town – the town of Holiwell. Holy Well. Do you understand?" (47). Through the two figures of Jeff and Magnus, Allen progresses the ideology of Michell to its next, inevitable step: the redevelopment of human structures to draw upon ancient wisdom encoded in the landscape. The work of Jeff, Magnus and the Lord of the Dance engineer agency and independence for its citizens: Mike's growing power manifests in a new way of walking, "no longer simply a means of propelling his body to some other place", but "something in its own right" (66). In contrast, the youth group and its work of theatre are directly criticised by "practical man" Jeff as an attempt to intervene in the children's development: "You don't want to let them have ideas, you want to give them direction" (60).

However, as with Peter and Aquarius at the climax of *Spring of the Mountain*, Mike's inheritance of the magic power appears to be too much for him to comprehend or direct. It exaggerates feelings of depression and violence among his

fellow citizens, and in the novel's conclusion Mike rejects the power entirely, choosing "to be in the real world. [...] So whatever plans you had for me, please shelve them. I want to study to be whatever it is that Jeff is" (124). Mike's vague description of Jeff implies the extra significance Allen gives to his role of architect, and the inference of the conclusion is that Mike will now apply the mystic insights of the Lord of the Dance to the pragmatic work of restructuring the town. In this, Allen again defers the moment of celestial insight which the Michellian ideology of ancient wisdom promises. The elitist overtones of the magical initiate are reiterated, but even as inheritor of this ancient knowledge, Mike and the reader are entirely subject to its reductive, constrictive ideology, explicitly described in authorial narration as 'masculine' and 'feminine', heavily encoded as energy and depression – indeed, "the entire concept of ... all new towns was male..." (94). Mike and his fellow citizens are not free agents. Like Peter's interpretation of the Weeping Stones as a prehistoric form of industry, the archaeological imagination implied in Magnus's channelling of the 'holy well', rather than exploring a site of ambiguity, orients Mike and the reader as subjects of a delimited and restrictive form of doctrine.

The protagonists of *The Spring on the Mountain*, at least, conclude their narrative with the knowledge to enact a spatial solution to a supernatural problem. From the beginning of that novel, the reader hears of a haunted corner in the village, and to varying degrees the children sense a malevolent presence there. In their sequential movements toward the spiritual apex, the mountain, they, and particularly Peter among them, deepen their understanding of the secret powers of landscape, learning about ley lines and dragon power (a combination of Watkins and Michell, also discussed in *Puffin Annual Number Two*). At the very apex of this initiation,

geographically sited on the mountain and chronotopically outside of temporality and narrative, Peter fully inhabits the *mearcstapa* role, but his comprehension is deferred.

On his return to the village, however, Peter experiences a vision of a violent event in the distant past. The violent death, he understands, has been captured and amplified by the ley. Only by reinscribing the ley in a semi-ritualised social event can the negative the “terrible emotion of the lynching” be cleaned from the dragon energy flowing down the old straight track (139). In a moment of Michellian epiphany, Peter suddenly understands how, pragmatically, it can be done, and he imagines:

... a great procession from the standing stone to the sea along the old straight track. A procession of life to carry the force along its proper way and to sweep it past the corner that had perverted its power. A procession of as much life as possible [...] like all the traditional country festivals there had ever been –

And if it *was* his responsibility, then he would just have to come back, somehow, at the right time – (*Spring* 2000, 139)

Such a procession, in theory, is not at all dissimilar to the one in Mayne’s *It* (1977), which similarly exorcises a force by reiterating an ancient route. In Allen’s usage, however, there is none of the difficulty of social practice depicted by Mayne. In fact, Peter imagines that he himself might not even be there for the festival, and that Mrs White will organise it at his suggestion. Rather than realigning a tradition, Peter only plans on reviving what he, as a town-dweller, imagines is a pre-existent event, the clichéd “traditional country festival”, disconnected from any existing social history or tradition. It is hard not to agree with Bramwell’s view, that “there is just as much of the urban fantasy of the rural in the village wise woman, the ley and

the mystical spring” as in the “bogus rusticity” of the Myers’ retreat that is the object of Allen’s satire, and that Peter’s solution comprises nothing more than “a fantasy of the rural...” (170). In this image of the country festival, the figure of the Romantic child overseeing historic landscape is invoked monologically, to compound a pre-existing ideology. Rather than move delinquently and intuitively, Peter is following a map and a process that is even labelled as such (“the old straight track”) within the text. As in Allen’s other 1970s fantasies, the figure of the child is promised a sense of fantastic agency deriving from archaeological explorations, but to the extent that they walk the boundaries of place, her child protagonists do so to reinscribe them and stabilise the meaning they delimit.

This chapter has so far argued for Judy Allen’s use of tropes and themes familiar from the decade of titles explored already in this thesis: the interanimation of scientific archaeological discourse with the fantastic and irrational discourse of the mind; prehistoric culture revived as a corrective to aspects of destabilised identity; anxiety over conceptions of authenticity regarding folk culture, fantasy and the natural world. It has further argued that Allen’s approach, typical of the late 1970s approach to images of ancient culture, utilises those tropes following an ideology quite distinct from her predecessors. In Allen’s novels, the archaeological imagination engenders mystical conceptions of selfhood and power, instead of the experiences of disorientation and intersubjectivity common in Porter, Mayne and Gordon. Throughout this thesis, the persistence of this approach to antique landscape has been typified as Neo-Romantic. In the concluding section of this chapter, I consider in what sense this is true of Judy Allen’s texts, effectively closing the period of this study.

## Conclusion

As established in Chapter 1, the origins of the Neo-Romantic sensibility belong to the interwar period in Britain: the era of a crisis in British identity and religious feeling (Lewis 2010) and of radical literary experiment. Neo-Romanticism never entered the mainstream of art, and its manifestations in literature (also termed as new romanticism and the new apocalyptic) were greeted with scepticism. Nonetheless, its writers were impassioned in arguing for the ideological consequences for their work. Read wrote, “Art, we conclude, is ... a dialectical activity, an act of renewal. It renews vision, it renews language; but more essentially, it renews life itself by enlarging the sensibility, by making man more conscious of the terror and the beauty, the wonder of the possible forms of being” (*Selected Writings* 282). Read, whose *The Green Child* (1935) connects English folklore with political activism and the mystic tempo of geology, came in later life to be centrally important to art criticism, but also a supporter of Reich (creator of the anti-orgone ‘cloudmaster’ weather device, discussed above) during his persecution by the American authorities, though it is not clear how familiar he was with his work. This fact is offered as illustration of the sympathies between radical Modernist reclamations of the Romantic imagination and the esoteric, anti-establishment approaches to widening consciousness that gained popularity (if not universal credibility) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Other continuities are evident when we consider Michell’s debt to Watkins and his *Old Straight Track*. Regardless of the esoteric concomitants proposed by Michell and others since, this is a clear act of archaeological imagination as an attempted re-enchantment of British identity, and it is significant that it enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in the midst of New Age, ecological shifts



in consciousness in the 1970s. What is proposed in Allen's recommendations of both Watkins and Michell is an act of multiple reinterpretations: of the landscape, of Watkins and of Allen's own text.

Allen's own conjecture on the meaning of the Weeping Stones in *The Stones of the Moon* is another example of her work as a reading of Michell's influential work. She actively engages, not merely with concepts such as dragon and orgone energies, but with the idea of folklore interpretation. Her books stand in sharp contrast to the work of previous writers in this thesis, in whose fiction the immanent power of the landscape is threatening: instead, it is a sense of authenticity of identity with strong conservative overtones. The idealism of the New Age trend is parodied in both the Myers and Mrs White in *The Spring on the Mountain*; and the motorway and textiles mill are damned in *The Stones of the Moon*, not for their pollutant potential but their effect on the character of their local community.

Whereas her predecessors utilised the tropes of the archaeological imagination to disrupt ideas of child development, to depict their engagement with an othered, unimaginable past, Allen's fantasy novels are accounts of linear initiation into high, elitist knowledge. Her work exemplifies how mapped and overwritten the archaeological image was by the close of the 1970s, and what a task of reinterpretation was required to recover its Romantic, imaginative and subversive qualities. In the following Chapter, I consider a modern writer's approach to the revival of Children's Neo-Romanticism, and new possibilities on offer for the role of the archaeological imagination.

## **Chapter 6: “A Place Nowhere in the World” The Novels of Catherine Fisher**

Throughout this thesis I have posited a Children’s Neo-Romantic sensibility. In the previous chapter, I suggested a point at which this sensibility began to wane, due to the mainstream adoption of pagan themes and esoteric philosophy in the 1970s, and the children’s literature establishment’s favouring of fiction with a realist and progressive sensibility. In this chapter, I argue for evidence of Children’s Neo-Romanticism’s legacy in contemporary children’s fiction. My focus is on the poet and novelist Catherine Fisher (born in 1957). Her work is informed by her knowledge of myth and her experience of archaeological work, both the physical experience of digging into the past and the imaginative practice that invests evidence with human, historical meaning. She presents archaeological activity in both its public and its most private, subjective sorts of activity, as in her poem, ‘Archaeology Poem, 1. Threshold’:

The trowel clinks.

Swathes of mud, like fudge, are sliced away.

(...)

Before the loud cry of discovery, pause,

Be a poet again. Come,

speculate. (*Immrama* 9)

In her fiction for children and young adults she treats the challenge of this speculation, whether investigating old tales, wooden henges, family history or a city's founding myths, as a view into the past that illuminates our own personal identity. In her work, prehistoric folk culture and folklore provide fantastical new structures for conceptualising place, not through binary discourse but organic association, as in *Darkhenge* (2005): the opening phrase, "The tree branched like a brain" precedes the pagan image of a tree buried upside down (5), which in turn presages a trip into the Celtic otherworld where an army of trees continually subdivide and advance. In her fidelity to the authenticity of landscape, history and folklore she often displays the acknowledged influence of Garner, and in her play with ideas of the enchanted landscape I will argue she writes deliberately in the tradition of the Second Golden Age.

The first section of this chapter more generally considers the limits of the Second Golden Age and how exactly we can speak of its legacy. Neo-Romanticism continued to have a presence in children's literature through the 1980s and 90s, but for the most part this was a period of innovation in theme and content, particularly in terms of realism.

The chapter then progresses to its focal author, Catherine Fisher, surveying her work and critical reception. A serial award-winning children's novelist and poet, Fisher's first novel for children was published in 1990 (*The Conjuror's Tale*) and her twenty-eighth in 2016 (*The Speed of Darkness*). All of Fisher's novels are of the fantasy genre, with some predominantly high fantasy (particularly, four sequences of

novels in trilogies and tetralogies) but also several explorations of the slippage between our world and that of myth. The aim of this chapter is to show the presence of Children's Neo-Romanticism in contemporary children's literature, and for this reason it will focus on her twenty-first-century work, beginning with *Corbenic* (2002), a disorientating account of a young man's disaffection explored through strange and unpredictable associations with the legend of the Grail quest. The chapter returns to the idea of place and displacement, and the ways that certain chronotopes embody different kinds of past, both mythical and historical.

It continues by looking at *Darkhenge* (2005), the story of Rob's descent into a Celtic otherworld via a mysterious wooden henge to rescue his sister Chloe. Chloe is in a coma following a riding accident, but as the novel explores, she is also a figure of deep alienation. The chapter considers to what extent Fisher transcends the conventional narratives of adolescent subjectivity, and explores the tangled roots of the Battle of the Trees. This chapter also shows how *Darkhenge* uses a dialogic structure to talk about the complex character of archaeological practice and the relation of individuals to myth.

The discursive nature of archaeological practice is foregrounded in Fisher's subtle interweaving of voices from the past, present and mythology of the city of Bath, *Crown of Acorns* (2010), with discussion of which this chapter concludes. This novel of Fisher's offers new interpretations of druidic history and belief, as well as the mythology of selfhood.

## 6.1 The Legacy of the Second Golden Age

One of the objectives of this study has been to consider the nuances of the Second Golden Age in children's literature. Multiple factors were involved in the production of this era: the increasing focus on children's education; widening levels of child literacy; ambitious editors such as Webb working with the support of Penguin to foster more literary, less commercial fiction; the flourishing children's librarian community and increasingly academic scrutiny; and a generally revolutionary spirit which aimed to produce new kinds of literature to meet perceived new expectations from the incoming generation. One major question about the Second Golden Age is: when did it end, if it ended at all?

In the previous chapter, I described the paradox of children's publishing during the recession of the 1970s, which actually led to an even greater number of titles released than ever before, albeit in paperback with shorter print runs, leading to a more competitive market. This decade was a period of increasing engagement between publishers and consumers, with increasing numbers of children's librarians, a general understanding that children's literature had a place in education, and the success of book clubs run by Scholastic, Puffin and Target.

At the beginning of the 1980s there was renewed fear for the children's book market, with a drop in the birth rate forecast and growing competition for children's pocket money, not to mention the funds of bookshops, schools and public libraries (all required to cut back expenditure). Yet between 1985 and 1990, according to Clark and Philips (2008), the number of published titles continued to increase and sales in children's publishing overall actually rose by a quarter in real terms, on top of an increase already seen in the previous decade. In the same period, adult

publishers managed only a seven per cent increase in sales. In addition to the Carnegie, Whitbread and Guardian prizes for children's novels, the 1980s saw the introduction of the Red House Book Prize (in 1981) and the Smarties prize (in 1985). The Red House prize was organised by the Federation of Children's Book Groups and judged solely by children, while the Smarties prize was judged by children from a shortlist drawn up by an adult panel. Despite some controversy over sweets as a sponsorship association, or perhaps because of it, the Smarties prize gained a high profile, and the advent of these new "Smarties days" of copious book awards was given as a reason for the avowedly progressive Other Award to cease operating. It was now "hard enough to see the books for the plethora of awards getting in the way", and in 1987 it was seemingly too difficult to promote alternatives or niggle the conscience of mainstream judging panels (Stones 1988).

The 1980s marked a shift in recognition of genres and settings beyond the often historical, realist and generally Britain-oriented prize-lists of the 1960s and 70s. The great fantasy and sci-fi novels by Susan Cooper, Nicholas Fisk, Diana Wynne Jones and Robert Westall (as well as fantasies by Mayne, Gordon and Allen), were uniformly overlooked by the children's literature establishment of critics and prizes, of which the avowedly progressive and realist Other Award was emblematic. A comparison across the prize-winners of the 1980s (including the Smarties prize-winners from 1985 onward) falls out into consistently different genres, styles and settings: eight historical novels, ten modern-day settings without fantasy elements, and ten fantasies of varying kinds. This seems to reflect the accounts of Reynolds, Clark and Philips, which suggest increasing competition for readership and a swathe of new titles every month. A parochial and nostalgic atmosphere remained: of the modern-day dramas, one was set in Jamaica and another in the west of India, but

otherwise British settings predominated, and only one of those British settings (1986's *The Snow Spider*, of which more later) was not English. The tropes of the Neo-Romantic sensibility were rarer in this period, although Robert Westall's *The Scarecrows* (1981) has a strong folk horror aesthetic, with vengeful ghosts manifesting through the very materials of the countryside to evict the modern family who have made a home in their old water-mill. In 1985, the four prizes went to four very different works with a common interest in rural culture: a ghost story by Kevin Crossley-Holland (*Storm*, 1985), the story of a boy afraid of a folk legend (*The Nature of the Beast* by Janni Howker, 1985), a collection of animal poems with Christian-mystic overtones by Ted Hughes (*What is the Truth*, 1984) and an account of a modern child discovering the farming heritage of the fens (*Gaffer Samson's Luck* by Jill Paton Walsh, 1984). The continuing sense that these topics were meaningful to young readers helped form part of a thematic continuity, bridging from the Second Golden Age to more recent titles, as we shall see.

Jenny Nimmo's *The Snow Spider* (1986), together with its sequels, *Emlyn's Moon* (1987) and *The Chestnut Soldier* (1989), represent the most successful engagement of the 1980s with the themes and tropes of Children's Neo-Romanticism. The novels, all set in a valley community in North Wales, narrate the coming of age of twelve-year old Gwyn Griffiths, who is the inheritor, according to his Nain (grandmother), of the powers of Math, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy: the magicians of Welsh myth as recorded in the Mabinogion. Landscape is not particularly emphasised across the trilogy, but the importance of living myth is made personally significant to young Gwyn and his friends, embodying a potent awareness of place and inheritance. The emotional temperature of these novels is noticeably warmer by comparison with the other writers in this thesis, with each novel pivoting

on a personal relationship marked with loss: Gwyn's younger sister, lost on the hillside; Emlyn's absent mother; Nia's soldiering cousin. Gwyn's magical inheritance, which is clearly to be read as both a personal power and a cultural inheritance, manifests in five unremarkable birthday gifts. There is nothing archaeological or ancient about these: "a piece of seaweed, a yellow scarf, a tin whistle, a twisted metal brooch, and a small, broken horse" (7). Instead, they are metonymic objects: seaweed betokening the magical ship made by Gwydion, the scarf of his sister, and so on. The potency of these small symbols is evocative of Neo-Romanticism's magic and poetical associative symbolism, making the novels' subtext of cultural inheritance both affecting and dynamic. The trilogy enjoyed popularity (as an early winner of the Smarties Grand Prix, as well as adaptation of all three books – again by HTV, producers of *Children of the Stones* – between 1988 and 1991) maintaining the profile of these themes and tropes.

The 1990s saw huge changes in the identity of children's publishing. While publishers continued to increase the number of titles available on the market, up to 1997 the decade saw a decline in the UK book market. Taking the awards of the Carnegie, Whitbread, Guardian and Smarties prizes as a barometer, the ideals of children's literature establishment were steadily shifting. Thirty-five individual titles were awarded: historical fiction was now seriously under-represented with only six titles, while fantasy novels (of which only one dealt with ghosts) narrowly dominated the landscape, with only thirteen novels awarded that were set in the modern day with no fantastic elements. More novels than previously were recognised by two prizes, among them two defining novels of this era: *Northern Lights* (1995) by Philip Pullman and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) by J.K. Rowling. The growing preference for children's novels dealing with



modern day ‘issues’, particularly in terms of the Carnegie Prize, which honoured only three fantasies this decade, is exemplified by a third defining text of the 1990s: *Junk* (1996) by Melvin Burgess, which writes explicitly and sympathetically about teenage heroin addiction. The Carnegie’s endorsement of Burgess’ novel reopened public discussion of the role and responsibility of children’s literature, a discussion characteristic of the Second Golden Age. A *Times* editorial on the subject stated unequivocally, “It was a Romantic fallacy to suppose that childhood experience was a world of its own, and that children’s literature must be didactic and improving. [...] Children should be given a chance to think for themselves. [...] That is part of reading up and growing up” (“Junk Fiction” 19). This recognition of children’s literature by mainstream journalism was paralleled by a relative widening of coverage of new titles. Though a far cry from the regular and extensive book review pages of the *TLS* in the 1960s and 70s, the 90s brought a relative increase in review coverage from the British press; there was also a steady flourishing in online discussion of publications, including more reviews by non-professional readers, both children and adults. Such mainstream recognition of the children’s novel reached something of an apotheosis with the award of the Whitbread overall Prize to the concluding novel in Philip Pullman’s “Northern Lights” trilogy, in 2001 – the first time a children’s novel had been recognised in such a context. If, as I argued in Chapter 5, the 1970s demonstrated a gradual divergence in taste between gatekeepers and readership in children’s literature, the success of Pullman’s work, and that of J.K. Rowling, showed that it could, to a great extent if not completely, cohere around certain major titles. The first three “Harry Potter” books won the Smarties prize (awarded by children) for three consecutive years, and their sales reinvigorated the children’s book market at the end of the twentieth century.

In prior chapters, I have aimed to define the Second Golden Age in terms of writerly engagement with the scope of children's reading, particularly in literary forms which acknowledge the reader's fluency and hermeneutic powers, mirrored in appreciation and criticism from wider culture. This respect and concern for the child reader can be said to fall into difficulties in the 1980s, but I argue that the legacy of the Second Golden Age is again enacted in the conditions of the late 1990s. It is within this new context for children's literature that Fisher emerged as a novelist: broad reader engagement, including an acknowledged adult readership, with renewed appetite for fantasy and a new tolerance for 'mature' themes and content. I would also argue that in the frequent usage of the fantastic realist mode in this era, influence of Second Golden Age children's literature is stronger than that of the fantasy genre per se.

The fantastic encounter of a modern child with the folk material of the past, immanent in the countryside landscape, continues to be revived and reinterpreted by writers beside Fisher. Among Butler's fantasy novels, *Calypso Dreaming* (2002) in particular is structured by a sense of ancient magic which becomes apparent in the wild countryside of an island in the Bristol channel. In Siobhan Dowd's *Bog Child* (2008), set in the 1980s, the discovery of a 'bog body' preserved in the peat on the border of Northern Ireland triggers the archaeological imagination for a young boy, viscerally involved in the Troubles, and emblematises themes of mortality, identity and history. In the novel *Waterslain Angels* (2009), by folklorist Kevin Crossley-Holland, similar archaeological fantasies lead a young girl to solve a mystery involving objects of antiquity and religious faith lost in the fens. In selecting Fisher as the focus of this chapter, I have followed the same conditions under which I selected Porter, Mayne, Gordon and Allen. In particular, I feel that Fisher has made

the archaeological encounter a theme of a notable majority of her works, all of them within the fantasy genre, but a significant number in an obviously fantastic realist mode which produces textual ambiguity and instability with which to challenge its reader. The influence of her own direct involvement with archaeological work provides a useful continuity with themes running throughout my corpus. In her most recent novels particularly, her genre-splicing innovations demand nuanced interpretation from her reader, distinguishing her work as unique within the contemporary scene. In their themes of loss, immanent historical meaning and legend, these novels also effectively revive Children's Neo-Romanticism, which, as I have argued, was intrinsic to the texts and criticism of the Second Golden Age.

## **6.2 Catherine Fisher: A Survey**

Catherine Fisher was born in 1957 in Newport, South Wales. She has talked of her interest in folklore, Scandinavian myth and fantasy literature, particularly that of Garner: “[He] is a huge influence ... I love him because his writing is so intense, he packs in so much, and then there’s the way he uses landscape...” (“Scared? You Soon Will Be” 15). She read English at the University of South Wales, and while working as a primary school teacher there, took part in a year-long archaeological survey. Archaeological curiosity and knowledge are frequent themes in her work, as are folklore and mythology (a volume of her poetry published in 2006 is entitled simply, *Folklore*, and explores themes of heroism and victimhood). Her first work of poetry, *Immrama*, was published in 1988, and three collections have followed. Fisher’s first novel, *The Conjuror’s Game*, was published in 1990, and clearly

showed the legacy of the Second Golden Age: children coming to understand the proximity of a world of ancient sorcery. Many of Fisher's novels of the 1990s are high fantasy (The *Snow-Walker* trilogy, 1993-97, and the four-book sequence, *The Book of the Crow*, 1998-2001) but several, including *Belin's Hill* (1997) confront modern children protagonists with ancient magic. In *Belin's Hill*, young Huw moves to a rural town after the death of his parents and soon becomes preoccupied with the eponymous hill, where the mysterious Hal lives alone in his family's house haunted by a family curse. An archaeological dig in the high street yields the remains of a druidic temple, and an entranced Huw finds an ancient clay head there, which draws him into Hal's orbit.

The novel prefigures some of Fisher's later, more ambitious works, and her literary influences are perhaps worn more openly than in her later work. The book opens with an epigraph from the work of Welsh Victorian writer of the supernatural, Arthur Machen, and elsewhere Fisher has written about how his novels "evoke the Usk valley as the haunt of numinous power, ancient often malevolent, never safe, never really seen but vividly there, in the turning of a lane, the configuration of a skyline, or some strange psychic confrontation" (Dooley 23). The same description could be applied to other writers explored in this thesis, and the protagonists' obsession with the ancient clay head, continually remaking and rediscovering it, recall the obsessive remaking of owl figures in *The Owl Service* (1967), while the unnatural electrical heat that parallels the growing tension of the novel is like that in Lively's *The Wild Hunt of Hagworthy* (1971). The specific landscape of Caerleon, the site of Fisher's major archaeological experience, permeates the novel, and the demonic deity's appearance is directly associated with wild, overgrown hills, with their evocation of deep time and Celtic identity: "A man with the smell of earth

about him, his clothes browns and greens, his face tattooed, his hair streaked with mud. A man from the past” (112). The novel concludes in an obscure mystical act of sacrifice on the part of the land-owner (as in other novels of my corpus, an ambiguous and suspicious authority figure), which returns the protagonist back to the events of the very start of the novel and shows them taking another route entirely. This radical switchback ride for the reader recalls the similar conclusion of *Children of the Stones*.

Another association, perhaps inadvertent, comes in the form of John Mitchell, the local reverend and an ally for the child protagonists, whose name suggests John Michell. There are no ley lines or even stone circles, but in that radically non-chronological return to the start which concludes the novel, there is reiteration of the association of earth mysteries with an existential knowledge that profoundly transcends our experience such that it cannot even be hinted to the reader. Despite the novel’s tendency toward pagan religious themes, Mitchell prefigures the priest in *Darkhenge* who, as I will discuss, emphasises the points of similarity between folk culture, mainstream religion and subjective mental experiences, rather than their differences. When the archaeologists tell the reverend that they’re investigating “some sort of religious site. A ritual sanctuary ... Blood and death and strange gods,” he laughs and acknowledges that such matters are “Right up my street...” (23).

Fisher is a prolific author, and her critical reception has grown slowly but steadily. There is as yet minimal scholarly treatment of her work, including fleeting references to her in Levy and Mendlesohn’s *Children’s Fantasy Literature: An Introduction* (2016) and Elizabeth Briggs’ survey of ‘Anglo-Welsh fantasy’ (1999). The most sustained discussion of Fisher and her work to date appears in Butler’s

“Children of the Stones: Prehistoric Sites in British Children’s Fantasy, 1965-2005”, in Joanne Parker’s *Written on Stone: The Cultural History of British Prehistoric Monuments* (2009). Butler contrasts Fisher’s use of archaeological and legendary figures in *Darkhenge* with Garner’s approach in *Elidor* (1965). Like Garner, Butler argues, Fisher’s informed approach to archaeological practice means her selective use of archaeological tropes and mythic figures “lay[s] a positive value on the ability to translate between different ways of seeing and understanding – or rather ... to overlay them in order to build up a cumulative complex of interrelated meaning” (154). That is, as well as representing the ethics of archaeological practice from multiple perspectives, Fisher gives an authentically archaeological perspective to the material on which she builds her fantasy, making overt her reinterpretation and interrelation of such texts as the medieval poem, “The Battle of the Trees”. Butler also argues that Fisher’s work differs from Garner’s in its treatment of Manichean moral tropes. My own reading of *Darkhenge* explores Fisher’s treatment of textual material in contrast to the materiality of the archaeological site. Whereas Butler uses the metaphor of landscape overlaid on Fisher’s fantastic Otherworld, I argue that the objective, material ancient landscape of Britain is presented almost with ambivalence by Fisher, subordinated by the interior fantasy landscape of its protagonist, Chloe.

In their discussion of *Reading History in Children’s Books* (2012), Butler and O’Donovan explore Fisher’s dissociation of Arthurian themes from ideas of national identity in *Corbenic* (2002), which departs from conventional treatments of Arthurian legend by generating disruption and disorientation in place of the customary bedrock of British identity; I discuss this dissociation further in this chapter. The novel describes teenager Cal’s flight from a difficult relationship with his mother, whose mental health problems and alcoholism make him feel angry and

ashamed. On his way from his home in Bangor, North Wales, to stay with his uncle in Chepstow (on the Wales-England border), he accidentally disembarks at the wrong station and finds himself the guest of a wounded lord called Bron. Cal has found himself in a re-enactment of Perceval's encounter with the Fisher King, keeper of the Holy Grail. Like Perceval, he fails to ask the question that would heal the King, denying the reality of Corbenic castle. After this, Cal struggles to find a place in the modern world, haunted by thoughts of the Grail and his failed responsibilities to his mother. He sets off in quest of the castle, while his identity and his grip on reality steadily fall apart. Butler and O'Donovan highlight Fisher's use of lacunae and ambiguity in order to separate Arthur from any specific location in the British Isles and maintain his symbolic importance, along with the rest of the Arthurian narrative.

The *Guardian* newspaper was late to recognition of Fisher's work, with no coverage of her fiction by its professional critics, only contributor reviews from young readers such as "Sophiescribe" ("This is the sort of book I devour rather than read!") of her *Oracle* fantasy sequence (2001-3), the first novel of which was nominated for the Whitbread prize. The sequence describes a world of high fantasy in which a young boy becomes inheritor of a magical talisman, which brings the corrupt authority of the land into direct conflict with him. Playing freely with the characters and stories of Norse mythology, Fisher writes an epic adventure of unheroic heroes in battle with monsters. Rather appropriately in the context of this study, Fisher was also featured in a 2015 *Guardian* article by Daniel Hahn on underrated children's writers ("I've never understood why Catherine Fisher isn't one of the book world's superstars"). In 2016, her novel *Incarceron* (2007) was selected alongside Garner and Cooper in a *Guardian* 'top ten' of writers informed by Welsh

myth, a selection made by *Snow Spider* author Jenny Nimmo. *Incarceron* is another fantasy sequence of two books, and again takes a high fantasy approach, with a world-sized prison that Fisher's protagonists must explore, escape and ultimately destroy.

*The Times* was quicker to highlight Fisher's work, with enthusiastic reviews from children's books editor Amanda Craig. *Incarceron* was selected by the Times as one of their Books of the Year. In an interview with Craig, Fisher emphasised the inspiration of ancient texts, from Beowulf to the Welsh Triads, enthusing about "the fragments of story, the lists for bards to remember with the detail stripped out that you can do anything you like with" ("Scared? You Soon Will Be" 15). Elsewhere she has stressed the role of reader interpretation and investment in the production of her texts, refusing to speculate on the fortune of her characters beyond the limits of the text. More recently, Fisher has enjoyed further success with her *Obsidian Mirror* sequence, a blend of fantasy and science-fiction which again ranges across multiple locations and time periods, and invokes the folkloric world of the fay.

Of Fisher's output, such hybridised science-fiction and fantasy sequences have enjoyed the greatest critical success, yet this chapter will focus on three thematically consistent approaches to fantasy set in the modern day, which I argue embody a revival of Children's Neo-Romanticism which overtly recalls the key texts and sensibility of the Second Golden Age. In the next section, I consider her 2002 novel *Corbenic*, an account of teenage alienation that refers to the themes of Melvin Burgess' work as much as it refers to the Grail narratives of Chretien de Troyes.



### 6.3 Placelessness and Childhood Alienation in *Corbenic* and *Darkhenge*

#### *i. Alienation and Mythic Place*

Fisher's work follows the conventional narrative of adolescent fiction, described by McCallum as the transition from solipsism (albeit sometimes presented in positive terms) to a state of intersubjective belonging through the internalising of culturally held knowledge. As previously established, the sublimity of Neo-Romanticist place-consciousness subverts conventional, even ubiquitous narratives of teenage alienation by multiple means. Through representation of the archaeological imagination, it emphasises the constructedness of texts, historical narratives and material landscape. Archaeological interpretation, and the instability of visual language, complicate, distort and make surreal the hermeneutic field of signs by which the viewer orients themselves in terms of space and place, and evoke moments of heightened subjectivity in such terms that selfhood itself, in texts by Porter, Mayne, Gordon and Allen, is highlighted as dependent on multiple discourses and their relations. In well-known texts, such as those by Garner or Cooper, the protagonist is displaced from everyday, urban life by visiting the countryside: the rural landscape is immanent with wild, mythic magic, suggestive of an othered, ancient vision of Britain, which they neutralise by completing with an archaeological view. In later developments of these tropes, such as those by Lively and Gordon, the protagonists are themselves locals: through their own sense of adolescent alienation, as self-conscious *mearcstapas*, they interrogate the production of local, rural place out of materiality and narrative, moving in an overtly childlike way in contradiction

of adult authority. Reintegration of diverging discourses is required to feel at home once more. If they leave home in some sense, it is usually into the wilder spaces of the countryside: hillsides, woodlands, fenlands.

By comparison with these examples, the displacement experienced by Fisher's protagonists is extreme and sometimes violent, and the objective sense of restoration and interpretation implicit in the archaeological imagination is urgently needed. *Corbenic's* Cal, *Darkhenge's* Chloe, and *Crown of Acorns's* Sulis, all begin the novel in flight from a difficult home-life, all seeking to make a new home in a new place where they can go unrecognised and perhaps even change their name. What they encounter is beautiful and attractive, but not, as they come to realise, entirely new. What it offers, whether in Wales, England, Glastonbury, Bath or even the otherworld of the Annwn, is an old folkloric power to rewrite their very selves.

Where is the castle of Corbenic? Although Cal sees the name obscurely on a sign at a railway station when he first arrives, the more informed reader will note that the name appears to be a corruption. It is better known as Carbonek, the "castle adventurous" from the legends of King Arthur, and more specifically of his noble knights' quests in search of the Holy Grail. The Grail itself has a strange history in Children's Neo-Romanticism, seemingly inherited from its popularity in modernist texts of the 1930s (from John Cowper Powys to T.S. Eliot, with Mary Butts highly interested too). In those texts, it was a symbol of religious mysticism and English mythology combining with suggestive Freudian theory. In children's literature, it is generally deployed as an emblem of imperilled heritage, a real object whose loss or misidentification indicates the absence of the marvellous from British identity. An ancient Grail appears, never identified with but highly suggestive of the Holy Grail, in Cooper's *Over Sea, Under Stone*. It is recognised, wrongly, by the villagers of

Lively's *Astercote*. It is suggested by the treasures of Garner's *Elidor*, and glimpsed in Mayne's *Earthfasts*. In the original legends of King Arthur, the castle of Carbonek is where the Grail was kept, where it was seen by the questing Knight Sir Percival, and later Sir Galahad and Sir Lancelot, each story with its own outcome reflecting the hero's spiritual readiness to receive the sublime blessing of this sacred relic. Many magical things are supposed to have happened in its walls (hence "the castle adventurous") and the original tale of Percival is incomplete, which has led to a long line of reinterpretations again placing varying emphasis on concepts of virtuous identity. Carbonek castle seems to have stood in the midst of the suggestively named but ambiguous Waste Land, and when Percival was given a sight of the Grail by the mystically wounded Fisher King, he might have restored the land and healed the King by asking the right question, but failed in this. Even Phyllis Ann Karr's exhaustive *Arthurian Companion* (2001) cannot be sure exactly where the castle is located: unlike other aspects of British landscape, no real place has laid claim to it. A reference to a headland may place it on a promontory in Cornwall, or potentially another place in Wales. Its indeterminacy seems to match the place of the Grail itself, which has had evolving significance over time: where is it from, what does it mean, and where is it now<sup>13</sup>? Questing in search of it might be seen as analogous to considering its meaning and provenance, completed by the emphasis on asking the right question in the legend of Sir Percival.

In Fisher's novel, Cal discovers the castle by mistake, getting off the train anxiously at the wrong station and discovering what seems to be a strange hotel standing in the middle of nowhere. Staying for the night as a guest of Bron the proprietor, who apparently suffers (like the Fisher King) a mysterious wounding in

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<sup>13</sup> A 2005 documentary appeared to show it in a dresser drawer in a house in North Yorkshire.

his lower body, Cal feels conscious of the super richness of the place, the quality of the fabrics, food, the nobility of the guests, and of his own working-class experience. He enjoys the lavishness, though, and looks upon it aspirationally. Cal's train journey is one of flight, not only from Bangor but also specifically from his mother, an alcoholic who suffers from depression and delusions and requires his constant supervision. Cal's mother is a source of shame to him, and although his trip to his Uncle is ostensibly only a visit, he has secretly arranged that he will stay in Chepstow permanently, work at his uncle's office and begin a new, independent life. In these opening chapters, Cal's train journey signifies his distance from both worlds, his intense solipsism (he sits "watching the landscape through his own reflection" in the window, drowning out the rest of the carriage with his own music) and his bitter thoughts of escape from his mother. Even when Bron shows him the procession of the Grail, carried by a young girl on a silver dish, he can only think that what he has seen is a delusion akin to his mother's, perhaps even a drunken one.

"Ask me what you saw."

"Leave me alone. I've got to get out."

"But you saw! You must have seen!"

Dully, Cal licked his lips, obstinate. He wasn't drunk. He wouldn't be like her. Never. He'd sworn long ago, never be like her. 'I didn't see a thing,' he whispered. (27)

His refusal to recognise the fantastic, to acknowledge a symbolic order that might restore the broken King and heal the waste land, is simultaneously a denial of his mother and her history. The doomy atmosphere of this chapter anticipates some

of the complicated emotion that the book will go on to narrate in articulating Cal's attempts at self-definition. It is unclear to the reader at this point what would have resulted from Cal's admission of the Grail vision, but it is clear enough that his rejection of the irrational in some way leaves his experience of the world incomplete: in his faithlessness (as a letter from Bron describes it), he has refused to be subject to its mystery. The ensuing events of the novel demonstrate the power such mystery holds over him, despite, or because of, his refusal to engage with it.

Cal continuously refuses to return to the place associated with his mother, even breaking a promise to return at Christmas, but he cannot avoid Corbenic and its Grail rites because they have no objective, geographic place. During his vision of the Grail, Cal knows innately that "he was somewhere lost, a place nowhere in the world, deep in darkness..." (25) It is repeatedly stated, after his first visit, that Cal's experience within Corbenic is not of the same order of reality as the rest of his experience, and the reader is made further aware of this problem of 'placing' the action of the novel through frequent intertextual references, such as the quotations from the story of Percival (by the medieval French writer, Chretien de Troyes) or the *Song of Annwn* (a Welsh collection of myths). Like the strange world of Elidor which appears to occupy the same space as the mundane world in Garner's novel, or the nameless fey land which approximates and reflects the physical world of the fens in Gordon's *The Edge of the World*, the fantastic dimension of Corbenic is intrinsically related to our world by objective discourse (the legend of Childe Roland in Garner's work, the story of the summer palace at Manea in Gordon's). The spatial dimension of the grail's realm is evoked as the conventional metaphor of the human mind, deep and dark and concerned with the centre of things: Fisher at one point likens it to an onion with too many layers removed at once. Its interior significance,

though, is interpolated by figures of historical, Arthurian and religious otherness: like an objective archaeological object he is able, spatially, to approach, reject and happen on it, as when he is lost in Chepstow, and confronts the absolute certainty that he has “walked straight out of the normal world into some other that was always there waiting for him, in his mind, at twilight, on borders and boundaries, shadowy crossroads” (55).

Cal is given a sword by Bron which he carries into our world, and which is recognised as authentically medieval by experts at an historical re-enactment. Although Cal is depicted as preoccupied by wealth and possessions, the sword possesses him: he cannot sell it or exhibit it as a marker of his identity. It has only one purpose, to be used in a fight at the re-enactment society, and when he misjudges his strength, the sword shatters under another’s blow. It is a marker of his own private inability to perform correctly in the liminal reality of Corbenic. The inexplicable existence of the sword makes it impossible for Cal to rationalise away the experience with Bron and the Grail, and the memory of his failure increasingly obsesses him, while he tries to settle with his uncle, repeatedly ignoring his mother’s entreating by phone for him to come home. It seems possible for other figures to occupy both spaces, as when the historical re-enactment society introduce themselves as Arthur, Gwen and their knights. Cal refuses to belong to the world of Chepstow, withholding key aspects of his life from his uncle: he, like Cal’s mother, offers him the love and welcome he feels unable to accept. Conversely, Cal lies to Arthur’s people and tells them that his uncle is actually his father, further resisting acceptance into a crowd. When the truth is revealed, they reject him from their circle. His condition of deep solipsism is intrinsically connected to his inability to find resolution with the high subjectivity of his Grail encounter: a refusal in both

cases to ask the questions that are required, and an irresistible desire to keep these negative aspects secret and suppressed.

Following the unexpected death of his mother, Cal embarks on a form of quest for the castle Corbenic. Rejected by Arthur's men and rejecting his family, even turning away the sole individual who offers to accompany him, he wanders the countryside avoiding the police, looking out for a familiar turret or railway sign. This part of the text grows increasingly ambiguous about Cal's mental state and it is possible to read the sequence as an act of self-punishment in the depths of his grief and guilt. His quest takes him to several places culturally associated with British mysticism, the last being Glastonbury, but he is continually frustrated by glimpses of the lost castle, which come to nothing. The extreme solitude of his pilgrimage increases the sense of Cal's alienation from friends, family and society, and any religious overtones are undermined by the sense that these sites of pilgrimage bring no reward, and in the way his friends gently try to dissuade him from his search, believing his original Grail vision to be an hallucination.

The reader is reminded, though, by the frequent epigraphs (such as Chretien de Troyes) and internal references to Wagner's opera, *Parsifal*, that Cal's vision is in fact supported by intertextual fact, and that it cannot be read as purely subjective, private hallucination (particularly in a world in which Arthur's men are recognisable to other people, and Cal can buy *Parsifal* on CD). His quest, therefore, has an archaeological overtone: he is in search of the remnants of something long lost, an object of extraordinary antiquity. Cal's quest is, itself, the revival of an historical rite: a semi-mystical engagement with objects of antiquity, British landscape and selfhood. His continued inability to locate the castle, however, encourages the reader to consider how such a rite – an act of pure archaeological imagination – might be

related (or analogous) to the destabilising effects of mental breakdown. Privately, he comes to think of the quest in terms of internal experience: Corbenic “wasn’t to be found on the map” (149), and is a place that is not Wales and “was not England. He had fallen into the crack between them” (169). Indeed, the very seeking of Corbenic is described in terms of a shrivings of his identity, particularly in terms of his material aspirations: “To find Corbenic he would have to give up everything, to walk right out of the world of towns and bed and breakfasts. To do what he had sometimes sleepily dreamed of on long train journeys, to walk into the greenwood and not come back” (165). The greenwood is significant: a territory of flourishing natural landscape, connoting the opposite of human industry and society, as well as the lawless haunts of Robin Hood. The longer he seeks for the castle, the more he realises that it cannot be placed or mapped, that he is “wandering in his own delirium, his own nightmares”, and yet the very concepts of the quest, the retreat from the world, can seemingly only be figured in terms of landscape and nature (170). The past that Corbenic represents is a mythical past that is recognisably the same as that of de Troyes and, to an extent, Wagner.

The idea of a mythical past before the cataclysm is particularly important to Cal, wracked with guilt over his abandonment of his mother. It is not clear whether Fisher presents Cal’s experience as internal to himself, part of a deeper onion layer of our world (in her metaphor), or a real magical realm in which the Grail exists with all its fantastical properties: indeed, her use of the archaeological imagination suggests that all three are understood through the same objective discourse. This is the discourse of analogies which characters have sought in order to unite disparate perspectives on archaeological objects in texts throughout this study: the correlation



of human, non-human, the imagination and materiality that characterised Neo-Romanticism in the early twentieth century.

ii. *Alienation and Archaeological Place*

*Darkhenge* (2005) is set very significantly in a recognisable place: Avebury, seen from the perspective of local children, Dan, and his friend Rob, whose sister is currently in a coma following a riding accident. Place names are used with precision, making geographical accuracy the features of its realism: Falkner's Circle, "Windmill Hill and its barrows", "[the] white chalk track of the Ridgeway", even "the car park on Overton Hill ... and beyond it the lorries on the A4 roar[ing] down towards Silbury, their windshields glinting in the ominous light" (5-7). As already described in my discussion of both Allen and *Children of the Stones*, Avebury is a place of iconic archaeological significance: the biggest European henge, surrounding a village, with satellite stone circles which vary in size and condition (the notorious Stone Killer Robinson having sometimes broken up these ancient monuments for building materials in the eighteenth century). A further Neolithic construction has also been uncovered, bisecting the circle in ways that have been interpreted – by early antiquarians and druidic scholars, and esoteric writers such as Michell – as images of ancient religious symbolism. For all these reasons, Avebury represents an intersection of many related interests concerning archaeology and magic, and Fisher's characters are conscious of how such interests have defined their home:

Usually on summer afternoons the grass between the ancient stones was a patchwork of picnicking tourists or Reiki practitioners or groups beating drums around the obelisk marker. But the rain had driven them in, to the tea rooms or the museum, or maybe into Avebury Manor for the guided tours. (*Darkhenge* 12).

The boys are not surprised, either, to find a new archaeological dig in practice (albeit in secret): there is “always a dig going on somewhere around Avebury” (45). In part because of the loss of his sister and his parents’ trauma as a result, Rob’s perspective is that of an individual who takes mystery and antiquity in his stride, and for whom they no longer signify anything beyond their mute strangeness and the continual attraction of tourists. When the archaeologist, Claire, describes the unique soil conditions at the site of her excavation, “totally bizarre for this area” and “fascinating”, Rob has “nothing to say. It sounded totally boring to him” (50).

Meanwhile, a series of brief interludes between chapters, distinguished typographically, presents a different form of specificity to the realist, geographical kind; each interlude is subtitled with names of native British trees: Birch, Rowan, Ash, Willow, and so on. These interludes, until roughly halfway into the novel, are narrated from the perspective of an important but seemingly isolated character: Rob’s sister, Chloe. Initially, it appears unambiguous that the Winter King is keeping her a prisoner in the mysterious Unworld of the inter-chapters (“Maybe if I can break the glass I can get some sort of message out. The bird is in a cage. Like me. I hate that” (43), “When are you going to let me go?” (79)), but the reader is also conscious of her as an alienated young woman (“I wonder if Mum and Dad and Mac are

devastated without me. I wonder if Rob's sorry now" (43)), and also that the King and the Unworld, both aspects of her imprisonment, are themselves in conflict.

The action of the novel closely follows Rob's attempts to enter Annwn, Orpheus-like, and rescue his sister, but Fisher deliberately turns these conventions of masculine heroism upside-down. Rob and his magical companion, an incarnation of the mythical bard Taliesin, here called Vetch, fail repeatedly to reach Chloe. Their actions are partly frustrated by an incarnation of the goddess Ceridwen, here called Claire, who allies herself with Chloe to protect the King. Ultimately, Chloe does not want to be rescued and to return to normality:

"So you want me back, do you? Little Chloe. Girly Chloe. You want me back so your life will be perfect again, and tidy, and just like it was. [...] I can feel myself ... my mind ... spreading out. As if I've escaped from some enclosure, all that bother of growing and hurting and eating and walking and hiding what I feel, even from myself. As if all I used to keep under the surface is bursting up and growing, like the trees." (221)

Chloe's displacement, like Cal's, is initially violent and unwanted, but then adopted and explored as part of her identity. Where he ventured in search of Corbenic out of a mix of shame and regret, her quest into the depths of the Unworld is a search for self-realisation, a new envisioning of the process of maturation, which focuses on mind over body. The two protagonists' differing ambitions are both to be achieved through acknowledgement of the value of the imagination in relation to the material world: in *Corbenic*, "to give up everything" (165); in *Darkhenge*, to liberate "all I used to keep under the surface" (221).

Whilst Cal intended to make his escape by walking into the greenwood, *Darkhenge*'s world of Annwn is even more overtly a natural world that implies the absence of humanity. It is a world of trees, continually flourishing and invading the fortresses of the King: "an unguessable tangle, a million filaments stretching and reaching down into the soil, from gnarled lumps vast as boulders to threads tinier than worms" (145). It is a realm of nature witnessed on a scale that transcends the human, whether spatial or temporal, reminiscent of the literally inconceivable 'deep time' of landscape formation hymned by Hawkes in her archaeological fantasia, *A Land* (1951). The same visual motif is employed in *Corbenic*, when Merlin is "a green man, made of leaves and stems and binds" which are seen "climbing with small crisp rustles over the walls and along the floor" (176). Like Cal's greenwood, Annwn not only has prelapsarian connotations but also promises the erasure and effacement of personal history, human culture and individuality.

Both Cal and Chloe show a marked ambivalence to the material aspects of archaeological practice: Avebury, like Glastonbury in *Corbenic*, is presented as a cultural site defined by absence, drawing tourists and archaeologists whose interests are viewed dismissively by the children, particularly in *Darkhenge*. The Unworld of Annwn is related to the site by human objects, that is, the wooden henge and the buried tree, evidence of pagan culture, but in its fantastic aspects it is entirely other to everything built or studied in the area. For the reader, however, considering the relatedness of the mythic fantastic to the historical realist elements, the irreducible possibilities of the archaeological site imply the power of the imagination, in both its dangerous and creative potential. Cal is on a quest of abjection in pursuit of the mythical fantastic, but for Chloe, the object is power and restitution, in a realm dominated by non-human, unlimited potency: "Why should I go back? I'm sick of

being small, and a girl and the youngest. Here I can do what I want” (220). Chloe’s angry rejection of family life, in which she is pejoratively ‘Little’ and ‘Girly’, entails rejection of the material and social human world, and threatens to lead her to meaningless isolation, as Queen in a world without people. The Unworld, which is a space of fantastic possibility and self-realisation, is here also one of solipsism and impersonality. The function of Avebury in this secondary world is partly, as Butler argues, an illustration of how Chloe’s identity is mapped onto the world; if she becomes Queen here, it will be in a world entirely shaped by her identity. In the story of the henge excavation, however, Avebury also functions as a depiction of how the archaeological imagination comprises ambiguity. Whilst the real, material world has previously locked Chloe in a stabilised system of meaning and insufficiency, archaeological sites such as Avebury and the henge also exemplify the human search for meaning out of irreducible mystery. The one human character who reflects such a search is Chloe’s godfather, a priest, who, alone, is able to address Chloe with implicit understanding. Fisher’s use of the archaeological site is not mediated by pre-existing theories of Avebury’s significance, such as Michell’s, but presented as an emblem of otherness and ambiguity within a landscape of fixed historical identity. It is for such ambiguity and uncertainty that Chloe is convinced to leave the solipsism of the Unworld; it is for the promise of creating other points of interrelation with otherness, as a writer, that Chloe rejects the Queenly position of power for her earthly identity.

Even Fisher’s use of folklore, though self-evidently informed and deliberate, emphasises ambiguity of interpretation. In *Darkhenge*, Annwn takes its name and nature from a magical Otherworld featured in the Mabinogion and the *Tales of Taliesin*, in which it is a strange subterranean realm with its own fairy-like

inhabitants: a human prince spends a year there, disguised as its King, Arrawn, and striving not to be lost in it afterwards. Though Taliesin himself is a strong presence in *Darkhenge*, and one of his *Songs of Annwfn* (also referenced in *Corbenic*) makes reference to King Arthur's trip into that Otherworld, this Annwn is mostly the invention of Fisher, modulated to reference ideas and figures of the unconscious. This Otherworld is certainly not the land of the dead, and time passes synchronically there and in Chloe's hospital room. The most obvious reference point would seem to be *The Battle of the Trees*, an enigmatic but allusive medieval poem contained in the longer, 14<sup>th</sup>-century *Book of Taliesin*. The latter provides epigraphs for chapters throughout much of the novel, but as soon as Rob and Vetch enter the Unworld, they switch to epigraphs from the earlier *Tales of Taliesin*, as though the point of reference for the text were moving further back in time (although this would not be signalled to the lay reader). *The Battle of the Trees* is richly symbolic and full of exciting imagery, but no conclusive interpretation has been made of its meaning; it has even been read (in a view endorsed by Robert Graves) as a druidic religious litany, encoding the letters of the Celtic *ogham* (alphabet) as their analogous tree. Fisher refers to this detail by titling the interludes with tree names and *ogham* letters, a device which reiterates her role in the discursive production of this fictional Annwn, distancing it from any historicism which might delimit its meaning.

By referencing and quoting from the *Tales* and *Book of Taliesin*, Fisher presents the human, material interrelation with the imaginary as primarily a textual act, a recurring motif of this novel about Taliesin and a would-be writer. The medieval texts are redolent of their history and culture, but where they describe otherness, in the form of Annwn, they are not exhaustible of meaning for modern readers, any more than an archaeological site is to its interpreters. Such usage is,

ironically, most powerful to the lay reader, for whom the mythological and druidic references connote the deeper mystery and branching possibility that Annwn represents for Chloe. Yet in that declaration of unity between antiquity, religious mysticism and images of selfhood, a direct correspondence can be traced between Fisher's use of Annwn and the castle Corbenic in Cal's novel. In both instances, the archaeological quest of the protagonists in search of a realm of pure imagination involves the search for a mystic object of antiquity, synonymous with non-human nature, which promises them a new perspective on the self, a Neo-Romanticist trope identifiable throughout this thesis.

It is significant that Cal and Chloe, as child figures, are the only figures in their narratives who attempt to achieve this union with the prelapsarian state. They rage at acts of parental failure and disown their families: their disaffection has no real relation to the wider sense of society, and other forms of opposition to authority are unexplored. In short, they are rehearsing a familiar trope of the child figure transitioning from solipsism to community identification. In addition to this, in a sense that is both Romantic and familiar from my exploration of Children's Neo-Romanticism, they are both engaged in recovering their common inheritance. There is no single objective item that will restore their stable subjectivity, even metonymically: the Grail on its own would mean nothing without the legend of Corbenic, the crown of Annwn would be meaningless without the power of Annwn. In both texts, the cultural inheritance of myth, quest and imagination (represented by a world of many parts) is the objective of the protagonists, and what it offers is a route back to a naturalised Romantic ideal of innocent, wild childhood.

What I have previously described as childlike delinquent manoeuvres are not fully embodied in Chloe's case. Instead, she is urged to adopt the role of writer by

adult authority figures, Vetch and Clare. as a mediation of stability and possibility. Vetch symbolically gifts her with the crane-skin bag of archetypal poet, Taliesin:

“It contains everything you need, Chloe.” Vetch came close.

“Words.”

“I’ve got plenty of words.”

“Not like these. These are the ogham letters of the druids, the secret runes of the trees. The Roots of language, Chloe, the seeds of story. [...]

They’re the only way we have of making others understand our lives, how it feels to be a man, a woman, a boy, a little girl. While we have them we can shape-shift, we are never trapped in our own souls, our own skin.” (306)

In the midst of a novel operating along a boundary of objective and subjective worlds, the role of writer is a *mearcstapa*-role in which she literally receives the blessing of Taliesin, folkloric boundary-haunter and mythic poet. Chloe’s adoption of the role reflects the reader’s interpretation of myth, fiction and ogham in Fisher’s novel: as Butler suggests, the reader is tantalised with the possibility that she is the author of the whole text (“Children of the Stones” 154). Cal’s narrative in *Corbenic*, however, follows a series of delinquent movements, against authority and reason, contrary to approved routes, in search of the sublime: his narrative, though, ends on an ambiguous note, suggesting the boundary-walker is not a role easily worn. Unlike Chloe, there is no textual or symbolic point of objectivity to bridge between discourses, and less sense of his own agency and freedom. Both novels end on notes of irresolution from which the reader must extrapolate meaning; as I will discuss, Fisher’s *Crown of Acorns* offers a more



satisfying sense of resolution for the reader who can relate the protagonist's narrative to ones of mythology and place construction.

As I will now explore, one of the strengths of Fisher's work is her presentation of the archaeological imagination as a way of parsing multiple forms of meaning without suggesting the need to simplify. In her work, even the most subjective experience can be seen to be informed by a mix of discourses, showing the protagonists that even their private rage or madness can have symbolic expression and therefore can connect them with something beyond themselves. As children, they not only represent a state of not-knowing but of new audiences for old tales, and in rereading an old narrative as a mix of dialogues, not a monolith, they also suggest the responsibility that comes with inheritance: the possibility of change.

#### **6.4 Interpolated Voices in *Darkhenge* and *Crown of Acorns***

##### *i. Circles of Disputation and Unity in Darkhenge*

Fisher's contributions to Children's Neo-Romanticism differ from her predecessors by focusing on the experience of the individual viewer: whilst cultural inheritance may be implicated, no wider sense of societal stabilisation or threat is involved in the archaeological imagination, as they are in previous folk revivals, hauntings and ley-markings. Indeed, the promise of inheritance is sometimes that of further, personal reckoning with otherness, religion and nature. Fisher's poetry frequently takes religious figures as its subjects, presenting them as complex, human characters; her fiction similarly invests figures out of myth (Arthurian, Celtic, pagan) with the same complexity, whether they speak idiomatically or with poetic intensity. As a result,

there is no hierarchy of significance between them and modern characters: the fantasy figures of old stories can be challenged and interrogated, while modern protagonists are able to look at their own identity as a mythological construct of their own. Readers of her richly dialogic texts are required to sift the discourse of imagination, science and religion and are rewarded with correspondences as well as conflicts.

In *Corbenic*, as argued above, the Grail quest engenders an archaeological vision which validates the imagination by renewing a mystic ritual, deliberately removing it from direct correspondences of place and then making it deeply personal and subjective. In doing so, what may appear simple (either as fantasy adventure or mental breakdown) becomes hard to distinguish in a stable way. As one of the people Cal meets suggests, “There are two sorts of life, aren’t there? The one that seems ordinary, like this, and then the reflection from it. Curved, shiny. All mixed up” (195). This description typifies the novel, which works through a series of ambiguous images and observations and reflections, but avoids juxtapositions of voices, resulting in a protagonist who voluntarily experiences multiple strange discourses and struggles to respond. In the final scene of the novel, Cal returns to the castle of Corbenic, and gains a second sight of the Grail: it is implied by his recognition of the cupbearer that she is his mother. There is no rational discourse with which to approach such a conclusion, and to some extent the novel reads as a poetic fugue, an intensifying series of poetic correspondences which destabilise fixed relations between the mind, mysticism and rationality.

Cal himself is conscious of his identity’s basis in other people, as when images of real and unreal friends walk beside him on the quest; they “were here, in some way, because he was here and they were part of him, and that was enough”

(216). Nonetheless, since Cal never speaks of his mother, does not remember her words, nor those of Arthur's men or Bran the Fisher King, they do not construct him linguistically. He remains a figure who interprets and considers such discourse, analogous to the role of the reader, without entering entirely into its world or adopting its terms. His desperate search through the famous mystic sites of Britain demonstrates the inability to find stable, material correspondences with the discourse of Corbenic castle; the narrative operates almost antithetically to such narratives of initiation as Allen's. The novel itself is built on the suspense leading up to his one question to the Fisher King, in which he must say the right thing in the right way, ventriloquizing the ideology of the Grail legend, but the challenge for Cal and the reader is to approach such ideology from a new, subjective position.

*Darkhenge* is a more overtly dialogic novel. At the centre of events is the archaeological dig run by Dr Claire Kavanagh at Avebury in which a Neolithic wooden henge is discovered, preserved by the water deposits in the local soil. The details of the dig are drawn, for the most part, from Francis Pryor's account of the discovery and unearthing of the Holme circle, a timber henge, in the wetlands of the Wash, Norfolk, in his case study of archaeological practice, *Seahenge* (2001). Like Claire's discovery, the Holme circle contained a remarkable feature: an upside-down oak tree buried in the middle. Theories have been advanced about the significance of this striking and eerie image at the heart of what was undoubtedly a religious shrine, but Pryor declares that it is impossible for us to ever make a final interpretation: "[symbols] are like that: they proclaim a great deal more than their face value alone" (275). It may be that it simply represented 'the world turned upside down', or a family emblem, or that it was a shrine to the forests themselves, venerated by adherents of a long-lost religion.

There is something of this last theory in Fisher's explicit link between the henge and the *ogham* magic of Taliesin's *Battle of the Trees*. She articulates the perspective of neo-pagan religion through a "colourful group" of individuals calling themselves the Cauldron People (20). They come to Avebury when "the charts and the stars are right ... and all the lines of power intersect" to welcome the coming of a "walker between the worlds ... with joy" (20). Though Rob's disdain initially primes the reader to disregard them, it is soon clear that the Cauldron People are onto something, and the figurehead that they conjure, Vetch, leads them to organise a siege of interested parties, including the media, to intervene in Claire's archaeological dig. They want to prevent Claire damaging the henge in her attempts to understand it: she, like Pryor's team, intends to take a section of the oak tree in order to date it by its rings, which Vetch and the Cauldron People claim is sacrilegious. This debate, which exists at the heart of archaeological practice, is presented in a sensitive, impassioned and informed manner by the author. It is a far cry from the monological rhetoric of Allen's novels, as when Tim in *The Stones of the Moon* tells David angrily, "You want to use a bit of sense before you try throwing people out of work for the sake of a stickleback – or some fairy story" but is later proven decisively wrong by events (100). Francis Pryor's team, as he explains in *Seahenge*, communicated constantly with Pagan, Druid and New Age groups who objected to interfering with the shrine. In Fisher's novel, the henge represents a connection between the modern world and an inheritance of folk tradition and belief through human shaping of the landscape. Discussion over its sanctity is complicated by a long-standing relationship between Vetch and Claire, whom Fisher makes explicit are human incarnations of mythic beings, and the sense that a wider story is playing out. Claire and Vetch's positions are seemingly

irreconcilable, representing fundamentally different interpretations of the mysterious henge excavation:

She snorted. “If the henge isn’t removed it will rot here. That’s a fact.”

“Then it must rot.” Vetch looked over at some men in suits climbing the gate.

“Death is a part of life. It comes to everything.” (150)

Whilst it undermines the discourse from Claire and the archaeological community that the wooden henge in question is, as it turns out, unambiguously magical, there are, as I will argue, further religious nuances to the discourses of science, imagination and poetry as the novel progresses.

Vetch, in turn, is the subject of discussion between Claire, Rob and Mac, a Catholic priest. His claims to be able to reach and perhaps retrieve Chloe from out of her coma bring harsh words from Mac: “No New Age bullshit, please” (135). Vetch speaks with the deeply irrational discourse of a mystic figure, and Mac’s response acknowledges this perspective whilst stating his scepticism: “You may well be eternal. But so am I. So are all of us. And yes, I know there are other worlds. Places outside this reality. We call one of them Hell.” When Vetch denies that he comes from “such a place”, he is unavoidably engaging with Mac’s specialised discourse. Mac’s response continues to modify the conversation, pushing it further away from the mystic register of the other man: “No, ... I don’t think you do. Judging by the remnants of your accent, I’d say you came from Wales” (137-8). The discussion is not purely dramatic, but establishes the relations and oppositions which hold the two men’s opposing views together in discourse. Their rhetoric embodies their power, as well as their identity – in fact, they cannot be understood as distinct from one another, but constantly interrelated, attempting to rewrite one another in new forms.

Mythic archetypes can recur in the mundane world of *Darkhenge* and cause harm: Claire tells the story of Vetch as a poet called Gwion (Taliesin's name in the sixteenth-century, mythologised telling of his biography) who seduced her as an undergraduate and ruined a promising career in archaeology by turning her away from orthodox historical accounts toward theories of the prehistoric origins of Celtic myth. She describes him as living in his own "Dreamworld", a loaded term in this novel, given that Vetch is analogous with Taliesin, for whom Annwn is a dream-world in which he is at home. No single discourse is placed in a hierarchy over the others in this novel. After the focus of the novel shifts into Annwn, the reader continues to hear Mac's perspective on events through the first person inter-chapters, at first in frustration ("A priest shouldn't be at a loss" 225), then in an ambiguous reconciliation of pagan and Christian philosophy. The structuring of Mac's narrative on the page visually anticipates the shift into a poetic form in the next inter-chapter:

"This is it. Now we pray. Your druid needs our help."

We formed a ring around her, holding each other.

A dark circle. (293)

The structuring of the book with oblique inter-chapters (and their even more obscure titles) contributes to the rich dialogism of the novel: when Chloe is unconscious, her voice permeates the text in the angry first person. We hear her resentments, fears and hopes, and correspondingly, although a prisoner of Annwn, she is seen to rhetorically dominate her captor, the King of Winter. The reader must negotiate the significance of Chloe's narrative, titled by the Celtic ogham, as a suppressed voice working in relation with Rob's perspective on the henge, the

religion of the Cauldron People and the material of the *Book of Taliesin*. In the final interlude, the register shifts out of any individual voice and fully into that of poetry:

We are a dark ring around the bed,

a forest of trees

Neither of mother or father

were we made,

not our body or our blood.

But of nine kinds of elements,

of God's fruits of Paradise... (303)

The words mirror the cultural commonality achieved by Rob and Chloe, along with the multi-applicability of myth, in a choral voice with both pagan and liturgical qualities. It forms the objective correlative of all these which, as I have already argued, typifies the Neo-Romantic sensibility. It reflects Chloe's responsibility and power as a writer to produce a discursive, irreducibly meaningful bridge between human place and its wild, ancient, imaginative other, the challenge reproduced structurally by *Darkhenge* itself, and explored hermeneutically by its reader.

ii. *Circles of Fear and Revelation in Crown of Acorns*

*Crown of Acorns* (2010) takes the overtly dialogic structural approach even further, in what is even more successfully and subtly a dialogic novel of archaeological imagination and narratives of self. The novel develops by circulating in turns

through three different strands, each with a focal character. The modern-day strand concerns Sulis, the most alike to protagonists in other of Fisher's novels: an alienated teenage girl, relocated by social services to a new pair of foster parents in the city of Bath. At a young age, she was involved in the death of a school friend, became a national figure in newspapers of the time, and now lives in fear of her friend's killer. Selecting Bath for its beauty and harmony, she takes her name from the Celtic indwelling spirit of the hot spring, an ancient patron saint of healing who was identified by Romans and merged by them with their goddess Minerva: a new identity defined by a spirit of place. Sulis takes on a fittingly appropriate job as a guide at the historic baths where she meets a new ally and comes to feel more threatened than ever.

Sulis's segments are narrated in the omniscient third person, but the other two strands, *Bladud* and *Zac*, are each in the first person and with linguistic inflections to indicate their remoteness in time. Bladud is the mythical founding father of Bath, supposedly outcast from his people due to leprosy: the story goes that he became a swineherd and infected the pigs in his care, before witnessing their healing in the medicinal waters of a spring in a remote spot on which he then founded the great city. Zac Stoke is apprentice to Jonathan Forrest, the eighteenth-century architect of a grandly ambitious King's Circus in Bath, a figure based upon the visionary architect and historian John Wood the Elder. The three strands have no overt narrative connection. Zac's strand is full of duplicity and mysterious meetings with what might be a secret druidic brotherhood, and even the death of Forrest, so that the planned construction of the Circus as a utopian, magical golden circle of houses is frequently endangered. Yet the narrative is resolved by Sulis's strand and her home with her new foster parents – in a flat in the King's Circus.



A recent biography of John Wood the Elder (Fisher's stated inspiration for Forrest) claims there is little doubt that Wood "saw himself as a Druid, and perhaps even a second Bladud" (Elliot 31). There is no evidence that he was a Freemason, except a telling reference to God as "the Great Architect" in Wood's three volume history of Bath, a bold vision of the city which proposes a new harbour and master plan of the city to regulate building (a proposal greeted with scorn by his contemporaries), as well as a radical rewriting of the city's founding myth. In this history, Bladud is King of Britain, a priest of the god Apollo, a man endowed with the gift of prophecy and, like Wood himself, an astronomer. Wood's great project, the King's Circus, completed like Forrest's project by the architect's son, may have been intended as an alchemical site or even an approximation of a stone circle in the metropolis (Wood's mapping of Stonehenge being "one of the most accurate of the time" (Elliot 88)). The Circus features a 'crown' of giant acorns, as well as a series of metopes (a sort of decorative tile) with obscure symbols that suggest nothing other than alchemical purpose, and remain as insoluble as they are irresistible.

Although Forrest himself is a relatively background figure in Fisher's novel, what we can guess at of his (and Wood's) theories of the divine magic of architecture evidently suffuse the text. The reader's task, interpreting the relation of Bladud's visions to the mysterious society Zac attempts to spy on, or the Bladud-esque antagonist Sulis believes she sees stalking her through the city, is an act of imaginative engagement with the theories of an eighteenth-century Druidic scholar, informed in every detail by what we know of Wood's beliefs, and yet never unambiguously endorsing them or making them narratively central. Multiple correspondences between the three strands compel the reader to follow inferences, irrationally and against temporality, producing a narrative, in turn, of authorship.

Forrest's writing of Sulis' life is done without words, and instead through the geometry and enigmatic decorations of the King's Circus, inhabited by Sulis and her foster-parents. As Bladud says, recalling the solitary work of founding the city: "If magic is a word for the unknown, then this was magic" (Crown 58). The reader is conscious throughout of how Sulis and indeed Forrest each produce their individual sense of identity out of intersubjective associations: recognition of themselves from others' perspectives, even across time.

The modern-day *Sulis* strand (and that with the most sympathetic characters) again follows the conventional tropes of solipsism and alienation to belonging. In a break with the tradition of Children's Neo-Romanticism, Sulis' deliberate engagement with the spirits of place is minimal (even her choice of name appears lightly chosen – it is clear from her questions about the King's Circle and the baths that she has not read deeply into her new home). At no point is she or her friend, aspiring archaeologist Josh, even suspicious that the magic of Bladud, Minerva or Forrest might be at work in their lives. The impression that something more uncanny than coincidence unites these stories is in the eye of the reader: a shadow on CCTV when the pair try and trap her stalker in the Roman baths, the sound of footsteps in the Circus when everyone is investigating Forrest's secret chamber, a strangely similar death recounted in Zac's narrative. The Sulis narrative is more concerned with the mythology of personal identity. Throughout the novel, Sulis struggles to stabilise her sense of self amidst the multiplying images of her: in tabloid photos from the time of her schoolfriend's death (reproduced in gutter press publications), in her new innocent persona in Bath, or in the letters she uncovers from her foster parents to her social worker. When she visits a bookshop and happens to find a copy of the dreaded image of her younger self, captured in the traumatic moment after the

murder, Sulis worries that Josh will recognise her, causing a new catastrophe which she sees in terms of fragile images of selfhood: “The Perfect City would fracture like a cracked mirror” (99). Later, when she believes he is behind her in the Roman Baths, she struggles to discern him from her in the obscure reflection: “Was she seeing him, or herself, or the gorgon mask up on the wall behind them both?” (189). In a later moment of terror, she feels herself disintegrating into “totally different people”, with the gap between “the Sulis she was and the Sulis they saw” (213).

In the resolution of her narrative, however, Sulis experiences a vision of the figure from her nightmarish memories of the school-friend’s death, a man who resembles Bladud (coat bunched up like wings, signs of leprosy which slowly vanish). He says that he has been reaching out to her but could only make contact here, “Because this is my place” (242). (There is room to assume he is actually talking about the King’s Circus of Jonathan Forrest, rather than the whole city of Bath.) In this episode of high drama, and a suggestion of the fantastic, this mysterious figure helps Sulis to uncover repressed memories of the death of her friend. The truth emerges in a strange dialogue:

“You fought.”

“We struggled.”

“You bit ...”

“... and kicked.”

“You pulled.”

“I screamed.” (246)

Sulis finds herself re-reading the memories of her worst experience, struggling to understand the motives of herself as an Othered figure, a figure as imaginary (it seems) as Bladud himself. She asks the vision, which could be read purely as her subjective projection, for guidance on her own identity. “*Did I kill her? Was I the stranger?*” (246). The dialogue ends with this question unanswered, and ultimately, she, like the reader, must establish their version of events from the evidence before them. She has certainly become a stranger to herself by this stage, and like a mythological being there is no solid evidence for any aspect of the story. She can only construct herself in terms of her relations to othered figures, but through the imaginative freedom of the novel, it becomes possible for one of those others to be a version of her own self. Sulis concludes the text with new aspirations to be an architect: to author the city herself, as both Bladud and Forrest do.

In all three novels, the interpolation of voices without clear hierarchies of reality or authority prompt new readings of myth, landscape and individual selfhood, and the relations between them. Together, *Darkhenge* and *Crown of Acorns* give the most sensitive representation of pagan religion and druidic history of any text covered in this thesis, alongside an informed view of archaeological practice that highlights its multiple concerns. In constructing these complex interrelations of histories in a variety of different tenors, with specialist languages (scientific, religious or poetic) tussling for dominance, Fisher gives a new mythological dimension to established narratives of selfhood. More than her predecessors, she provides signals of her protagonists’ future plans: Chloe and Rob conclude *Darkhenge* looking ahead as, respectively, a writer and an artist, while Sulis in *Crown of Acorns* has decided she will be an architect. Having participated in mythically-inflected events which only make sense as syntheses of multiple

discourses, these child figures have not merely transitioned passively from alienation to the community, but look toward engaging actively in constructing new mythologies of place and self.

### **Conclusion**

The Second Golden Age of children's literature was a perfect storm of authorial ambition and reader engagement, and the challenge of maintaining its high ideals in an era of changing attitudes to the young, and changing forms of children's culture, produced an entirely different atmosphere in children's publishing after the 1970s. Children's Neo-Romanticism could be said to have exhausted its possibilities by this time, with new subjects opening up for exploration and the uncanny landscape of Neolithic earthworks rendered familiar through copious usage in television drama. Ecological themes, pagan religious concepts and the maturation narratives of adolescence all demanded increasingly sensitive handling.

In my reading, these three novels of Catherine Fisher's represent a clear and consistent revival of the themes of Children's Neo-Romanticism, with their innate combinations of landscape, myth and fantasy and their depiction of child figures with a gift for hieratic vision. In their journeys out of solipsism, Fisher's protagonists become involved in the same fantasies of recurrence, ghosts and ancient magic as the Neo-Romantic writers of the Second Golden Age of children's literature. They produce new and insightful visions in the light of the archaeological imagination: ambiguous quests of selfhood through territories of the past which belong to the psyche rather than any specific historical moment or cultural group. They bear the

legacy of Garner et al, but utilise the images and tropes of the past in an entirely un-nostalgic manner.

## Conclusion

### Summary of the Main Points of the Thesis

In this study, I have aimed to give an alternative perspective on fantasies of the 1960s and 70s, to broaden understanding of the children's literature establishment in its Second Golden Age and explore its use of archaeological tropes in narratives of selfhood and fantasy. The place of the child, in cultural and social terms, was changing in this era, and a major concern seems to be, as I have argued, the conceptualisation of the child's agency, its interpretive ability, its development of self and identity, and its discursive relation to the figure of the adult. Jacqueline Rose proposes that the objective of the discursive exchange that is intrinsic to children's literature is to reproduce the role of a child characterised by Romanticist unworldliness, innately attuned to the natural world and the tropes of fantasy, in order to affirm the adult role as a stable emblem of societally produced authority. The children's literature establishment of the 1960s and 70s, as I have tried to show by reference to its awards and criticism, valued depictions of children's agency, as anti-authoritarian interpreters of adult discourse. The sensibility explored by this thesis exhibits this literary complexity, depicting children's reading of place as an act of correlation of a polyphony of realist, fantastic, internal and objective sorts of discourse.

Despite continually endorsing texts with a realist and progressive basis, the children's publishers, critics and gatekeepers approved of imaginative and fantastic narratives, not in escapist but decidedly literary terms. The texts explored in this thesis have been disregarded, for the most part because they belong overtly to their era; whether or not they can be objectively described as 'dated' they patently address the interests of their particular period, utilising narratives of objective child development to contextualise subjective disorientation. Through the archaeological imagination, they depict engagements with ideas of hermeneutic ambiguity, textual insufficiency, questions of heightened subjectivity and childlike spatial practice. What in some ways resembles Romanticism, I have argued, is best understood as Neo-Romanticism: the mode in which a sense of heightened self-consciousness and intersubjectivity is engendered through archaeological visions of place as both natural and constructed, both material and discursive, both human and non-human mixed together.

These novels are frequently concerned with the child being directed or manoeuvred. In de Certeauian terms, they depict adult authority's desire to institute borders through narrative and controlled movement, and to place the figure of the child in the country setting to characterise their development. Some of the values implicit in this desire are evident, as I described in my Introduction, in the 'geographer-citizen' trend in the early and mid-twentieth century, inspired by the edifying hobby of field archaeology. A chronotope of the educationally improving excursion to an historical site, immanent in the material world, persists from texts by Rudyard Kipling and "Euphan and Klaxon" (described in the introduction) to Sheena Porter and John Gordon's depiction of school trips, or Judy Allen's depiction of the manipulative Miss White. The experience, as depicted by these writers, however, is



repeatedly influenced by the character of archaeological practice as fundamentally one of ambiguity, intrinsically incorporating the imagination. If, when directed to, these protagonists respond to landscape at all, it is rarely with innate feelings of identification, and more often in recognition of its ruined human features: respectively, the imminently flooded valley or long-lost camp, the remains of the Green Man earthwork or a first sensing of haunting energies, or the unfathomable illusions of the mysterious Aquarius. William Mayne's *It* (1977) reads almost like a disturbing parody of Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906): when Alice encounters an ancient spirit of place, it attempts to direct and induct her in matters of the remote past, but the character of the induction is malign. Where Puck instilled Dan and Una's sense of British identity, Mayne's Alice feels her own identity wearing away. The concept of a spirit of place such as a fairy, ghost, or magic circle, the tropes reproduced faithfully from tales of British folklore, features in instances throughout this corpus as a discourse of its own, marking the boundaries, temporalities and histories of place.

The archaeological theme presents children as actively interpreting and correlating multiple forms of discourse in order to satisfyingly interpret, and accommodate themselves within, place. Alice's understanding of 'It' comes through her correlation of multiple discourses, all of which are involved in constructing not only the identity of her village but the place of authority, church and folkloric history embodied in it. Likewise, the protagonist of *Earthfasts* (1966), Keith, has to correlate his own experience, local history, Arthurian legend and scientific discourse in order to resolve the disturbances in his own. Other protagonists in these novels perform similar acts of interpretation and creation in order to understand and 'earth' the powers arising from the past: the children in John Gordon's *The House on the Brink*

(1970) bring together multiple perspectives on the bog oak Thing that is at large in the fens, understanding it materially, historically and in the Manichean terms fantastically imbued on it by another character. In *The Stones on the Moon* (1975), Judy Allen dramatizes an eleventh-hour act of the archaeological imagination, in which multiple forms of data are synthesised to understand and manage a site of power from prehistory. Only in her fantasies, of the late 1970s, does the material ancientness of landscape lose some of the disorientating, teasing, irresolvable sense of prehistoric mystery that it connotes throughout the rest of my corpus, a space in which the fantastic is at liberty to play without reducing the hermeneutic complexity of the text's overall polyphony.

As well as dramatizing acts of correlation, these texts frequently explore ambiguities of discourse, challenging the reader to interpret the text's fantastic, folkloric and historical constituents. The use of the fantastic, and its relation to folkloric 'spirits of place' (as described above), is one of many means of foregrounding the textuality of these novels and presenting its hermeneutic instability. The textual ambiguities of Gordon's novels and those of Mayne, to different degrees, destabilise readers' interpretations of image, character, dialogue, and even expectations of genre. Throughout these novels, including the more conservative fiction of Porter and the more radical textual strategies of Fisher, textual discourse itself is presented as insufficient to reproduce the highly subjective experiences engendered through ancient landscape.

Throughout these texts, conventional narratives of selfhood, from positions of solipsism to socialisation, are interrupted. In Sheena Porter's novels, moral dilemmas often provide a sense of the strangeness of self, but this sense is exaggerated in *Nordy Bank* (1964), when Bron becomes afraid of her own potential

to mutate or regress emotionally. Most overtly, in Mayne's novels, the confusion of discourses around characters highlights characters' awareness of stratified aspects of self, over which an objective identity struggles to retain control. In Gordon's novels, identity (and particularly class identity) is depicted as tied to place; archaeological stratification of place leads to the sense of identity as an artificial construction, and adolescence as a liminal position from which to regard and depart from it. Gordon's pragmatic sense of place is reflected in his protagonists' physical agency, moving in secrecy, in darkness, toward mystery and against rationalism, both in contradiction of adult authority and in exploration of landscape's rich archaeological meaning.

It is the combination of such delinquency and agency with discursive fluency as characteristic of childhood that I read as the legacy of the Second Golden Age in the Children's Neo-Romanticism of Fisher. Fisher's texts invite their readers to explore the ambiguous relations of the fantastic and the folkloric, the historical and the personal. In their accounts of ancient landscape's innate meaning, they do not promise textual stability but rich possibility. The archaeological tropes, most overt in *Darkhenge* (2005) and *Crown of Acorns* (2010), suggest the mode of discursive ambiguity in which they are to be read: accounts of selfhood, myth, legend and even architecture. They are, as I have argued, in the same tradition of writing of as different a text as *Nordy Bank*: the experience of the alienated child narrated through their imaginative exploration of discursive place, with rich discursive ambiguity addressed to active, imaginative readers for whom textual identification is never rendered straightforward.

### Some Concluding Statements

The perspective I have offered on the children's literature establishment of the Second Golden Age is not always one of radicalism and innovation. Indeed, a self-consciousness over the ideals and identity of the children's novel, and its readers, runs through the narrative of award-giving in this study, illustrated by the initial conservatism of the Carnegie and, seemingly in reaction against it, an increasingly marked preference for realism, culminating in the controversy over Melvin Burgess' *Junk* (1996) and its distinctly mature subject matter. The initial critical admiration for subtle, literary texts by Porter, Mayne and Gordon, and the lack of attention for such fantasy novels as *The Dark is Rising* (1973), also form part of that self-consciousness, and (apart from Mayne) those authors' displacement from canons of children's literature after the 1970s suggests the important role played by an individual emphatically excluded from the establishment: the child reader. Yet the reader's role is recognised and accentuated in texts throughout my corpus, from the intertextual play of Bron's copy of *Warrior Scarlet* (1958), to language play in *It*, the hermeneutic teasing throughout *The House on the Brink*, and even the book recommendations, implicit and explicit, in Judy Allen's novels. The increasingly subtlety with which child roles are dialogically linked to the authority figures who govern their sense of place finds, perhaps, its most complex and rewarding form in the work of Catherine Fisher. In *Crown of Acorns*, a sophisticated mix of discourses is entrusted to the reader to draw together, with a stratified identity at its centre, looking out on the city of Bath, reading her own archaeological narrative of the city without diminishing the innate mystery and unknowability of ancient landscape, or

selfhood. This continuity of reader acknowledgement defines the radicalism and subtlety of the Second Golden Age in my view, emphasised by the richness of many texts considered by this corpus.

In addition to deepening somewhat our understanding of the Second Golden Age, I have sought in this study to take the long-disputed, valuably strange category of Neo-Romanticism into previously unexplored uses. In recent years, a new appreciation of post-war artistic innovation (in the form of Alexandra Harris' *Romantic Moderns* (2010), as well as major exhibitions of Paul Nash, British Neo-Romantic Art and Classicism in Modern British Art at Tate Britain, Bucks County Museum and Pallant House respectively, among others) has signalled an overdue rehabilitation of Neo-Romanticism's idiosyncratic values. Its complexity seems more germane to the innovations, and sense of tradition, of this corpus than the more popular Gothic, Rural Fantasy or Folk Horror. I have theorised its ideological and aesthetic tenets, to attempt to explore what it means to write in a sensibility conventionally associated with visual media, surrealism and images of non-human landscape. In my view, its application to these texts of the 1960s and 70s indicates a deeper concern with themes of selfhood and perception than has been acknowledged in works produced within the shadow of wartime.

Kimberley Reynolds suggests, in *Radical Children's Literature* (2007), that unfashionable approaches to literature can be and have been adopted, or harboured, off the radar in the field of children's literature, where they are experimented with and recuperated for future use. The value of Reynolds' argument (with its own debt to Dusinberre's *Alice to the Lighthouse*, 1987) is not only that it acknowledges the literary qualities of children's literature (and in turn its readers), but that it deepens our appreciation of the place of children's literature within wider literary production,

without homogenising its practice and power. It preserves the special category of children's literature as a liminal viewpoint, capable of sifting and even playing with multiple forms of discourse and media, acknowledging a wider continuum beyond its borders and a sense of tradition inside them. In this, perhaps, there is a thematic link between the aims of this study and the particularity, if not (in my view) 'impossibility', of literature for children.

### **Some Limitations of this Study**

In terms of the Second Golden Age, and indeed other aspects of post-war British children's literature, this study is of course only a very partial approach to exploring its identity. As described in the introductory chapter, my aim to explore this particular trend and sensibility required me to select authors who met a series of conditions. Fine novels of a distinctly Neo-Romantic sensibility, which did not meet those conditions or were in some way atypical of their author's main output, had to be excluded which would have given new perspectives on those recurring themes. Janni Howker's *The Nature of the Beast* (1985), Diana Wynne Jones' *Fire and Hemlock* (1985), Josephine Poole's *Moon Eyes* (1965) are just three examples of texts which might have been valuable to the study. Likewise, the strict parameters imposed on the study ruled out some interesting texts by my four Second Golden Age writers, which might have confused my line of argument through inclusion. William Mayne's sequels to *Earthfasts* take some surprising directions, whilst John Gordon's *The Edge of the World* (1983) is, in my opinion, one of his most rewarding novels on children's attitudes to place.

### Potential for Further Research

A snapshot or a microcosm, a cross-section, certainly of the flourishing Neo-Romantic bohemia in London, could be found by glancing at the inhabitants of 77 Bedford Gardens, on Camden Hill. In 1946 Colquhoun and MacBryde were still living on the first floor, as they had since 1942, when John Minton had intermittently used No. 77 as a studio. Above them lived Ronald Searle, the graphic artist and Kaye Webb, Art Editor for *Lilliput* and patroness, through the magazine, of Bill Brandt, Minton and other new illustrators who were also visitors to No. 77, such as Susan Einzig. (Mellor 58)

Despite the undertone of gossip, there is something irresistible about the image of the young Kaye Webb, in due course to be one of the most energised and influential players in the Second Golden Age, living almost literally on top of major participants in the Modernist and, explicitly, Neo-Romantic art world of the 1950s. Mellor also mentions Webb's near-neighbours, established avant-garde artist Jankel Adler and young novelist John Christopher, later author of the 'Tripods' sequence (1967-88) and the 'Sword of the Spirits' trilogy (1970-72). Partly it hints at the under-explored influence of illustration on that era; Susan Einzig, mentioned here, was a colleague of Minton, a Neo-Romanticist artist, and the original illustrator of Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). Mostly it is a useful reminder that the ostensibly separate worlds of high art and children's fiction were produced in a continuum rather than a vacuum. From 1961 onward, the most influential and prolific children's publisher in the UK (publishing Garner, Cooper, Mayne, Gordon and Allen) was run, not by a children's librarian or a publishing habitué, but a figure with strong links to

and interests in modern art and literature and, in Mellor's term, "Neo-Romantic bohemia" (58).

Tempting though such anecdotal and biographical material is, I have aimed for what seems the more productive approach, arguing for textual evidence of receptivity to modernist art forms. However, there is certainly scope for archival and biographical research which explores the discourse of children's publishing editors and creatives during this period.

As previously noted, critics have been either too tentative or too free in associating works of fiction with the field of Neo-Romanticism. I hope that my theorisation of Neo-Romantic writing might be useful in further exploration of this field, to energise future readings of John Cowper Powys and Herbert Read, among others. As the nature writer Robert Macfarlane observed recently in *The Guardian*, fascination for the countryside's immanent power has undergone a revival of late, and a "loose but substantial body of work is emerging that explores the English landscape in terms of its anomalies rather than its continuities, ... that locates itself within a spectred rather than a sceptred isle" ("The Eeriness of the English Landscape"). Among works by hauntological musicians The Owl Service, and film-maker Ben Wheatley, Macfarlane highlights such distinctive modern writers as Paul Kingsnorth, Melissa Harrison and Helen Macdonald, and their accounts of the strange, inspiring, ancientness of landscape. In support of Reynolds' argument and, I believe, that of this thesis, Macfarlane associates this field of work with particular highlights in the Second Golden Age of children's literature. The novels of Garner and Cooper, he says, are "[v]ital to the modern moment ... Once read, these novels are hard to forget. They lodge and loom in the memory." There is a richly rewarding field awaiting exploration, reflecting the past and the acute present moment, and its name is Neo-Romanticism.



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