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**Narratives of Isolation: Space, Place, and the  
Solitary Girl Child in Late Nineteenth-Century  
Art and Literature**

**Deborah Jane Rees**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sussex

January 2021

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## Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Lindsay Smith for her unwavering support throughout the writing of this thesis. Her scholarly advice and guidance have been invaluable, whilst I will be forever grateful for her kindness and understanding during challenging and difficult times.

Lindsay is one of a number of University of Sussex staff who inspired my studies when I returned to education as a mature but nervous undergraduate. I was fortunate to find an interdisciplinary approach to English Literature at Sussex, and my thanks must also go to Vincent Quinn, Jenny Bourne Taylor, and Catherine Packham, for their enthusiasm and encouragement.

I would also like to thank the staff of Sussex's School of English, especially Pam Thurschwell, Hannah Field, and Sara Crangle, for generous and encouraging readings of my thesis during its years of completion. In her administrative role for the School, I am also very grateful to Laura Vellacott for her support and professionalism before, during, and after a difficult period of intermission. The support of The Doctoral School and their Researcher Development Programme has been most helpful.

My research has been aided by a number of librarians, archivists, and curators, both in the UK and abroad. Special thanks go to Katie Boyce and her team at the Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering, and Anne Gerard-Austin at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Both made me most welcome and I am grateful for their help and encouragement.

I am very grateful for the generous funding I have received from the University of Sussex's Director of Doctoral Studies, and the award of Sussex's McCarthy Bursary, as well as funding from the British Association for Victorian Studies.

Thank you to my friends and family who have looked on, bemused, as I became the perpetual student, but who have encouraged and supported me. My dear friends, Fiona, Berni, Carmel, and Ann have been unwaveringly enthusiastic of my studies, and I am grateful for their love and belief in me. My own children, Katie, Dominic, and Matthew have never questioned my absorption in my work and have embarked on their own personal careers; I am very proud of them all. Becoming a grandparent during the final months of my studies has brought its own delights.

My own parents, Tom and Florence Keefe, both died during the latter years of this thesis and their loss is incalculable. They supported me when I first returned to study, and were a constant source of love and enthusiasm throughout. Neither had received any opportunity for further or higher education themselves, and yet were unfailingly encouraging to me. I only wish that they were here to see the completion of my work. I miss them dreadfully.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Mark. He has been a source of constant support, emotionally, financially, and as technology expert. His unswerving and sincere faith in me has sustained the completion of this thesis, whilst his perpetual readiness to help solve my numerous technical deficiencies has proved invaluable. It is to him that this thesis is dedicated. I hope I have made him proud.

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Deborah Jane Rees

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the environmental experiences of isolation and solitude in literary and visual representations of girlhood in the 1890s and the influence of both upon changing notions of childhood, family, and selfhood in the period. The fictional girl figures I propose demonstrate how the experiences of isolation (as either an imposed or chosen condition of retreat), and solitude (the resulting state of being alone), intrude upon childhood to manifest a radical new female experience within specific environmental contexts. I consider the places of the home, the rural world, and the urban cityscape as sites of performance, where the space of the environment produces prescriptive role-playing necessitated by an obligation to conform to societal and cultural expectation. Girlhood isolation within these sites, I argue, heightens perceptions, highlights conformities, and perpetuates a revaluation of personal needs and desires that results in self-determination and fulfilment.

I contend in the thesis that particular fictional figures and narratives of isolated young girls emerge historically at precisely the time that understandings of fixed gendered places and performances are in a state of fluidity. In these circumstances such fictional girls acquire a liberating space in which to develop, and the agency with which to define themselves in contradistinction to their parents, their peers, and the expectations of late nineteenth-century society. Henry James, Sarah Grand, Stephen Crane, and the neglected British artist, Thomas Cooper Gotch, acutely observed such connections between girlhood and autonomous behaviours, and their creative responses to the emergence of what I read as a ‘new childhood autonomy’ are thus intrinsically linked to each other and with this defining period of change.

The growth of child psychology as a specific branch of mental science and a newly-established academic discipline at the fin de siècle begins to explain the significance of the period’s attempts to capture the ‘voice’ of the child, and the significance of such studies in articulating girlhood as an emancipatory force for radical change. The thesis also questions the connection between these fictional images and texts and the turn-of-the-century preoccupation with childhood development and experience expressed in a number of non-fiction works.

## Illustrations

Dimensions, where available, are given in centimetres, with height before width.

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- 4.1 Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Exile: 'Heavy is the Price I Paid for Love'*, 1930, oil on canvas, 62 × 53 cm, Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering



## Introduction

This thesis explores literary and visual representations of girlhood at the Victorian fin de siècle, and the significance of these figures in expressing the period's changing notions of childhood, family, and selfhood within an environmental context of isolation and solitude. The title of the thesis specifically incorporates both these terms of detachment and disconnection that have, in the year of an international pandemic, become ubiquitous in our global consciousness, although now, as always, each experience of isolation and solitude is unique. For some, isolation is a choice, a way to retreat from society and to disrupt the familiar in order to reset and restart, to begin anew. Retrospection and introversion can result from a slowness that isolation can bring, when perceptions are heightened, and even routine behaviours become sources of inspiration.

Yet for many, isolation is a condition imposed on them, by geographical, political, or biological factors. It can mean financial difficulty, restricted resources, and have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. Collective isolation and its association with sickness, infection, and public health that has come to dominate 2020/21 has its etymology, interestingly, in 1890, when it was first used to convey the 'cutting off' (of an infected person or place) from all contact with others.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, isolation's connection with solitude also dates back to the nineteenth century when the meaning of solitariness conveyed a sense of being detached or separate from other things or persons, and unconnected with anything else. The term too, carried both positive and negative connotations, for to be solitary, the OED tells us, was 'to stand alone; not accompanied or paralleled in any way; of being sole or unique.'<sup>2</sup>

I use both terms in the title and throughout the thesis, but not because they are necessarily interchangeable. Rather, I argue that the fictional girl figures I propose demonstrate how the experience of isolation (as both an imposed or chosen condition of retreat), and solitude (the resulting state of being alone), intrude upon childhood to manifest a radical new female

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<sup>1</sup> 'isolate, v.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020, <[www.oed.com/view/Entry/10081](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/10081)> [accessed 16 October 2020].

<sup>2</sup> 'solitary, adj.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020, <[www.oed.com/view/Entry/184311](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/184311)> [accessed 16 October 2020].

experience. For although both terms, isolation and solitude, emerged in the fin de siècle as a means to denote, as now, notions of quarantine and incarceration, this thesis reads the experience of isolation, and ensuing solitude, in selected texts and images of the 1890s as empowering. I contend that the fictional figures and narratives of the isolated young girls I explore, emerge historically at precisely the time that understandings of a fixed *paterfamilias* and its resulting gendered places and performances are in a state of fluidity. The advent of the New Woman, a ubiquitous preoccupation accompanying the threats posed by effeminate masculinity and homosexuality, notions of societal collapse, and the breakdown of previously accepted standards and hierarchies, all serve to leave the place of the girl child, her position in society, her ‘narrative’, in a cultural wilderness. If, as I argue, the girl child can no longer be defined within the apparent gendered types of the previous generation as a quite specific entity within familial space and place, and if the movement of the fin de siècle brings forth the potential for new roles and new understandings of a hitherto fixed identity for adults, the girl child cannot but be left in a state of isolation, in a space and place of flux of her own. In these circumstances of disruption and retreat, the fictional girls of this thesis, I contend, acquire not only liberating spaces in which to develop, but also the agency to define themselves in contradistinction to their parents, their peers, and the expectations of late nineteenth-century society, anticipating the preoccupation with ideas of the self that are more readily associated with Modernism. A number of writers and artists of the 1890s, I argue, acutely observed these connections between girlhood and autonomous behaviours, and their creative responses to the emergence of what I read as ‘a new childhood autonomy’<sup>3</sup> are intrinsically linked to this defining period of change.

In childhood there are limitations, boundaries, and expectations ingrained in the material fabric of any environment that culturally and historically determines the acceptable behaviours of those that perform therein. This is why the childhood environments of home, the

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<sup>3</sup> I use this phrase to describe both the desire and quest for self-fulfilment demonstrated by the fictional children of this thesis. These children, I argue, disengage from the traditional expectations of their familial and familiar environments to pursue new relationships defined not only by their distancing from nineteenth-century convention, but also, significantly, by their benefit to the individual child.

rural or ‘natural’ world, and the city streets dictate the direction this thesis takes. Child segregation from a family or peer group has repercussions for the relationship any child has with their material surroundings. The traditions of gendered familial roles, hierarchical restrictions, and class distinctions, as this thesis argues, influence the relationships developed and sustained within these three environments. But I consider these places as sites of performance, where the space of the environment produces prescriptive role-playing necessitated by an obligation to conform to societal and cultural expectation. Isolation within these sites, I argue, heightens perceptions, highlights such conformities, and perpetuates a revaluation of personal needs and desires that results in self-determination and fulfilment.

In the first instance, this thesis will question how fictional architectural frameworks articulate the movement of childhood growth and how girlhood understands and responds to an environment as a replacement for human contact. If architectural space and place are, as I contend, themselves social and ideological constructs that dictate acceptable behaviours and activities, how does isolation therein defamiliarise these conventions? But I also question the connection between these fictional images and texts and the turn-of-the-century preoccupation with childhood development and experience expressed in a number of non-fiction works published in the same period. The definition of the child is encumbered with the weight of preconceptions of what it means to be a child, with the weight of historical, societal, and cultural expectation determined, in the nineteenth century, by gender, class, and hierarchical chronology. The disturbance of this role and its regulating patterns at the *fin de siècle*, coupled with the growth of child psychology as a specific branch of mental science and a newly-established academic discipline, begins to explain the significance of the period’s attempts to capture the ‘voice’ of the child. Do these fictional representations of childhood of the 1890s reflect the emerging interest in studying ‘the mind of the child’ or are *fin-de-siècle* children of artistic and literary fiction framed as mere fallout from adult environmental experience and discourse? In close readings of both fictional and non-fictional representations of child solitude, I consider the significance of alienation from the hackneyed tropes of familial conformity, and

the contribution of this detachment toward a sense of self-determination at the end of the nineteenth century.

### **The Legacy of Romanticism**

In the introduction to her seminal work on child development in literature, science and medicine in the Victorian period, Sally Shuttleworth reminds us that: ‘The figure of the child [...] lies at the heart of nineteenth-century discourses of gender, race, and selfhood: a figure who is by turns animal, savage, or female, but who is located not in the distant colonies, nor in the mist of evolutionary time, but at the very centre of English domestic life.’<sup>4</sup> This centrality of the child to adult discourse had its origins in the eighteenth century when emerging structures of middle-class family life were developing new social spaces and places for childhood, and more significantly, when the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau laid the foundations for Romantic conceptions of the child.<sup>5</sup> Rousseau’s desire was to arrest childhood development, and to ensure that a child stayed a child for as long as ‘nature’ intended. As Shuttleworth observes, ‘Rousseau’s child is a child of nature in two senses: he is to be brought up in the countryside, away from corruptions induced by the accelerated forms of learning created by social and city living, but he is also to be raised according to the laws of development laid down by nature.’<sup>6</sup> In advocating distancing, isolating, from both ‘social and city living’, Rousseau laid the foundations for the Romantic cult of the child. Such fixation upon, the obsession with, producing and naturalising the figure of ‘The Child’ was shared by William Wordsworth and many of his contemporaries. As an object of male fascination and of a nostalgic yearning for a state that could never be reclaimed, ‘The Child’ of the Romantic text became an essential being, represented in all places and at all times as the same, interchangeable and archetypal. The Romantic child represented a singular ideal free from the imprint of their culture, and instead imbued with a ‘natural’ undifferentiated life force, unmarked by time, place, class, or gender.

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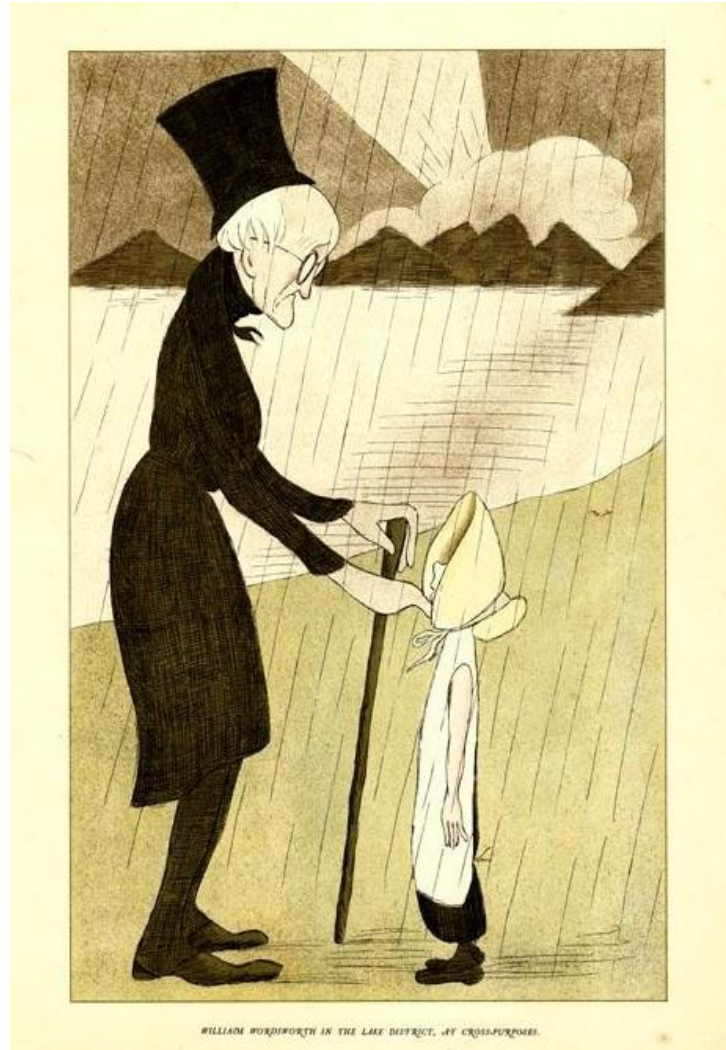
<sup>4</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. by Barbara Foxley (first published 1762; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 5.

Such essentialising Romantic discourse attributes the authority of nature to the child who is a figure of natural law, of archaic being from time immemorial, and of lawful evolutionary development.<sup>7</sup>

In the preface to her study of four Romantic writers and their ‘fixation’<sup>8</sup> on childhood, Judith Plotz offers us Max Beerbohm’s caricature of ‘William Wordsworth in the Lake District’ from a 1904 edition of *The Poet’s Corner* (figure 0.1). Her study of the fascination of



**Figure 0.1.**

Max Beerbohm, ‘William Wordsworth in the Lake District, at Cross-Purposes’ (Illustration from *The Poets’ Corner*, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1904)

<sup>7</sup> See for example, William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, first published in 1794, William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, whose origin was in a two-part version of the poem composed in 1798-99 (a longer version was published in 1805, whilst a much-revised work was published after the poet’s death in 1850), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight’, first published in 1798.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. xii.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, and De Quincey for the figure of the child through the various figures of *The Child* in their own work, expands into a study of the figure of the adult, male writer who is self-defined and given a vocation by a commitment to childhood, a fixation, that Plotz tells us, ‘secures the vastly amorphous category of childhood in a single ideal form of an uncannily beautiful child.’<sup>9</sup> Plotz wonders about the focus on isolated children in an evacuated rural space, and acknowledges the ‘comic creepiness’ of Beerbohm’s image that defamiliarises the familiar phenomenon of such fixations on the child figure as the embodiment of eternal youth and fullness of being: ‘Such relentless focus’, she says, ‘on an unchanging child forever fixed in childhood is an important Romantic trope.’<sup>10</sup> Indeed, such uncanny fixity on arrested beauty fascinated each of the writers treated in her book. For the mental qualities attributed to childhood are those befitting a solitary creative genius who, in isolation from human society, is capable of forming unitary visions of a world instinct with meaning.<sup>11</sup> Within the Romantic discourse of essential childhood, the mind of the child is set up as a sanctuary or repository ‘of valuable but socially-endangered psychological powers: idealism, holism, vision, animism, faith, and isolated self-sufficiency.’<sup>12</sup> It is through these powers of consciousness that the solitary child of Romantic discourse becomes the symbolic representative of the creative mind and the vault of creative power, to be reclaimed retrospectively by the adult self.

Beerbohm’s image, then, we are led to conclude, is his personal reflection on Wordsworth’s fixation upon the child figure, some fifty years after the death of the poet, but more widely, it offers a retrospective revaluation of the appropriation of that figure for Wordsworth, and indeed, for any Romantic poet’s own means. For the image throws up some disturbing but enlightening questions and observations in relation to the shifting understandings of Romanticism at the turn-of the-century. In a drab and unforgiving landscape on the bank of a dolorous lakeside scene two figures stand duel-like, the interrogating adult and stupefied child, the tall, overreaching male and the small, pathetic girl child, whilst an intense vertical rain

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<sup>9</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. xii.

<sup>10</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. 13.

washes over them both. Plotz's reading of the two figures is astute and raises a whole series of questions about how and why elderly Romantic writers might look fixedly at little girls and boys: 'Why', she asks, 'are there only two of them present? Why is there no human society? Doesn't the child have playmates? Doesn't the adult have a family? Why are they standing around in the rain instead of going home?'<sup>13</sup> My concerns emerge from Plotz's reading and question the balance of power in this image and the inclusion of an isolated, somewhat dazed girl child in this desolate and bleak space. Wordsworth is almost twice the height of the child, and in his somewhat menacing black garb, he dominates the picture. One of his large, elongated hands grasps a cane whilst 'the other points or pokes at the child about at the level of her jugular vein.'<sup>14</sup> In her detachment from family, from her peer group, from any kind of 'appropriate' company, Beerbohm's unseeing child – her face is turned upwards to the adult but her eyes are hidden by her bonnet – is 'made uneasy by a peculiar adult fixation.'<sup>15</sup> She is utterly beholden to him and her submission and subsumption make for uncomfortable viewing. For Beerbohm's caricature illustrates the strangeness of such an appropriation of the child figure by the male poet. His image suggests that in arresting and invoking childhood as a permanent state to provide both subject matter for their poetry and 'meaning for [...] life',<sup>16</sup> some Romantic writers construct childhood for their individual purpose and simultaneously deny the identity of the individual child.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Beerbohm's caricature draws attention to the denial of the child's own self-worth: not only through Wordsworth's domination but also through an idealisation of childhood as a separate but universal sphere of being that provides fodder for the artist. For in

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<sup>13</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. xiii.

<sup>14</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. xv.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth recalling that as early as 1807, some of Wordsworth's contemporaries had expressed their dismay at the direction that his later work was taking. His determination to make poetry out of the vernacular had led an anonymous critic in *Monthly Literary Recreations* to describe his verse as 'not simple, but puerile', whilst his previous political radicalism appeared to have turned into a mouthpiece for Church and State conservatism. Beerbohm's caricature is not a young, radical Wordsworth, but a top-hatted Victorian Wordsworth, an elderly figure of the establishment, whose position 'at cross-purposes' suggests puzzlement and distress rather than enchantment at the child before him. At the time of its publication in 1904, Beerbohm's book of twenty caricatures depicting notable poets from the past was received as 'terribly clever' and 'designed admirably' with 'grace, imagination, and sympathy' [See an untitled review in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 5.15 (June 1904), p. 324 (one page)]

her oversized bonnet, bare arms, white pinafore, and disguised features, Beerbohm's girl child calls to mind Helen Allingham's paintings that I discuss in Chapter 2, and is a nod to the sickly-sentimentalised child of the earlier Victorian period but with a wry eye that in caricature acknowledges the illusion and falsity of just such depictions.

Nevertheless, the Romantic cult of the child as explored by Plotz – as an object of adult male fascination and nostalgic hankering for a state that could never be reclaimed – continued well into the Victorian period, and significantly, for the purposes of this thesis, reached its peak in the 1890s, 'when bands of self-proclaimed "child-lovers" sought to chronicle the outpourings of the childish imagination.'<sup>18</sup> The intellectual climate of the fin de siècle contributed afresh to this new concept of the child and childhood, for in that period there was a growing awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences as determinants of adult behaviours and habits of mind.<sup>19</sup> The often-accepted simplistic view of the child yielded to the probing analytic impulse of both the scientist and the creative mind, and the child emerged as a vessel of consciousness to be explored in depth.<sup>20</sup> From the Romantic texts, the late Victorians were able to piece together a new discourse of childhood that produced and naturalised 'The Child' as both a normative human being and a fetishised sublime object.

At a time when existing concerns about the hereditary transmission of physical and mental traits, and fears of the long-term decline in families and society took on a new significance, the concept of degeneration had taken hold as a widespread explanation of cultural and societal divisions.<sup>21</sup> As early as 1867, Henry Maudsley, one of the most prominent late

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<sup>18</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 7. The final decades of the nineteenth century saw not only a huge growth in literature for children but an equivalent growth of interest in finding ways to scientifically study the mind of the child. The 1890s saw the foundation of child study movements both in the UK and the USA. Some of the major proponents whose scientific contributions I consider in this thesis include, James Sully, Granville Stanley Hall, and Alice Woods.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Leonard Guthrie's first book-length study of child psychiatry, *Functional Nervous Disorders in Childhood* published in 1907 but based on lectures delivered in the 1890s. Guthrie suggests it is not only adult happiness but also adult mental health which is determined by childhood experience.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, James Mark Baldwin's *Mental Development in the Child and the Race: Methods and Processes* (1895) and George John Romanes's *Mental Evolution in Man: Origin of Human Faculty* (1888).

<sup>21</sup> See for example, William Greenslade's *Culture, Degeneration and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Daniel Pick's, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder c.1849-c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and the collection, *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End* edited by Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).



nineteenth-century psychiatrists had voiced the concern that mental instability in parents posed a threat not only to those adults and contemporary society but also to future generations, as ‘the acquired ill of the parent becomes the inborn infirmity of the offspring. It is not that the child necessarily inherits the particular disease of the parent [...] but it does often inherit a constitution in which there is a certain inherent aptitude to some kind of morbid degeneration, or a constitution destitute of that reserve power necessary to meet the trying occasions of life.’<sup>22</sup> This stress on inheritance and the transmission of acquired traits, the concern over female emancipation, education and sexuality, and effeminate masculinity and homosexuality, contributed to the growing centrality of the child in late nineteenth-century discussions of individual and social development. For the child was perceived as facing both backwards and forwards, ‘recalling an earlier stage of human development and representing the legacy of the present to be transmitted to future generations, and this consciousness permeated the analysis of children’s physical and mental health in educational and psychological theory.’<sup>23</sup>

So it is that in the late nineteenth century, the child grows in symbolic power for all that it enables in adults, including the promise of social hope without the risk of actual societal and political engagement. In spite, and maybe because of, the fears of the powerful influence of heredity, the growing field of late nineteenth-century child psychologists advocated that a child’s growth should be carefully guarded, controlled, and monitored, but that ‘the playfulness and spontaneity of children were the key to understanding the process of human development as well as to their own future health.’<sup>24</sup> In the 1890s, the emergence of the field of child psychology gave rise to the Child Study Movement which brought together a number of disciplines and otherwise disparate groups to explore the early years of a child’s life: psychologists, evolutionary biologists, teachers, parents, and literary and artistic figures, all focused on the emerging science and interpretation of child study, but still with one foot in the

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1867), p. 204.

<sup>23</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, ‘Heredity, Degeneration, and Modern Life’, in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 287-292 (p. 289).

<sup>24</sup> Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, ‘Heredity, Degeneration’, p. 290.

Romantic landscape of the sentience of childhood.<sup>25</sup> For in the fin-de-siècle child there is potential waiting to be released, a vision of the embodiment of all triumphant past history and all future possibilities, expressed by Alexander Chamberlain at the conclusion of his 1900 text:

The child, in all the helpless infancy of his early years, in his later activity of play, in his naiveté and genius, in his repetitions and recapitulations of the race's history, in his wonderful variety and manifoldness, in his atavisms and his prophecies, in his brutish and in his divine characteristics, is the evolutionary being of our species, he in whom the useless past tends to be suppressed and the beneficial future to be foretold.<sup>26</sup>

Chamberlain's optimistic evaluation glosses over the notion of any pragmatic or psychological restraints or obstructions to ideal child development, to emphasise the role of play and childhood imagination in the evolutionary journey toward perfection. This 'highly Romanticized'<sup>27</sup> notion of childhood from the late Victorian era, so cherished and so desired, had become something to be preserved at all costs, well into the twentieth century (and beyond). The apparent disintegration of the familial, societal, and cultural universal values that seemed to construct a ubiquitous national identity could be re-established in the generation to come in the guise of the children.

The fin-de-siècle child served then a revised purpose for the adult 'child lovers'. The 'playfulness and spontaneity' of children as articulated by Chamberlain was the key to understanding the process of human development, whilst their centrality to the notion of familial stability and contentment was unquestionable. By carefully studying and managing their growth and development, the child could become the reliquary for the regeneration and renewal of the entire race.

Little wonder then that by the late nineteenth century, claims to childhood as a domain

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<sup>25</sup> As Shuttleworth observes in *The Mind of the Child*, the 'mundane, maternal chore of child-rearing here becomes, through verbal transubstantiation, synonymous with the glorious sweep of onward human progress' (p. 272), the child figure as the key to self-understanding and the guarantee of a more positive future.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Chamberlain, *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 1900), p. 464. Although at the extreme, optimistic end of child study, Chamberlain's text voices the fascination and intense focus on the figure of the child at the fin de siècle.

<sup>27</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 267.

for exploration and to Wordsworth and his contemporaries as its original explorers had become commonplace. As Shuttleworth reminds us: 'In the last decades of the century, the growth of imaginative literature for children, with its nostalgic yearning for a lost world, worked together with the new evolutionary science of childhood to redefine and validate Romantic conceptions. [...] The imaginative creations of the child were to be treasured as a form of lost wisdom.'<sup>28</sup> However, the metaphor of discovery and reclamation in the 1890s also produced strangeness and wonder where there had been familiarity. The singularity of children and the separateness of the child world began to emerge and take precedence over the notion of the 'knowable' child of innocence, nostalgia, and understanding. Childhood served a purpose in both literary and scientific discourse, as imaginary adult kingdom and as adult research institute. As imaginary kingdom, it was often figured as a lost garden paradise, presided over by a child-redeemer or child-idol. As an object of knowledge, of wisdom, rather than worship, the distinctiveness of children, or more specifically, 'The Child', became a major area for nineteenth-century scientific study. Numerous works were published on the psychology of childhood, the anthropology of childhood, the sociology of childhood, as well as an abundance of fictional literature in the second half of the nineteenth century that centred on the separate world of childhood.<sup>29</sup> Whilst the non-fiction texts delivered to adult readers reported from an 'alien' realm to aid understanding and interpretation, 'The Child' as protagonist figured powerfully in Golden Age children's literature, and certainly by the 1890s, writers of fiction for children had opened up a number of imaginary but familiar lands for their characters to enter.

Children's books from this Golden Age – that is, books written *for* children rather than those adult fictions written *about* children – are, in the main, nostalgic in their conspicuous construction of a personal golden age, rich in retrospective longing for a past not as it was, but

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<sup>28</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, the following non-fiction texts: Granville Stanley Hall's, *The Contents of Children's Minds on Entering School* (1893), Charles Darwin's, 'A Biographical Sketch of an Infant', in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* (1877), Margaret McMillan's, *Early Childhood* (1900), James Sully's, *Studies of Childhood* (1895); and the fictional texts: Lewis Carroll's, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), Charles Kingsley's, *The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby* (1862), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886).

as it might only have been.<sup>30</sup> Informed by Romanticism, these children's texts display a not dissimilar function to their informants, for their purpose is in serving an adult 'fetish.'<sup>31</sup> Setting up walls around the trope of childhood, enclosing it and locking it down, these texts demonstrate that the child of children's fiction is a construct, presented as innocent, pure, and asexual, and 'as a fetish allowing adults to disavow their own lack of completeness [...] standing outside the [...] problems of identity.'<sup>32</sup> To this end, the children's literature of the late nineteenth century exhibits a desire to enclose childhood within the frameworks of commonplace environments, a move that Michelle Phillips tells us was demonstrated by a tremendous drive to turn children inward into the security of enclosed spaces, like the home, the garden, the school, and the playground.<sup>33</sup> As emblems of protection and safe-keeping, these spaces not only offered the security of physical containment for images of childhood, but also their association for the adult was wide-reaching and psychological:

one of the most successful efforts to save and prolong childhood happened within the interior of the adult mind. Freud's notion of the unconscious, modern notions of nostalgia, and the return of the Edenic child as the "child in the midst" of a postlapsarian society are all iterations of a post-Romantic treatment of childhood that imagined the child's central psychosocial role as being somehow salvific, offering adults healing, reform, spiritual closeness, and artistic beauty.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, the images and texts of the fin de siècle supposedly created specifically for children were 'actually populated with fantasies about childhood fabricated by the grownups who wrote the narratives and the artists who drew the pictures.'<sup>35</sup> These fantasies were linked to 'a general longing for the world of the child as a reliable substitute for the perversely untrustworthy dependency of woman on man. Inevitably the adults' fantasies about the purity of the child's

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<sup>30</sup> Michelle H. Phillips, *Representations of Childhood in American Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> In this psychoanalytical context, the term is David Rudd's. See David Rudd, 'Children's Literature and the Return to Rose', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 35.3 (Fall 2010), 290-310.

<sup>32</sup> Rudd, 'Children's Literature', p. 290.

<sup>33</sup> Phillips, *Representations of Childhood*, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Phillips, *Representations of Childhood*, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 188.

mind also found expression in similar fantasies about the purity and ideal harmony of the child's body.<sup>36</sup> Dijkstra's reading is, of course, primarily concerned with the evocation of the woman as child, but his remarks resonate in their negation of the fin-de-siècle child figure as anything but mere fodder for adult identity.

### **Reconceiving the *Bildungsroman***

Too often, the identity, the 'voice' of the child is mediated through its default to this Golden Age, to the texts produced by adults for child readers, texts that repurpose the child as adult fetish in the way that the Romantics exploited childhood as a symbol of growth and regeneration for the adult self. In offering a provocative reading of Jacqueline Rose's seminal work of 1984, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*,<sup>37</sup> David Rudd rightly argues for 'a reading of the space between children and adults as dialogic and negotiable,'<sup>38</sup> a space that is well observed, I suggest, in the fin-de-siècle adult fictions of this thesis. The literary and artistic texts I consider can be understood as new formations of existing expressions, despite presenting themselves as stories about childhood created by adults. These texts differ from the *bildungsromans* of previous eras because they, like their companion artistic counterparts, are less narratives of traditional growth, and more 'portraits' of children that eschew familiar and hackneyed approaches to the child figure and their development. They explore and express novel cultural and imaginative ideas of childhood autonomy and agency that serve neither adult desires nor follow a uniformity of path to an appealing conclusion. Indeed, the world of the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman* is only held together by a set of developmental defaults and constants in which the protagonist, the narrator, the author, and the reader all believe and hold to be true. As Stephen Kern reminds us, mid-Victorian thought:

tended to divide ideas and people and actions into tight categories of

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<sup>36</sup> Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p. 188.

<sup>37</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (first published 1984; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> Rudd's 'Children's Literature and the Return to Rose' referenced by Peter Hunt, 'The Spaces between Children and Adults', in *Space and Place in Children's Literature, 1789 to the Present*, ed. by Maria Sachiko Cecire, Hannah Field, Kavita Mudan Finn, and Malini Roy (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), pp. 21-22 (p. 21).

true-false, good-bad, right-wrong; and not to recognize the mixed character of human experience. The conviction that order underlay experience was tersely expressed by that quintessential Victorian, Samuel Smiles— “A place for everything, and everything in its place.” In their homes, in their minds, in their social lives all things had a proper place.<sup>39</sup>

This shared belief was manifested in a stable social environment shaped by traditional institutions and social patterns and behaviours. The protagonist of the *bildungsroman* might rebel against these institutions and patterns during the course of the narrative, but their return to and integration into them provided the condition for the happy, or at least, conciliatory ending. Thus, the nineteenth-century novel of development had been anchored in a world of public value, universally agreed and understood by writer and reader, whilst its pattern of plot was formulated and played out depending on the changes of fortune and status of its protagonist.

The texts and images I examine see the individual retreat into a more strongly fortified and isolated private world. Breaking with the dominant tendencies of nineteenth-century childhood writing, with the Romantic exultant celebration of the ‘Cult of Childhood’ on the one hand, and the *bildungsroman* and its confident depiction of unified, lineal, prescribed development on the other, the texts and images of the 1890s that inform this thesis suggest a response to the new and emerging socio-ideological formation that amounted to a radical re-conception of the child self as idea.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, Henry James, Sarah Grand, and Stephen Crane reconceive the *bildungsroman* as the story of emancipation *from* rather than initiation *into* a limiting adult society, in the same way that the painter Thomas Cooper Gotch specifically takes the notion of the child as ‘idea’ to reimagine its place within the artistic conventions of domestic and rural space.

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 181-82.

<sup>40</sup> The concerns of the child study movements formulated in the final decade of the nineteenth century were similar to those that continue to preoccupy such studies today and include not only language acquisition and the workings of the imagination, but also the emergence of a child’s sense of self. Such studies gave rise to a number of autobiographies, fictional accounts of childhood, and studies of child psychology and psychiatry. See for example, Guthrie’s *Functional Nervous Disorders in Childhood* for ideas on social evolution and the relations between self and environment, and James Sully’s focus in *Studies of Childhood* on the French autobiography by Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d’un enfant* (1890), which questions when a child first comes into self-consciousness, into an awareness of itself as a being distinct from others.

Indeed, my thesis will provide a counter argument for the art and literature of the 1890s which critics have had a propensity to view as overwritten with ideas of decadence and degeneration, fears and psychological misgivings, manifested in the subversive adult figures of the dandy and the New Woman whose presence appeared to epitomise the breakdown of the cultural and societal certainties of the Victorian age and its familial touchstones. Without diminishing the significance of these radical, turn-of-the-century adult figures, I suggest that the well-established association of Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and the *Yellow Book* to the age, and the debates over morality, aesthetics, politics and science that we have come to associate with the period, have overshadowed and marginalised the trope of girlhood at the fin de siècle. Extensive scholarship has been undertaken on the visual iconography of the 1890s associated with the decadent movement and has focused on the visual in terms of the grotesque, the subversive, and the paradoxical, with contributions by Bram Dijkstra and Shearer West.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Tate Britain is currently showing the largest exhibition of Aubrey Beardsley's drawings for fifty years, accompanied by a number of supporting conferences, talks, and publications.<sup>42</sup> Literary decadence has also been exhaustively researched, and scholarship on the 1890s is alive with publications on Oscar Wilde, Max Beerbohm, and Algernon Charles Swinburne, whilst the place of Imperialism and Empire has been interrogated by Joseph Bristow, Robert Hyman, and R. H. Macdonald in the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson and H. G. Wells amongst others.<sup>43</sup> The politics of socialism and its manifestation in alternative utopias in works by Edward Bellamy, William Morris, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman has been thoroughly well reappraised

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<sup>41</sup> See Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity*, and Shearer West's *Fin de Siècle: Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> The Tate exhibition opened on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and was extended until 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The co-curators Caroline Corbeau-Parsons and Stephen Calloway offered an introductory talk to Beardsley's career in March 2020 at the Tate. 'AB 2020: Beardsley Re-Viewed' is a two day conference organised by Dr Sasha Dovzhyk in association with the Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies (since cancelled because of the pandemic). Aubrey Beardsley's *A Book of Fifty Drawings*, introduced by Alice Insley, and the exhibition catalogue, *Aubrey Beardsley*, edited by Calloway and Corbeau-Parsons, were both published by Tate Publishing (London) in 2020 to coincide with the exhibition.

<sup>43</sup> See for example, Joseph Bristow's *Empire Boys* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), Robert Hyman's *England's Imperial Century 1815-1914* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), and R.H. MacDonald's *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

by a number of critics,<sup>44</sup> and significant work on New Woman writers has been produced by Elaine Showalter, Ann Heilman, and Sally Ledger.<sup>45</sup> And yet, whilst these fin-de-siècle writers and image makers are understood as responding to the desires and anxieties of their time, to aestheticism and decadence, evolution and degeneration, marriage, homosexuality, and promiscuity, arguments for the 1890s as an era of anxiety in which culture and society manifested an alarmingly prevalent downward spiral have tended to eclipse both the phenomenon of contested visions of collapse, and the voice of the future generation of being, the child figure. In the literature and images of this thesis, however, it is, I argue, the neglected figure of a solitary girl child that emerges as the radical proponent of positive change and promise at the end of the century.

### Girlhood

Jennifer Sattaur's *Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*, published in 2011, is the only dedicated account that I have discovered that attempts to reconcile an understanding of the figure of the child at the end of the Victorian period with the anxieties that preoccupied society at the century's end.<sup>46</sup> As she explains in her introduction, the book 'hopes to demonstrate the ways in which some of the emergent social movements which have come to define and represent change in the *fin-de-siècle* period were inherently concerned with the ideas of childhood and parenthood and the ways in which they represented both the promise and the threat of the future.'<sup>47</sup> Although Sattaur's book makes some interesting observations, her primary concerns appear to be less with the child figure as an autonomous individual, and more with the child as symbol, as a vehicle that indicates the patterns of either positive or negative

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<sup>44</sup> See for example, John Goode's 'Gissing, Morris, and English Socialism', *Victorian Studies*, 12.2 (1968), 201-226, Matthew Beaumont's *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England 1870-1900* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), and Chris Ferns's *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> See for example, Ann Heilman's *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), and Sally Ledger's *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer Sattaur, *Perceptions of Childhood in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Sattaur, *Perceptions of Childhood*, p. 1.



societal responses.<sup>48</sup> Studies of the phenomenon of adolescence such as John Springhall's *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain (1860-1960)* and John Neubauer's *Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence*<sup>49</sup> have considered the influence of the major players in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century child psychology in the social institutions and youth movements of the period, including Granville Stanley Hall and Sigmund Freud, and both texts certainly acknowledge the contribution of the study of child psychology to the development of significant reappraisals of the child figure at the fin de siècle. However, the aforementioned studies have tended to focus on a male-directed youth movement, often referring to the rise in mass-produced imperialist adventure stories for boys and the formation of the gender-directed youth training organisations such as Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, and The Boys' Brigade.

It is my contention, however, that it is the figure of the girl child that pervades the culture of the fin de siècle as a more powerful symbol of the promises of the modern age. The weight of nineteenth-century ideology aligns the female with the dead weight of tradition and conservatism that the active, newly autonomous, and self-defining subjects of this thesis must seek to transcend. As antidotes to the many saccharine celebrations of childhood innocence and fantasy lives that appeared in the last decades of the nineteenth century and its somewhat misguided passion for childhood, the novels and images I examine are also stories of specifically female lives in a time of cultural and aesthetic change. They are stories of minds in transformation and, influenced by the ideologies of their time, they challenge the discourses of internalised girlhood to produce a number of representations that collectively question the ramifications of sanctifying, prolonging, and memorialising childhood. Through readings of some of the period's most divergent and memorable female children, I will demonstrate the profound interconnections between femininity, childhood, and advancing modernity in the late nineteenth-century social imaginary. Most notably, isolated spaces emerge as a central arena within which the autonomy and agency of the modern girl are played out. The centrality of

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<sup>48</sup> Sattaur, *Perceptions of Childhood*, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain (1860-1960)* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986) and John Neubauer, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

familial ties and identities – as mother, daughter, sister, and wife – are integral to the revaluation of new forms of selfhood and identity. The space and place of home, the bucolic environment, and the urban cityscape, often imagined as domains where ‘natural’ and timeless behaviours hold sway, are radically implicated instead in the processes of significant social change. The potential for a myriad of opportunities in the narratives of this thesis suggests that for Gotch, James, Grand, and Crane, the artistic temperament found fuller and freer expression through the persona of a strong, triumphant, isolated young woman.

In an interesting paradox, ideas of the female child figure in these texts come together as the collective constructs of the age appear to be falling apart. For although, as I have suggested, the times were fraught with political and religious strife, with cultural and societal upheavals and angst, these circumstances, as any revolutionary or historian knows, make a ripe environment for change. Despite, and indeed because of, the change and doubts that characterised the *fin de siècle*, the following chapters suggest the emergence of new voices for female childhood knowledge and understanding that appear through avenues of chaotic experience in an eclectic and disparate body of works. In considering the fears of the *fin de siècle*, I interrogate how the figure of the girl child can either be subsumed into new value systems (of which she is not a part), seek some kind of balance (and essentially remain unheard and unseen), or find a set of individual values that elevates her above the fray.

### **Studying the Child**

I have already alluded to the emergence of new structures of feeling about the child in the *fin de siècle* which were developed out of a new sensibility towards the child in society, formulated in experiments with representations of the child’s point of view, moral conscience, and psychic life. As Shuttleworth observes, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the inner workings of the child’s mind become, for the first time, ‘an explicit object of study across the cultural and disciplinary spectrum, from novels and autobiographies to psychiatric cases [...] an era which witnessed the rise of child psychology as a discipline.’<sup>50</sup> Shuttleworth’s inspiring exploration

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<sup>50</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 2.

and inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the child mind is both comprehensive and informative, and some of its pivotal observations are of significant interest to my own work and offer an important contextual framework.

In the first instance, it is important to acknowledge, as Shuttleworth does, the influence of the theorist James Sully in the arena of child study. From the 1880s onwards, the science of child study, post-Darwin and therefore based on loosely framed evolutionary assumptions, developed rapidly in both Europe, and significantly, for the purposes of this thesis, in the USA. In the UK, such studies were led by Sully, whose 1895 publication, *Studies of Childhood*<sup>51</sup> marks the institution in England of this area as a disciplinary field,<sup>52</sup> while in the USA, Granville Stanley Hall, the first president of the American Psychological Association, also focused on child development and evolutionary theory, publishing works as diverse as ‘The Contents of Children’s Minds’ (1883),<sup>53</sup> ‘Children’s Lies’ (1890),<sup>54</sup> and ‘A Study of Fears’ (1897),<sup>55</sup> and ‘A Study of Anger’ (1899).<sup>56</sup> Whilst the studies of both men were informed by evolutionary theories and by theories of recapitulation (the ways in which childhood re-enacted the forms of our ancestors, mirroring in early childhood ancestral forms of the species, both human and animal), their approaches to their studies were fundamentally different. In America, Hall had launched his research in child study with a huge survey, designed to assess and chart the contents of children’s minds. For Hall, child study demanded the application of science through statistical surveys and experimentation. Child study, he observed, marked ‘the advance of evolutionary thought into the field of the human soul.’<sup>57</sup> In this short statement, published in the 1899 edition of *The Paidologist*, the language, as Shuttleworth has observed, is both militaristic and imperialist.<sup>58</sup> It extolls the ability of science to colonise an area of study that until this point had been the territory of religion, philosophy, and literature, that is, the arts and

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<sup>51</sup> James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (first published 1895; London: Free Association Books, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Granville Stanley Hall, ‘The Contents of Children’s Minds’, *Princeton Review*, 2 (1883), 249-272.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, ‘Children’s Lies’, *American Journal of Psychology*, 3 (1890), 59-70.

<sup>55</sup> Hall, ‘A Study of Fears’, *American Journal of Psychology*, 8 (1897), 147-249.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, ‘A Study of Anger’, *American Journal of Psychology*, 10 (1899), 516-591.

<sup>57</sup> Hall, ‘Introductory Words’, *The Paidologist: The Organ of the British Child-Study Association*, 1 (1899), p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 269.

humanities. There appears to be no room in Hall's school of study for creativity and interpretation. His remarks formed part of his contribution to the inaugural journal of the British Child-Study Association (BCSA) in 1899, but his direction of study was neither embraced nor adopted by its members. For despite the fact that the BCSA had been founded in 1893 by three women teachers following a visit to Chicago where they had encountered the work of Hall, the association clearly held its own views on the appropriate approach for its members. The BCSA was more eclectic in its methods, open to the role of literary texts and contributions from educationalists and familial sources alongside the science.<sup>59</sup> This methodology was far more akin to Sully's approach to the study of the child, which favoured a far more individualised application via a variety of sources. Indeed, writing in *The Paidologist* in 1900, Sully appeared to critique Hall's statistical approach: 'You will get more knowledge of child-nature by studying one child's doll worship with something like thoroughness, than by collecting millions of scrappy observations.'<sup>60</sup> Various branches of the BCSA were initially set up in the UK, whilst the founding of the national association and its associated publication, *The Paidologist* came in 1898 and 1899 respectively.

In his role as a pioneering child psychologist, James Sully was one of the leading lights of the BCSA, whose mission statement focused 'on that one subject of surpassing interest—the bringing up of our children, the evolutionary progress of our race.'<sup>61</sup> In bringing together the work of 'child psychologists and psychiatrists, animal psychologists and biologists, teachers, and mothers'<sup>62</sup> there were, however, inevitably, a series of territorial struggles over the space and place of childhood study, focused on the converging relationship between the domestic and the professional. The hallowed space of the nursery world was obliged to open its doors to the, invariably male, world of the scientists, who were themselves embarking upon new territories in a traditionally female domain. And as Shuttleworth reminds us, despite an apparently

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<sup>59</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 269-271.

<sup>60</sup> James Sully, 'On the Observation of Some Moral Aspects of Children', *The Paidologist*, 2 (1900), p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> 'Editorial', *The Paidologist*, 1, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 272.

collaborative approach, the assigned role of mothers as first observers of their children's behaviours was, for some, a contentious one: a mother attempting, unaided, to systematically study and record her child as a scientific enterprise might not only 'pollute' such an activity through bias and interference, but also mothers would, it was suggested, be unable to accept that their own children were anything other than exceptional.<sup>63</sup> The animal psychologist Lloyd Morgan, who was to become the president of the BCSA in 1900, therefore stressed the need of animal study for understanding the child mind, to reassure mothers that 'the child passes in the course of its mental development from the lower level of animal intelligence to the higher level of human intellect.'<sup>64</sup>

Sully himself had had difficulty with the quality and practice of maternal observations in the earlier research he had conducted into what would form the first chapter of *Studies of Childhood* in 1893. He was especially keen to obtain first-hand accounts of the childish mind during the first five or six years of life from parents and teachers,<sup>65</sup> but the lack of observational training in mothers resulted, Sully argued, in an unskilled approach and unreliable conclusions.<sup>66</sup> Sully's somewhat crass attempts to negotiate the field of gender politics can be mitigated, however, by his overarching desire to obtain the greatest accuracy in results, reflected by the range of observations that he was desirous to receive which included headings such as 'Imagination and Fancy', and 'Artistic Production'.<sup>67</sup> And although firmly wedded to ideas of recapitulation, he, unlike Morgan, envisaged the infant as 'primitive' rather than 'animal', shrouded in an age of myth and imagination, which was, he argued, central to the heart of creativity, development, and intelligence:

It is because the child remembers as well as sees, remembering even while he sees, that he grows thoughtful, inquiring about the meaning and reason of this and that, or boldly venturing on some explanation of his own. And just as the child's mind must take on many pictures of things before it reflects upon and tries to understand the world, so it must collect and arrange pictures of the

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<sup>63</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>64</sup> Lloyd Morgan, 'Our Double Acrostic', *The Paidologist*, 1 (1899), pp. 47-48.

<sup>65</sup> Sully, *Mind*, 2 (1893), pp. 420-421.

<sup>66</sup> Sully, 'The New Study of Children', *Fortnightly Review*, 58 (1895), pp. 729 and 731.

<sup>67</sup> Sully, *Mind*, 2 (1893), pp. 420-421.

successive scenes and events of its life, before it will grow self conscious and reflect upon its own strange existence.<sup>68</sup>

So although Sully draws on evolutionary explanations in his accounts of childhood development, he also develops a theory of childhood imagination that celebrates creativity: consider his chapters entitled 'The Age of Imagination' and 'The Child as Artist'.<sup>69</sup>

It is important to note, however, that despite his prominence and position as the leading child psychologist of the BCSA, Sully's *Studies of Childhood* was not universally applauded, and significantly, one dissenting voice came from a woman writing, most unusually, for the authoritative and male-dominated journal *Mind*.<sup>70</sup> Alice Woods, herself a committed member of the child study movement, reviewed Sully's text, and dared to reproach him for a 'naïve and sentimentalized'<sup>71</sup> view of childhood.<sup>72</sup> Whilst Woods acknowledges the book as the 'first careful attempt' to study childhood in England on a large scale, she immediately recognises that:

Undoubtedly there are serious drawbacks to the method of treatment. The want of definite plan makes the book extremely difficult to grasp, and hence very hard to review. We rise from its perusal with a conviction that there is plenty of material here; a number of interesting facts; charming child stories, often most skilfully interpreted; but what we are to learn from it is apt to elude us. What we have to try and get at is how these studies are to help us in the future, and what light they throw on the many problems of childhood.<sup>73</sup>

It is ironic that Wood's assessment of Sully's text invokes his own criticisms of the unskilled and unscientific approach recorded by the mothers of his own studies in documenting 'charming child stories'. And far from tracing humanity back to its basic and primitive sources through impartial observation (as only men can), Woods suggests Sully and other male psychologists create the subjects they wish to discover to produce their desired results in the same way that

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<sup>68</sup> Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>69</sup> Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, pp. 25-63, and 298-330 respectively.

<sup>70</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 285.

<sup>71</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 285.

<sup>72</sup> Alice Woods, 'Review of James Sully, *Studies of Childhood*', *Mind*, 5 (1896), 256-261.

<sup>73</sup> Woods, 'Review of James Sully', p. 256.

mothers were wont to manipulate the study of their own children through bias and interference. The subjects, however, learn to answer back, and Woods includes her own, subversive, observation of nineteenth-century childhood: “‘Don’t be so silly, K,” said a parent to his ten-year-old daughter. “I can’t help it, Father,” was the prompt reply, “I’ve inherited it from Mother.”’<sup>74</sup> And as Shuttleworth observes, ‘In the quick-witted response of this child, the evolutionists’ theories of female inferiority become a weapon of offence. Far from dwelling undisturbed in a sacred realm, this child has both absorbed social attitudes to femininity and turned them to her own advantage.’<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, Woods detects a distinct gender bias in *Studies of Childhood*: ‘It would seem’, she wryly observes, ‘that boys are far cleverer than girls, from Professor Sully’s collection of stories, or is it that parents are wont to pay more attention to the saying and doings of their sons than of their daughters? I suspect that this is the true state of the case.’<sup>76</sup> In her acknowledgement of the current suppression of the ‘voice’ of the girl child, and its significance for contemporary child problems, she also envisages the necessity of its emancipation from tradition through the development of the child’s creativity. All children, Woods argues, require a higher order of imagination in order to be able to see beyond their own experiences, to envisage ‘living a distinctly different life of their own.’<sup>77</sup> And whilst Woods uses an image of ‘intelligent’ stones and pebbles as exemplars of a child’s imaginative powers, her rationale concludes in a child’s ability to imagine for themselves unexperienced and uncharted lives, and to ‘rejoice in a joy different in many ways to that he has himself experienced.’<sup>78</sup>

Disappointed to discover that the development of a child’s artistic powers and the child’s desire to express him or herself is limited in Sully’s text, Woods, nevertheless, remains committed to the discovery of the knowledge of child-life by way of ‘keen powers of observation’ and ‘close

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<sup>74</sup> Woods, ‘Review of James Sully’, p. 260.

<sup>75</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 286.

<sup>76</sup> Woods, ‘Review of James Sully’, p. 257.

<sup>77</sup> Woods, ‘Review of James Sully’, p. 257.

<sup>78</sup> Woods, ‘Review of James Sully’, p. 257. Note: whilst Woods adopts the male gender bias when alluding to this particular story, she makes a point of mixing gender attribution throughout the review for balance.

confidences' to see and hear the 'truth' of the child without either mitigation nor exaggeration.<sup>79</sup> Accurate knowledge and understanding, she argues, are gleaned through slow study and intellectual appraisal and insight, by observers who are 'fully conscious of their own infirmities and the difficulties of their task, and who bring to bear upon it an inexhaustible patience and *a determination to put aside all prejudice, and preconceived notions*'<sup>80</sup> (my italics). Woods demands no less from her scientific community than she does for society as a whole in order to address and 'solv[e] the enigma of child-life.'<sup>81</sup> Granting the child a new interiority, a complex subjectivity, complete with passion, imagination, and trauma which defies easy analysis, is paramount, Woods suggests, for childhood maturation and the beginning of the journey towards novel ways of seeing and being by way of acts of self-custody and self-expression.

Despite the different approaches of the two leading lights of the child study movements in the UK and the USA, the Anglo-American, cross-cultural development of the science of child study and the growth of interest to both nations in understanding the mind of the child at the end of the century is reflected in the texts that this thesis takes as its primary sources of study. It is my contention that despite the many different disciplinary strands and forms of practice that contributed to this movement, the overarching preoccupation was a desire to study the child, not only for its own sake, but also as an entry point for all the emerging disciplines of evolutionary biology and psychology, anthropology and philosophy. Sully's preoccupation with the power of individual study was complemented by the inclusion of literary texts and autobiographies in his work on childhood, although he used these resources to create an abstract entity of the child mind, determined by inherited and evolutionary memories, but taken outside of the pressures of immediate historical context, whether of class position or familial power struggles.<sup>82</sup>

However, the primary texts and images of this thesis creatively take the individual figure of the girl child as their starting point for diverse and psychological studies of what it means to be a quite particular child in a particular environment in the final decade of the

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<sup>79</sup> Woods, 'Review of James Sully', p. 261.

<sup>80</sup> Woods, 'Review of James Sully', p. 261.

<sup>81</sup> Woods, 'Review of James Sully', p. 261

<sup>82</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 302-303.



nineteenth century. The images and texts I propose, challenge the essentialist view of childhood as redemptive, virtuous, and universal, and therefore refuse to meet widespread contemporary nineteenth-century expectations about what children and stories about children ought to be. Indeed, these representations are among the first, I contend, to not only question the notion of a universality of childhood, but they are also among the first to acknowledge that childhood is a social construction, and among the first to show concern for the harm that ideals of childhood could do to children as well as adults. As I shall explore in Chapter 2, Sarah Grand's novel, *The Beth Book*, celebrates her protagonist's extraordinary capacity, her 'further faculty' and her imaginative dreams which place her in touch with her ancestors: human evolution, inheritance, and isolation here give rise to both an understanding of Sully's theory of development and Woods's stress on a child's capacity for enhanced imagination and creative thinking and seeing. Published in the same year as Grand's text, James's 1897 novel, *What Maisie Knew*, also focuses on the content of the child's mind, one of the major questions in developmental psychology. Writing at the height of evolutionary psychology, 'when it was believed that the child, as Sully phrased it, was the "memento of the race" carrying within it the legacy of past experience'<sup>83</sup> James's text, and as I explore in Chapters 1 and 2, Gotch's paintings, both allude to, and then problematise Sully's psychologies of inheritance whilst also embracing a new frame of reference and model of temporality. Robert Louis Stevenson's seemingly 'off the cuff' remark that children 'are not the contemporaries of their parents'<sup>84</sup> suggests the burgeoning realisation that not only were children capable of exercising a departure from the constraints of their parents, but in doing so, they were placed in a position of alterity to 'rational' adult patterns of behaviours, a possibility that Crane's female protagonist exercises in Chapter 3.

### **Hierarchy, Authority, and Power**

In an echo of Alice Woods's critique of Sully, the little-known Irish writer, Hannah Lynch, comments that children are not guileless, but spend their lives in 'unconscious acting,'<sup>85</sup> and

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<sup>83</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 217.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Child's Play', *Cornhill Magazine*, 38 (1878), 352-359 (p. 357).

<sup>85</sup> Hannah Lynch, *Autobiography of a Child* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1899), p.38.

certainly, the 1890s saw a powerfully controlling sense of childhood as theatrical, of children set up to 'perform' for peers and parents, as we have seen in Sully's methodology. But Lynch goes on to explain that children are also 'experimental artists with life,'<sup>86</sup> an attractive image that suggests the role of the scientific experimenter is transposed with that of the child, who becomes, as Shuttleworth suggests, 'the embodiment of literary and scientific creativity.'<sup>87</sup> Conceiving of the child as exiting the space of observed and monitored passivity necessarily involves the reimagining of the power relations and hierarchies that imbue their relationships with surrounding adults, especially their parents. Of course, the idea that children should 'know their place' has its roots in a traditional Western hierarchy that places children subordinate to, and some might argue subject to colonisation by, adults.<sup>88</sup> However, the apparent breakdown of convention at the fin de siècle that affected relations between masters and servants, husbands and wives, and, I argue, parents and children, was characterised, with the benefit of hindsight, by the philosophical writer, Robert Musil (1880-1942), as one in which 'sharp borderlines everywhere became blurred, and some new indescribable capacity for entering into hitherto unheard-of relationships threw up new people and new ideas.'<sup>89</sup> Indeed, as early as 1913, in his retrospective overview of the final decade of the nineteenth century, Holbrook Jackson had observed that the 1890s had witnessed a challenge to traditional adult authority by the emerging generation in a desire to live lives very different to their parents. He describes this desire, however as inevitable, as a 'necessity' which was

thrust upon the younger generation by the unimaginative opposition their demand for more life encountered at the hands of the autocracy of elderly respectability. [...] For if those in authority had occasional doubts as to their own material importance they had none about their virtue and righteousness. No one, indeed, had ever contested their right to such views, and these views were supported by the full weight of traditional opinion.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Lynch, *Autobiography of a Child*, p. 38.

<sup>87</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 303.

<sup>88</sup> Terri Doughty and Dawn Thompson, 'Introduction', in *Knowing Their Place? Identity and Space in Children's Literature*, ed. by Terri Doughty and Dawn Thompson (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 1-5 (p. 1).

<sup>89</sup> Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities, Volume 1* (Written 1921-1930 and first published in Berlin in 1930; London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (first published 1913; Hassocks, Nr. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1976), p. 126.

The idea of self-realisation, Jackson argues, was at the root of this attitude for ‘more freedom, more experience, more sensation, more life. [...] The younger generation became acutely conscious of parental control.’<sup>91</sup> The fictitious child figures of this thesis demonstrate their desire for different lives by recoiling from their adults and from the discourse of experience that those adults construct as certainties and transmit as gospel to the children. In this respect, not only are the children of these turn-of-the-century texts under scrutiny, but so too are the adults who are directly responsible for the children’s development: the parents, the guardians, the educators, and the immediate community, the entire scope of transmitters of adult knowledge and behaviours. Indeed, the adult versions of events are problematised in these texts precisely because the child figure poses a challenge to the adult discourse of self-censorship and self-suppression that is muddled and equivocal with self-protection and self-interest. The texts become crises of authority wherein the fictions themselves represent and vindicate the appeal of the child against the authoritative vision of the adults’ conformity and furtherance.

Of course, studying or writing about children is inevitably complicated by these gulfs of power, hierarchy, and chronology, the time between childhood and adulthood, and the influences, traditions, and expectations that this period of transition and transformation must endure to achieve any notion of self-understanding and autonomy. It is hardly surprising then that literary and artistic representations of childhood do not move from sensation to selfhood in a seeming vacuum but are subject to intense pressures from their familial and social environments for authority and agency. Indeed, the adult-child relations are at their most complex in their constant re-depictions of vulnerability and power, dependence and subversion, and their respective appropriation of shared environments. This thesis takes exactly this premise as its starting point, for James, Grand, Crane, and Gotch interrogate the very sources of the presumption of adult authority and the hierarchical relationships performed in domestic, rural, and urban spaces. The image and text makers of this thesis not only question the hierarchy and its dependence on chronology for validation, but they also examine the ways in which the

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<sup>91</sup> Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, p. 132.

fictitious girl child addresses the processes of coming both to know herself as situated in space, and how the places she inhabits shape her understanding of selfhood.

### **Space and Place**

The tropes of space and place in this thesis provide ways of teasing out some of this power-imbalance, notably through the relationships between the inner spaces of the texts and images, which are often symbolic, and the outer places, the specific ‘real’ locales, the environments in which the books are set or the images are framed. Both of these may, of course, serve as metaphors: the internal spaces to explore the relationships between the adults and children, and the external places that tend to be primarily concerned with adult need, function, and identity. However, as I have suggested, the historical workings of space and place to generate individual and social identities were in crisis at the Victorian fin de siècle. The final decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a loss of faith in the overarching explanatory patterns and transcendent reference points of the age (God, Queen, Soul, Reason, History etc.) that had traditionally delineated selfhood and identity. As an individual’s existence and sense of selfhood no longer came to be determined by the clear hierarchical frameworks and reference points that had hitherto moulded and governed their behaviours, the focus appeared to shift to the experience of the individual in their immediate social environment. Certainly the child protagonists of this thesis are characterised by a loss of assumed stable childhood identity anchored in familial reference points, and consequently, they actively seek different position-takings and postures in the different places they inhabit and the spaces within which they behave. Crucially, however, I suggest their identities are not defined through the ideas offered by others, for far from readily absorbing ideas of behaviours and conventions, they demonstrate astute, pragmatic judgements of the purpose such ideas serve in relation to their own development.

Whilst the relationship of the girl child to a physical place informs this thesis, it is juxtaposed with her radical reshaping and appropriation of an emergent and novel isolated space of being. The stories of the fictional girls in the following chapters take place in recognisable

and commonplace environments, but the girls contest and subvert the traditions of performance for each environment by way of a self-determined alienation and detachment. Likewise, readers and viewers can conceive that the texts and images of this thesis also express a detachment from the traditional reference points that anchor identity and comprehension, existence and purpose, to reveal an emptiness, a space, wherein there used to be a semblance of certainty, knowledge, and assumption. A state of isolation therefore becomes the framework for self-conception and understanding structured in a fictitious world in which positions and truths become relative. Deprived of a stable developmental framework, the girls of these texts are similarly deprived of a stable social and epistemological environment in which identities would traditionally be created and defined. These texts then negate the pressures of family and society and deliberately open up a void, a vacuum of identity in which their child protagonists might be liberated. Isolated from the familiar, this thesis seeks a reconciliation for the child borne out of alienation and detachment, a reconciliation between isolated mind space (the space of the philosophers) and isolated 'real' place (the physical landscape of the imaginary *fin de siècle*), to bridge the gap between space and place and, in the process, conceive of the child's possession of an autonomous existence.

What I am proposing then is a radical shift from our understanding of the girl child at the *fin de siècle* that will result in her transformation to an independent and quasi-revolutionary figure that anticipates modernist thinking and the attitudes that we have come to associate with the child minds of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There is an empty space of scholarship on the *fin-de-siècle* girl as a figure of change and new beginnings rather than one of renewal and continuity. The gap, the space left open by the apparent disintegration of the traditional Victorian family and the desertion of the daughter has not, I contend, been fully considered. And yet, unencumbered and isolated, the girl child's opportunities for a radical realignment and rediscovery of young, female selfhood suddenly appear endless for they are no longer shaped by ideology, familiarity, or patterns of expectation. The images and texts of this thesis are thus united in their determination to examine the same concerns: the consequence of environment on the girl child's maturation, the emergence of her sense of selfhood, the

disavowal of imitation and replication, and the origins of agency, all framed within a position of narrative isolation. James, Grand, Crane and Gotch all seek to discover the process of their protagonists being cast adrift and question the consequences of such alienation: does the female child figure recreate society and family, or does she formulate a different framework? Does she seek solace in the familiar surroundings of home and its accompanying patterns of bucolic and urban behaviours, or does she endeavour to reshape and reform those staples to serve herself better?

The relation between home, the rural environment and the cityscape is a complex one. They are, all three, in a sense, opposite to each other, and they constitute a foundational series of fundamental binary pairs in nineteenth-century culture. The home is literally surrounded by city streets or country lanes, and it depends for its existence on the relative peace of both, which in turn depend upon the disciplining of the unruly, unfortunate, or transgressive elements of the population. Despite the appearance of stability and permanence, the maintenance of the social order in the nineteenth century depended upon individual acceptance of the frameworks that constituted personal lives and was thus a most fragile construct, especially for privileged Victorians. At a time when fiction for children was increasingly focusing on a world where children could exist in a realm of their own imagination, the adult novel suggests that for children that framework is borne out of the hierarchy of chronology and that children are defined by the adults who shape their lives. Girls, especially, could expect little or no support if they chose a life that did not subscribe to traditional criteria. For the young female, the possibilities for self-realisation were indeed limited, and very few models presented themselves. The 1890s, however, saw the beginning of a new age for children, children who ‘at the end of the nineteenth century, were different from children before or after,’<sup>92</sup> seeking a solution to the question of how they, as young female individuals, might face the conflict between personal desire and societal demands. I consider the fictional children discussed in this thesis as defining this ‘difference’, displaced characters, unable and unwilling to behave as expected by those who

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<sup>92</sup> A. S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 29.

would govern and shape their futures, and therefore failing to fill and reproduce the spaces traditionally occupied and subsequently relinquished by role models. Children had learnt to perform, to ‘play’ roles that they were expected to play as social beings. They walked onto a stage already set. To choose not to play was to retreat, to withdraw into a space and place of solitude and, I argue, potential liberation.

The organisation of the prosperous middle-class household of the 1890s reflected a changing attitude toward the traditional family dynamic. Nineteenth-century architecture and literature reveal the hierarchical structure of the social system and inscribe invisible and abstract ideologies and cultural values into something visible and concrete in the form of buildings and their occupants, or texts and their characters. Increasingly, children were becoming isolated in the nurseries at the top of the house, whence they descended, perhaps twice a day, to see their parents. It may be that it was as much an outcome of these conditions as of an increased interest in the child personality that drove the late nineteenth-century narrative of a child rarely seen. These fictional children are both physically and psychologically detached and become immersed in their own affairs, viewing the adult world as infinitely distant and alien. This domestic detachment, I argue, marks both the physical and psychological emancipation of the child at the century’s end, where childhood rebellion against adults may not be new, but the indifference the children display to the adult world, their contempt for it, is. For despite the adult domination of their landscape, the domestic spaces of home are marked as sites of uncertainty for a child: the thresholds between the interior spaces of the adult world downstairs, the nursery where the youngest children lived with a nurse or nursery maids, and the schoolroom presided over by the governess, suggest not only physical boundaries and borders, but also psychological thresholds for the fin-de-siècle child figure. These threshold spaces, sites of shutting out and welcoming in, are, of course, spaces of hesitation, but they may also be spaces of liberation, ambiguous spaces to engage with the conflicts of identity that domestic space and place ordinarily serve to maintain through performance and convention.

‘The child in the house’ as an emblem of performance, protection, and safe-keeping is tested in the first chapter by Henry James’s study of Maisie Farange, a study that challenges the

limits of domestic innocence, shelter, and nostalgia within a framework of isolation and neglect. The intrusion of isolation into the domestic place of home is a particularly poignant one. Since the home is traditionally understood and fictionally represented as a beacon of inclusiveness, comfort, and nurture, James's disturbance of the girl figure within such a politically and culturally charged space raises some interesting, and as yet, unanswered questions concerning the dichotomies of nurturance and autonomy, connectedness and individuation, dependence and dominance, and bounded places and open spaces. James's decision to represent an unconventional child and childhood, led him to build a strange new domestic apparatus around her that alienates rather than embraces childhood identity. Indeed, it appears that Maisie finds her 'place', her identity, in the *transitional* spaces of the homes she inhabits. Her quest for freedom and autonomy is, I argue, portrayed through her very movement from one domestic place to another via spaces of liberation and unknowing.

Gaston Bachelard's seminal work, *The Poetics of Space* understands the domestic place of the 'house' and its identity as 'home' as the first universe for children.<sup>93</sup> However, Bachelard also argues for the need for solitude within this space, for childhood solitude, he argues, is imperative to creative development. Indeed, not just the absence of playmates but a degree of absolute boredom, detached from the company of others is salutary for a child to daydream and imagine, a philosophy that finds its expression in the character of Maisie. The girl child in the context of James's homes is segregated and isolated, and domestic nostalgia, I argue, emerges as an illness whose cure requires a removal of, not a return to, childhood convention.

In the second chapter, the catalyst for the transformation of the protagonist of Sarah Grand's novel is her connection to the 'green' place of the 'natural' world, the land beyond the domestic framework. If domestic confinement functions in and of itself as a site of transition and as a potential place of liberation, it will, of course, be pertinent to look at the experience of the child removed from the home environment and to consider how different exterior spaces function for female child development at the fin de siècle. If the home is a 'stage' already set for

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<sup>93</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 5.



the girl child to behave as she is *expected* to behave, what are the consequences when that child chooses to remove herself from the confines of such expectations of behaviour and performance? An interest in childhood and the natural environment had, as already stated, been a central aspect of the Romantic concept of the self and Chapter 2 charts the influence of Romantic and post-Romantic discourse and sensibility on the child figure and notions of selfhood during the second half of the nineteenth century. Beginning with a reappraisal of John Everett Millais's painting, *The Woodman's Daughter* of 1851 alongside Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name, this chapter starts from the mid-century to understand the radical reconceptualisation of the girl child that evolves during the following decades and finds its fulfilment in the fin de siècle. Portraying an image of girlhood whose identity is framed by a discourse of nature, but who is absolutely dependent on her parent[s], and whose class is fundamental to her identity and its future possibilities, Millais's painting is replete with signified traits of repression and control borne out of gender-role conditioning and hierarchies that confirm the incapacity of the girl child to escape her 'natural' condition. As noted, however, from the mid-century onwards, the child was increasingly the subject of mental science, and during the latter part of the century, was viewed through a post-Darwinian psychological and psychiatric lens as the key to both the past and the future. Grand's text takes Millais's image of constrained female maturation and, like those of Sully and Woods, focuses, in a positive and productive way, on the child's creativity and adaptiveness as an exploration of individual childhood consciousness for imaginative identification and transformation. So, whilst the depiction of Beth's childhood in Grand's novel is startling even today for its unflinching representation of the cruel, confusing, and petty tyrannies children suffer, such traumas are the catalyst to the arousal of Beth's early awakening to sensation, her education into class difference, and the growth of her mythic and visionary fantasy life. In her solitary exploration of the world around her and her spontaneous and instinctive response to nature, Grand's protagonist, I argue, illustrates the potential of unfettered female difference, energy, and autonomous agency when detached and alienated from familial ties.

In my third and final chapter in which I explore Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the text appears to depend for its chief impact on scenes that show how Maggie's New York tenement dwelling and its slum city environment destroys any sense of the marvellous or inspiring for its protagonist. The growth of the city as a worldwide phenomenon in the Victorian era was documented by A. F. Weber's monumental work of 1899 *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>94</sup> Published at the very close of the century and comprising a remarkable compilation of statistical detail garnered from censuses and other official sources from a range of countries, Weber's work belongs to an epoch of painstaking and voluminous studies of contemporary urban conditions on both side of the Atlantic. The growing sensitivity of the middle classes to their physical and social environment, both in Britain and the United States, can be drawn, not only from Weber's own work, but also from the output of journalists, novelists, clergymen, doctors, legislators, and waves of public-spirited men and women, who, as I examine, in Chapter 3, sought to study, interpret, document, authenticate, and reform the living conditions of the urban poor in both the United States and the United Kingdom. As sites of widespread philanthropic and government interest, London and New York were synonymous with an apparent altruistic middle-class desire to 'save the child', documented in works by, among others, W. T. Stead and Jacob August Riis in the final decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> These two cities therefore provide the environmental backdrop for my enquiries into the 'place' of the urban girl child in the 1890s, a decade recognised as 'marking the really dramatic onset of the urbanization of the world: the spreading tap-root of industrialism, the acceleration in transport and communications, and the concentration of new powers in the hands of the State and its municipalities now gave to the process a perennial momentum.'<sup>96</sup> Indeed, in penning her short story 'Gutterella' in 1895, the Anglo-American socialist journalist and

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<sup>94</sup> Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Statistics* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1899).

<sup>95</sup> See William T. Stead's, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of our Secret Commission as Published in The Pall Mall Gazette of July 1885* and Jacob A. Riis's, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890).

<sup>96</sup> H. J. Dyos, 'Review: The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Review of Some Recent Writing', *Victorian Studies*, 9.3 (1966), 225-237 (p. 228).

education reformer Margaret McMillan, I argue, straddles the space between fiction and non-fiction writing to make a more general point about working-class life and the corruption of childhood under industrial capitalism at the turn of the century. Arthur Symons's volume of poetry *London Nights* of the same year, envisions the city as a magical place in which the child is oblivious to the industrialism, poverty, and deprivation of the city, but which, I argue, draws comparison with the work of both Crane and McMillan in articulating the place of the city as a site of girlhood transformation.

In the proximity of urban mechanism and tenement sprawl, the organic life of Chapter 2 suffers; social constraint and great impersonal forces often doom the development of the free and spontaneous individual. The doom is simplest and most understandable for Crane's Bowery inhabitants for whom order and fate are hopelessly imposed. Unlike the decontextualized and solitary Romantic child, Crane's street children are firmly set in the seething mass of human misery. Engendered with a kind of cognitive dissonance, the discourse of these children, children inescapably defined by their noxious urban environment, is, of course, antithetical to Romantic discourse, and as Plotz acknowledges, 'the homeless masses—waifs, strays, Nobody's Children, mudlarks, guttersnipes, pariahs, and arabs—are represented as an alien element within western civilisation.'<sup>97</sup> Finding her 'space' on the streets of New York, and then in the East River, Maggie's quest for self-assertion appears to follow a predictably tragic course of destruction for a girl of the streets. Crane, however, perceives the city as an extension of the psyche, and although incapable of changing the society that would imprison her, Maggie finds her identity and her destiny in a place of endless, undefined space, fluidity, and boundlessness. In a space without walls or restrictions, and no longer overshadowed by her communion with the cityscape, Maggie liberates herself, I argue, by apparent self-destruction in the limitless waters of the river.

It is the posture of a lone human girl figure then that commands the attention of the novel. And although Crane cares little about the history of his protagonist prior to her story

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<sup>97</sup> Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, p. 38.

itself, and inside the story makes little effort to recreate the intricacies of relations between human individuals, the force of Maggie's psyche springs from an uncommon directness of relationship between Maggie as perceiver and the streets of her environment. Her awareness is not turned in upon itself through memory or elaborate ruminations, or the unfolding of associated images; it is turned straight outwards upon objects perceived simply but with an unusual sensitivity, a luminous and illuminating intensity of perception. The strangeness Maggie observes in her world is also her strangeness, the relationship between a particular sort of character and a particular sort of environment. The city may breed those feelings of strangeness, unease, betrayal, fear, and dislocation, the novel tells us, but it breeds excitement, release, expectation, and wonder too, and it is Crane's position to testify to the significance of that dislocation and the triumph of its resulting release.

At first sight, the primary texts I explore might seem to be a somewhat eclectic collection. However, my choice is determined not only by the arresting and innovative means by which each text adopts and interprets the pioneering ideas of late nineteenth-century child psychology in the UK and the USA, but also by the recognition of each in expressing such radical new thinking through the figure of the girl child, in a myriad of circumstantial environments. Although individually each text has been the subject of significant scholarship, they are, to my knowledge, yet to be considered alongside each other for any kind of commonality. And yet, a lengthy and close reading of each text, further supported by secondary literature (prose and poetry), visual images (paintings, photographs, and illustrations), and contextual non-fiction, suggests an intertextuality borne out of a novel reappraisal of these late nineteenth-century literary works and their female child protagonists. Each text opens up the space between traditional adult authority and child submission to reveal not only the artificiality of chronological age to determine authority, but also a new place of negotiation that ultimately serves the girl child above the adult. Each text makes explicit the connection between girlhood and the end of the century, in ways that foreground the cultural anxieties of the 1890s around foundational sites of place and performance, but whose resolution results from their girls' dislodging of assumptions. Set self-consciously at the beginning of a new age, the new voices of

authority and agency I read in these texts emerge from the detritus of traditional adulthood, and refuse certain versions of development (the *bildungsroman*; the marriage plot; the fallen woman) while inviting new kinds of structures and alliances that are consciously and radically self-serving for their young protagonists.

Significantly, the consideration of Gotch's paintings from the 1890s alongside the literary texts demonstrates the value of reading image and text alongside each other to support my claims whilst also offering the opportunity for an idiosyncratic assessment of a number of his works that have been consigned to a forgotten art history. Indeed, the primary texts, and the supporting material and images attest to the prevalence of a neglected aspect of fin-de-siècle literary and visual scholarship that prioritises the experience of girlhood over and above that of those around her. Rather than victims, the fictional girls of this thesis, I argue, appear at the vanguard of feminist thought, suggesting not only the early stirrings of first-wave feminism, but also the significant fact of feminism's embryonic and earliest origins in the mind and body of a young, female child, who is otherwise too often overlooked as beholden and wedded to preconceived patterns of behaviour. Each text is a narrative of development; not a *bildungsroman* (a point I argued earlier in this introduction), but a journey toward a higher level of awareness via the unfolding development of an individual's relationship with a specific environment. Portraying either a girl's protracted maturation over the course of a novel or an intense snapshot of a number of her defining developmental moments, each text culminates, I argue, in an individual recognition of selfhood borne out of choice rather than obligation. Lengthy analyses and detailed readings of the main novels in each chapter are necessary to appreciate how language and form, the psychology of relationships and subjectivity, and a myriad of actions and behaviours, both between characters and between the protagonists and their surroundings, contribute to articulating a liberating autonomous experience for each central figure. Of course, scholarship can, by its nature, adopt multiple conflicting viewpoints on its subject material to challenge or substantiate any number of critical debates drawn from the 'evidence' of the text. This thesis therefore attempts to ensure the integrity of its contentions by reference to the ubiquitous presence of its ideas throughout the source material and the relation

of those ideas to the cultural, political, and societal landscape of the fin de siècle. Reading the isolation of these fictional girls as imperative to their emancipation mirrors the necessity of re-reading them in a state of detachment from the framework of existing scholarship that could all too readily contain them.

### **Thomas Cooper Gotch**

As I have stated, the oeuvre of the much neglected second-generation or post-Pre-Raphaelite painter, Thomas Cooper Gotch informs the chapters of this thesis, and his paintings from the last decade of the nineteenth century are especially poignant when read in conjunction with the literature I propose. A focus on literary texts and visual images within a historical movement enables an analysis of its representations of childhood and gender in relation to subjectivity, identity, and culture. Reading the images and texts alongside each other in this thesis reminds us how the images of the painters echoed in the words of the writers at the fin de siècle, and close readings of both reveal an interrogation of the idea of a natural, essential notion of the girl child. For in my analysis, Gotch's paintings of the 1890s, to date interpreted in limited secondary material as simplistic, sentimental, and reactionary rather than complex, participate in a novel reconceptualisation of girlhood when read alongside the literary figures. My analysis reveals a relationship between the paintings and the texts that contemporary debate has overlooked, as both are anchored, I argue, in the fraught cultural context of the late nineteenth century and disrupt the ideology of femininity and material environment to reveal, what I read, as a radical approach to representations of girlhood. Flirting with ideas of socialism, aestheticism, and progressive social policy, the source of the originality of Gotch's paintings from 1891 was his representation of the girl child as an 'idea', lost in abstraction and yet defined by her relationship to the space and place of her environment. Gotch's radical reimaginings of solitary girlhood emerge then from a twofold approach that artistically represents the contemporary debates of child psychology and first-wave feminism of the fin de siècle, and the contextual framework of those debates in the material landscape and objects of traditional womanhood and

femininity. His progressive, yet neglected works suggest an artist ahead of his time in his ambition for female emancipation.

Gotch trained in the 1880s and was a well-respected and popular artist in the 1890s and 1900s, receiving serious attention and critical acclaim both in newspapers and journals. He held membership and exhibited through the New English Art Club (NEAC) and began exhibiting paintings in the Newlyn style <sup>98</sup> from the late 1880s. He was not, however, one of the original settlers in Newlyn, although his name has become synonymous with its artistic movement. In an interview for the *Black and White* magazine of 1895, he tells the interviewer:

I first saw Newlyn in 1879, and did much work here in 1881 and 1883, which was before the original settlement. Then I came here to settle in 1887, and for a time did a good deal of work which might, more or less inaccurately, be described as belonging to the Newlyn School. That is, I painted, or endeavoured to paint, what I saw.<sup>99</sup>

Gotch undertook extensive world travel from 1883 and practical overseas work in relation to his role as chairman of the Royal British Society of Colonial Artists (RBSCA), organising overseas artists' colonies and exhibitions, as well as teaching and maintaining a social circle in Newlyn. A visit to Florence in 1891-2 saw a certain change in his oeuvre: 'Some of the Pre-Raphaelite men—the real ones—caught hold of me', he continues in the interview. 'Not so much by their cleverness—they were not clever—as by their attitude towards their art. I began to paint something more than I saw, if you understand: to try for the beauty which is beyond mere truthfulness.'<sup>100</sup>

In the 1890s and 1900s, Gotch was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite tradition in art and included as a proponent of 'Pre-Raphaelism Today' in the re-printed volume by Percy Bate,

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<sup>98</sup> As a group or colony of artists, the Newlyn School was seen in its own time as the first important reflection in British art of late nineteenth-century French painting. The so-called square brush technique and *plein air* method were new and provided the basis and impetus for both British art's belated and fleeting response to French Impressionism, as well as the revitalisation of the substantial but more modest and continuing British landscape tradition. See Caroline Fox and Francis Greenacre's *Artists of the Newlyn School, 1880-1900*, 2nd ed (Newlyn, Cornwall: Newlyn Orion Galleries, 1979) for an introduction to the School's history, its members, and its output.

<sup>99</sup> 'Realist as Mystic: An interview with Mr. T. C. Gotch', *Black and White: A Weekly Illustrated Record and Review*, September 21<sup>st</sup> 1895, p. 379.

<sup>100</sup> 'Realist as Mystic', p. 379.

*The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters: Their Associates and Successors*, (1899).<sup>101</sup> But seen as unusual and unreconciled to current art movements in many contemporary reviews, Gotch came to be largely understood in terms of his critical positioning in counter-distinction to modern art,<sup>102</sup> as part of a 'list [...] of symbolistic, inward-brooding artists, young and old, behind whose line, form, design and colour is an ethical or literary intention, sometimes so subtle it can hardly be called didactic.'<sup>103</sup> His categorisation as a remnant of Pre-Raphaelitism became a less positive association, and his art was deemed increasingly irrelevant or out-of-touch. The milestone exhibition, 'The Last Romantics' in 1989<sup>104</sup> began to reignite some level of interest in Gotch's oeuvre, but as Alice Eden observes, whilst the exhibition catalogue was valuable in resurrecting Gotch from his entirely 'forgotten' status, it also served to confirm his status as a conservative vanguard associated with traditionalism; the title 'Last Romantics' suggested a distant, reactionary artist, failing to move with the times, times which appeared to have resoundingly rejected Victorianism along with the artistic heritage, schooling, and methods they stood for.<sup>105</sup>

It is therefore no surprise that Gotch has experienced an increasingly indeterminate position within the history of British art, and there has been scant serious scholarly consideration of his work. Whilst he has been linked, both at the time and since, with the past, the poetical, and the religious, his works continue to be misunderstood through the dichotomous lens of feminine innocence or malignancy, as in the well-known study by Bram Dijkstra.<sup>106</sup> Reproductions of his more arresting canvases featuring girls and female adolescents that he began to produce in the 1890s (and which inform the chapters of this thesis), are frequently to

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<sup>101</sup> Percy Bate, *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters: Their Associates and Successors* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1899, reprinted 1901 and 1910), pp.112-117.

<sup>102</sup> Alice Anne Eden, 'Women, Representation and the Spiritual in the Works of Thomas Cooper Gotch, Robert Anning Bell and Frederick Cayley Robinson' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2016), p. 25.

<sup>103</sup> C. Lewis Hind, 'Ethical Art and Mr F. Cayley Robinson', *The Studio*, 31, (1904), 235-241 (p.239).

<sup>104</sup> 'The Last Romantics. The Romantic Tradition in British Art: Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer' was held at Barbican Art Gallery, London, 1989.

<sup>105</sup> Eden, 'Women, Representation and the Spiritual', p. 26.

<sup>106</sup> Bram Dijkstra includes Gotch's *The Child Enthroned*, *Holy Motherhood*, and *Death the Bride* in his study of fantasies of feminine evil at the turn of the nineteenth century. See *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).



be found as the title covers of books on the subject of Victorian childhood.<sup>107</sup> Very seldom, however, is there any accompanying intellectual discussion of the images within the texts; the paintings are manipulated and reproduced solely for aesthetic impact. More recently, a selection of Gotch's paintings have been the subject of a doctoral thesis examining three 'forgotten' artists working from the late nineteenth century into the 1920s.<sup>108</sup> Alice Eden reads Gotch's work alongside that of Robert Anning Bell and Frederick Cayley Robinson to explore representations of womanhood and female spirituality in the context of modernity, and I am indebted to her for her insightful study. A biography, written in 2004, helps to contextualise Gotch's oeuvre in relation to his personal life but avoids any more astute research that might inform a scholarly evaluation of his child paintings.<sup>109</sup>

My own appraisal of Gotch's work benefits from archival research and the opportunity to view most of the paintings I refer to first-hand, despite some of those paintings being held in storage and not usually accessible to the public. Thanks to the generous support of the University of Sussex's Director of Doctoral Studies (DDS), I was able to spend a week in Kettering, Northamptonshire, at the Alfred East Art Gallery working alongside the gallery officer, Katie Boyce. The gallery holds a substantial collection of Gotch's oeuvre, including *The Orchard* (c. 1887), *Death the Bride* (1895), and *The Exile: 'Heavy is the Price I Paid for Love'* (1930) as well as considerable archival records, to which I was granted unrestricted access. Funding from the DDS, the British Association for Victorian Studies (BAVS), and the award of Sussex's McCarthy Bursary in 2017 enabled me to travel to Sydney, Australia for a research trip to the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The gallery houses a rich collection of European paintings, including Gotch's *My Crown and Sceptre* (1891). Having corresponded with their assistant curator of international art, Anne Gerard-Austin, I had learnt that the gallery archives

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<sup>107</sup> *The Child Enthroned* was used as the front cover illustration for Hugh Cunningham's *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995), and *Alleluia* wraps the front and back covers of Catherine Robson's more recently published *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Eden, 'Women, Representation and the Spiritual'.

<sup>109</sup> Pamela Lomax, *The Golden Dream: A Biography of Thomas Cooper Gotch* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2004).

and research library were in possession of letters and documents that related to the gallery's acquisition of *My Crown and Sceptre* directly from Gotch in 1899 for £250, and its subsequent history. All of this material was made available for the length of my stay and I worked in both the curatorial offices and the research library. The painting itself is on prominent display in the gallery's Victorian Court, an impressive space that houses the gallery's nineteenth-century European art collection. Gotch's work hangs alongside paintings by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Ford Madox Brown, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and Sir John Everett Millais, and despite being in such illustrious company, does not fail to impress. Over a century after it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1892, (not only 'on the line' but also in the centre of one of the principal rooms), the painting's luminosity and unusual sitter continues to command the viewer's gaze.<sup>110</sup> I also visited the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston, Lancashire, where, thanks to the generosity of their fine art curator, Lindsey McCormick, I was fortunate to be granted access to their stores to view *A Golden Dream* (1893).

I approach these works as a feminist scholar and frame the visual constructs of girlhood produced by Gotch with contemporary feminist reconsiderations of girlhood and womanhood. A reappraisal of his work of the 1890s alongside literary works of his contemporaries suggests the embryonic emergence of female emancipation in the figure of the young girl, in images which engage with and mediate both old and new modes of female being and becoming. His paintings are part of the visual culture of a significant historical moment for the first-wave feminist movement in which demands for societal change and equality across Europe and in America were enacted by an unmaking or 'breaking' with the past. For as Eden observes, 'From the late nineteenth century, there were changes in women's thinking and aspirations, a flourishing of feminist texts and theorisations of male hegemony.'<sup>111</sup> The two histories, of Gotch's paintings and of feminism, run alongside each other and have connections, and the specific interactions between his images of girlhood and the context of female liberation and

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<sup>110</sup> A report of my BAVS funded research trip can be found in the BAVS Newsletter, ed. by Joanna Taylor, 17.2 (November 2017), 26-27.

<sup>111</sup> Eden, 'Women, Representation and the Spiritual', p. 33.

agency are detailed in my individual chapters. In engaging with ideas of female emancipation and articulating feminist possibilities, Gotch created compelling and complex representations of girlhood; the cultural tensions are evident in the visual forms of his paintings and their themes. His paintings of solitary young women in the 1890s suggest an alternative feminist awakening for girls alongside the hackneyed narrative of sexual awakening. The visual language of these paintings corresponds with first-wave feminist reassessments of youth and womanhood at the fin de siècle in the work of New Woman writers and child psychologists, and with embryonic considerations of the possibilities of female liberation across the public and private spheres. While his images were not consciously advancing a feminist agenda, Gotch's paintings destabilise and erode the certainty of dominant gender norms, and his aesthetics reveal an unease with accepted gendered discourse. Anchored in the fraught cultural context of the last decade of the nineteenth century, Gotch, and his literary contemporaries explored in this thesis, employ the language of contemporary child psychology and feminist debate as a counter to fin-de-siècle anxieties, and in this way, suggest the significance of the girl child as a fundamental force for positive change.

## Chapter 1: Domestic Space and the Isolated Girl Child

### Introduction

The concepts of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ interact in an immensely complicated process of adult self-definition. The dominant role of the adult in this relationship is maintained and repeated throughout culture and society and, in the Western industrialised nations at least, ideological political and moral issues assert themselves with concentrated vigour with regard to children. As Karin Lesnik-Oberstein observes, this near total dominance of the adult world over that of the child, established at its most fundamental level by chronology, creates an uneasy field of tensions relating to control, self-control, and the pressures, joys, and uncertainties of power, autonomy, and authority.<sup>112</sup> It is, without question, a complex and questionable hierarchy. In so far as any society and culture are dynamic systems, when a child enters them an inevitable interaction is established and maintained, as between any novice and some form of establishment.

The regulating forms exercised by adults over children are most obviously visible throughout our society in the shape of laws concerning the child’s place in the family and the domestic space of home: adoption and custody; fostering; laws that relate to property ownership and inheritance; and laws that concern the abuse and neglect of children. So it is that these rules determine the story that adults tell about childhood - which is largely mute itself – and thus determine its function, its reception, and its meaning within society. And yet, as members of the foundations of the structures of Western industrialised society, the adults within the adult-child hierarchy do not appear to have the option of withdrawing from their positions of power, for even the giving of freedoms to children is a product of an exercise of power on the part of the adults.<sup>113</sup> For the purposes of this chapter then, we must interrogate the adult-child hierarchy within the domestic space of home during the Victorian fin de siècle, a period of tremendous societal change and unrest for both adults and children, not only to acknowledge the

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<sup>112</sup> Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, *Children’s Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 27.

<sup>113</sup> Lesnik-Oberstein, *Children’s Literature*, p. 28.

responsibility of power, but also to understand its contribution toward the child struggle for equality, self-definition, and subject status.

### Domestic Geography

The place of ‘home’ in nineteenth-century discourse was imagined to provide a powerfully influential space for the development of a child’s character and identity. Home was understood as the best context for moral and spiritual growth and a vehicle for the perpetuation of traditional ideas.<sup>114</sup> In mid-century, the example of the Royal Family endorsed and advanced this ideology which became an increasingly sentimental one, with domestic emotions heightened and gendered roles and relationships sanctified, notably the already much-discussed role of women as ‘the angel in the house’,<sup>115</sup> a myth which was both fervently approved and attacked for decades. Mid-century domestic novels not only explored the implications of parenthood but they also allowed for a close focus on the development of the child in the context of the daily minutiae of family life.<sup>116</sup> The actual process of growing up became a matter of considerable interest, with children understood as emergent personalities ready to be moulded and shaped. The organisation of domestic space prescribed what should happen in the home and was dependent on reading the domestic interior as separate from, and its internal practices as different to, the outside environment that surrounded it. As nineteenth-century domestic discourse determined how the parent - particularly the mother - and child should behave within the space of home, ‘some late twentieth-century scholars of the nineteenth century have

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<sup>114</sup> See for example, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838), Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861) and Augustus Leopold Egg’s triptych, *Past and Present, Nos 1, 2 and 3* (1858).

<sup>115</sup> The term is the title of Coventry Patmore’s long narrative poem published in parts between 1854 and 1862, and charts Patmore’s traditional courtship and marriage to his wife Emily. The poem is now known for the way in which it idealised women as devoted, docile wives and mothers; paragons of domesticity, virtue and humility.

<sup>116</sup> See for example, George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855). For further reading on the significance of the home in Gaskell’s fiction, see Carolyn Lambert’s, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Fiction* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013).

responded by evoking a highly structured domestic geography, citing middle-class homes in particular as designed to reinforce a hierarchy and to assert power.’<sup>117</sup>

However, as the nineteenth century progressed, the relationship between the physical worlds of work and home, the public and private, was transformed by urbanisation and industrialisation, although, as Jane Hamlett observes, ‘the results were complex and uneven.’<sup>118</sup> In the final decades of the century, although men still dominated the public world, the exclusion of women was contested on many levels. Almost as quickly as male power institutionalised the nineteenth-century professional and public world, female pioneers emerged to challenge this.<sup>119</sup> As Hamlett argues, ‘The boundaries between public and private life in the nineteenth-century social world, then, both physical and ideological, were permeable and frequently transgressed. The home, supposedly the heart of the private world, was no exception to this’<sup>120</sup> and the physical structure of the home itself had a dual function, providing both a frame through which to view the outside world and also to allow the domestic interior to be viewed *by* the outside world. In autobiographical writings of nineteenth-century childhoods, it is often the windows of the home that frequently appear, for they are points of transition and transgression.<sup>121</sup> Windows looked out onto streets, and children often looked out to learn about the wider world from within a position of domestic space. So rather than isolating the home from the public world, the physical structure of the home often framed a child’s early perception of it. Likewise, the door, and its substitute, could both represent and transcend the separation of inner and outer, private and public: ‘life flows forth out of the door from the limitation of isolated separate existence into the limitlessness of all possible directions.’<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, ‘Introduction’, in *Domestic Space: Reading the nineteenth-century interior*, ed. by Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 1-17 (p. 3).

<sup>118</sup> Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England 1850-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 30.

<sup>119</sup> See the section ‘New professions’ in Susie Steinbach’s *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 63-82.

<sup>120</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 30.

<sup>121</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 31.

<sup>122</sup> Bryden and Floyd, ‘Introduction’, p. 9.

Architecture and literature are shaped by the same ideologies and social structures and so they share many characteristics. Nineteenth-century homes and literature reveal then the hierarchical structure of the social system and attempt to inscribe invisible and abstract ideologies and cultural values into something visible and concrete in the form of houses and their occupants, or texts and their characters. The use of interiors in novels to convey the character and behaviour of individuals to readers depended, of course, on the existence of shared sets of meanings about particular objects. In this respect, the design of the fictional home is itself a readable text, ‘suggesting and justifying social categories, values and relations [...] to produce a specific orientation towards a given ideology,’<sup>123</sup> its meaning, as a spatial text, found in the study of the way in which its users develop and maintain rules for operating within it. Inside the home, individual privacy might be achieved through internal segregation, but ‘the division and use of rooms were not necessarily geared towards securing the privacy of the individual in isolation – rather they were about negotiating the relationships between family members, and constructing gendered roles.’<sup>124</sup> By exploring the way texts divided, labelled, and inhabited rooms in the home, this chapter will suggest how far these fictional domestic places were a spatial manifestation of contemporary hierarchies of power. Spatial boundaries, whilst not absolute, suggest instead the flexibility of the social meaning of space, and their role in individual self-fashioning and agency.

Whilst the child still lay at the heart of the late Victorian familial ideal, a tail-end legacy of the mid-century model, at the same time, the child of the middle-class family was constantly at a remove from everyday life. For in spite of the warnings given by every previous generation of writers about the dangers of delivering children into the hands of servants, it became increasingly the practice after 1870 or thereabouts for the middle and upper classes to separate themselves from their children, with three quite detached establishments within the space of home: the adults’ world downstairs; the nursery where the youngest children stayed with a

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<sup>123</sup> Bryden and Floyd, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 40.

nanny or nurse maid; and the schoolroom presided over by the governess.<sup>125</sup> Increasingly isolated in the nursery or school room which was located at the upper extremities of an already not inconsiderable building whence they descended perhaps twice a day, children were ‘seen but not heard’ by their adult social peers and managed by an equally silent and unobtrusive body of female servants and their ‘watchful eye,’ who were installed in a strategic position as a security device for their typically silenced subjects. As the architect J. J. Stevenson advised in his *House Architecture* published in 1880: ‘The nursery department should be shut off from the rest of the house; for however interesting children may be, there are times when our appreciation of them is increased by their absence.’<sup>126</sup> The arrangement of the middle-class home often meant that children had different points of spatial contact with the servants from that of their parents, and forged separate and distinctive relationships with them. From the child’s perspective, the nurse maid or nanny was the most significant of these servants, an often ‘young and untrained’<sup>127</sup> female, who, in later childhood, may be replaced by a governess.<sup>128</sup> Deprived of the company of their own parents, the children were often at the mercy of this female authority, and the constant power she held over the children could be a licence for abuse.<sup>129</sup> James Sully concludes his chapter on childhood fear with a discussion of the brutality of those who have charge of the children and who delight in compounding the child’s fears whilst isolated in ‘black solitude.’<sup>130</sup> ‘It is undeniable,’ he says, ‘that children are exposed to indescribable misery when they are delivered into the hands of a consummately cruel guardian.’<sup>131</sup> Children’s young minds could be exposed to stories and points of view that challenged those of the class to which they belonged. Their heads could be filled with fears and fantasies of macabre old wives’ tales and superstitions regaled by nannies, and which were compounded by the often morbid surroundings of nursery life, primitive attic spaces cut off from the comforts of adult domestic space.

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<sup>125</sup> Gillian Avery with the assistance of Angela Bull, *Nineteenth Century Children: Heroes and Heroines in English Children’s Stories 1780-1900* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p. 210.

<sup>126</sup> John James Stevenson, *House Architecture* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), p. 70.

<sup>127</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 118.

<sup>128</sup> For a full account of the role, see Kathryn Hughes’s *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2001).

<sup>129</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 119.

<sup>130</sup> Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, p. 226.

<sup>131</sup> Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, p. 226.



In this respect, the child occupied a space that was even less well defined than that of the liminality of the governess, a reclusive position, and perhaps for this reason, fictional representations of children in the art and literature of this period often involved the consequences of such liminal positioning. Similarly, the removal of one or both parents allowed the question of absolute obedience to both parental authority and traditional gendered tropes to be sidestepped and the autonomy for children resulting from the absence of parents became a common device for stimulating and facilitating fantastic adventures in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction for children. Removing the child from the confines of the captive domestic space to experience a different kind of life in the far-flung places of their imaginations was both a mental escape from the dreary confines of the nursery walls and an opportunity for the hierarchical order of adult-child relations to be overturned, albeit within the space and place of the mind. Certainly, as Sattaur has observed, orphans abound in fin-de-siècle texts, whilst children who exist largely without the guidance of parents and with almost the authority of adults are equally numerous.<sup>132</sup>

But confined within the ideology of the domestic, in *adult* texts that reflected on the organisation of the family dynamic and hierarchy of the household of the time, children were socially and temporally isolated, temporary creatures, to whom the adult world appeared increasingly distant and alien. Like ghosts they could be little more than echoes of some more permanent familiar and familial state, their uncertainty and indifference to the adult world not only a reflection of the crisis of adult identity brought about at the end of the century, but also the resulting disconnect from the framework of family that such a crisis invoked. In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), a heart-rending suicide pact reduces Jude and Sue's children to ghostly admonitions. Cheated of his childhood, Little Father Time 'neither smiles nor laughs like other boys'<sup>133</sup> and suffers under the gossip of the masses. An isolated, impressionable, and easily moved observer and listener, his mind focuses directly on the nature of reality in general,

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<sup>132</sup> Sattaur, *Perceptions of Childhood*, p. 108.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Goetsch, 'Old-Fashioned Children: From Dickens to Hardy and James', *Anglia*, 123.1 (2007), 45-69 (p. 65).

rather than, like that of ‘ordinary’ boys, concentrating on detail to understand life. Henry James’s fictional children of the 1890s, as I shall explore, appear to mark the pages they occupy with a sense of fleetingness: none of them can occupy the childish domestic space they are written into for very long. James’s *What Maisie Knew* may take place in a familiar domestic setting, but it lacks the family element. In both the literal and figurative sense of the word, Maisie is divorced from the familiar and not part of a family circle. The adults who might have served as surrogate family members are more interested in each other and will, in their detachment from the child of the story, also fail to form traditional family groups of their own, remaining single, childless, and un-nurturing, or promiscuous, disloyal, and shifting. In James’s *The Pupil*, the story’s main focus is on the homosocial relationship between an inexperienced, shy, and lonely teacher and a vulnerable boy, who is ashamed of his parents’ financial manoeuvres, who suffers from isolation, and who longs for love. These literary children of the fin de siècle possess or are assumed to possess knowledge unsuitable for their age. They are exposed to adult pressures and all three texts work to isolate children to sharpen a more critical view of the culture that surrounds them.

Reimagined domestic spaces become then catalysts for the unfixing of identities, and as I shall argue, like women not content to be confined to domestic seclusion, the fictional child of the fin de siècle was likely to move out, beyond, or up from the constraining boundaries of domestic space into more ambiguous and emancipatory social places of pleasure and danger. However, as I shall explore, this did not necessitate removal from the physicality of home. Indeed, it is my contention that such feminised domestic space has been both overlooked and devalued as a developmental arena for the negotiation of childhood autonomy at the fin de siècle. Yes, the home is widely understood as the space and sphere of the domestic and the feminine; it is the stage for the theatre of the family, a place where people are born and live and die, and characteristically its position of stability marks it as the formal space of departure for a narrative. However, as a signifier of stable space, the home or homestead therefore also functions as a point of stasis which must be broken or disrupted for a child’s story to acquire momentum. Although, as I have suggested, this often requires a physical departure from the

confines of the familial settled sphere, occasionally the radical refiguring of the ‘theatre of home’<sup>134</sup> takes place precisely within the domestic framework that would confine it. It is my contention that by radically reimagining the house and its inhabitants by way of an isolated and solitary childhood exploration that not only resists the constructions and expectations of traditional adult convention but also that capitalises on the freedom of liminal positioning, the figure of the child can create its own positive world of autonomy and agency.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard considers how the physical space of the house adapts to its inhabitants and how its inhabitants react to the space of the house. He reads the house as an intimate space, a privileged entity that embodies all our images of protection but whose essence of attachment goes beyond mere description (whether this description be objective or subjective, that is, whether it gives facts or impressions).<sup>135</sup> Whilst Bachelard admits that every house is first a geometrical object of planes and right angles, he asks us to ponder how such rectilinearity so welcomes human complexity, idiosyncrasy, how the house adapts to its inhabitants. If the house is the first universe for children, how does its space shape all subsequent knowledge of other space, for is it ‘a group of organic habits’<sup>136</sup> or something more meaningful? For an inhabited house is not an inert box. ‘Inhabited space’, Bachelard tells us, ‘transcends geometrical space,’<sup>137</sup> and any consideration of the space of home participates ‘in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise. This is the environment in which the protective beings live.’<sup>138</sup> Certainly within this space of habits of nurture and protection, Bachelard makes it clear that it is the childhood spaces of domestic solitude that offer the opportunities for thought and isolated daydreaming that are of greatest significance and of the greatest benefit to child development. Every corner in a house, he tells us, every angle in a

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<sup>134</sup> I first encountered this phrase in Jenny Bourne Taylor’s study of Victorian psychology and the novels of Wilkie Collins, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>135</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>136</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 14

<sup>137</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 47.

<sup>138</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 7.

room, every inch of secluded space in which a child likes to hide, or withdraw into itself, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination.<sup>139</sup>

Thus, the role of the private domestic room is pivotal in constructing an emerging sense of self in childhood. Detached from the family, isolation in a secluded room and notions of autonomy may then enter a symbiotic existence. The opportunity for selfish thoughts and behaviours is intrinsically dependent on the child's removal from the obligations of their role as somebody's son or daughter in shared familial domestic spaces. The playroom or nursery can be read as a separate reality, both physically removed from the adults' domain, and functioning as a space of spiritual isolation, valued by children for both its distance from traditional domestic turmoil and its potential as a space of transience, wherein a child may develop a sense of self, a learning of a fundamentally different kind. Passing into this realm, a child may cease to be beholden to the power of familial obligations, their elders forgotten in favour of a realm of oblivion and uncharted possibilities. The power of this private yet domestic space does not derive from beauty, order, and cohesion, qualities that were traditionally identified as intrinsic to self-development, but from its negation of the surrounding utility and rationality. As I shall explore in the paintings of Thomas Cooper Gotch and in the novel *What Maisie Knew*, the fictional domestic space in the final decades of the nineteenth century could be defamiliarised in terms of social interaction and the way in which private familial roles were performed which had a direct relation to both the use of space and the roles performed therein.

### **The Art of Domestic Life**

There would appear to be an obvious connection between the Victorian domestic novel and Victorian genre painting.<sup>140</sup> Both are rich in objective detail that tells a story of middle-class social life, and '[t]he particular dynamics of realism, in which art at once mirrors and produces "truth," are common to both: a mimetic art is always, as narrative theory has painstakingly

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<sup>139</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 136.

<sup>140</sup> Examples of academic studies in the field of Victorian domestic literature and genre painting include Hugh Witemeyer's *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (1979), *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (1995), and Julia Thomas's *Victorian Narrative Painting* (2000) and *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (2004).

established, a construction rather than a transparent reproduction of a preexistent reality, and yet it is a construction whose power depends upon an audience's recognition of its verisimilitude.<sup>141</sup> Representations of domestic culture were crucially important to Victorian life and in particular, its depictions and self-representations of both women and children at home, as I have suggested, are images which were at the heart of Victorian iconography and ideology. Paintings of women and children at home performed a cultural work for the Victorian audience, allowing not only a glimpse into the stories of the guarded and private spaces of middle-class bourgeois life, but also modelling how the 'right' home should look, how it should be inhabited, indeed, how the theatre of home should be appropriately conducted within its various given spaces and alongside the material possessions of its makeup. Although the representation of women and children within domestic interiors can be traced from Renaissance painting, the Victorians focused with a new intensity on the domestic interior.<sup>142</sup> And as William Gaunt observes: 'It is possible to trace a development of middle-class taste from the eighteenth century in pictures with a story of everyday life, domestic in sentiment or atmosphere, to the social realism of the 1870s and 1880s'<sup>143</sup> for narrative was a constant interest. The Victorian age had created a severe middle-class code exerted through the family and its domestic spaces, a code that often became a despotism fashioning the lives of children through its reliance on strict control, the inculcation of the most emphatic principles of duty, self-sacrifice, and social responsibility.<sup>144</sup> The culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was strongly influenced by a feeling of revolt against such restrictions. The pain and bewilderment of the child oppressed by a discipline which ran counter to their instinctive desires and the subsequent discovery or creation of a scheme of things to which this discipline did not apply have been a

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<sup>141</sup> Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 218.

<sup>142</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 218.

<sup>143</sup> William Gaunt, *The Restless Century: Painting Britain 1800-1900* (London: Phaidon, 1972), p. 8. See also, Marcia Pointon's *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (1997) and Kate Retford's *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (2006) for accounts of the historical development of portraits of middle-class domesticity.

<sup>144</sup> Lynda Nead's *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (1988) and Susan P. Casteras's *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (1987) show us the significance of domestic culture to Victorian life, and the centrality of its self-representations, and depictions of women and children at home to Victorian iconology.

constant theme of fin-de-siècle writers, artists, and reformers. As I shall explore, by the end of the century, under the shadow of cultural and societal upheaval, and partly under Impressionist and Aesthetic influence, narrative painting lost some of its hold to the emerging idea of interpretive looking and novel ways of seeing.

In broad cultural terms, the last two decades of the nineteenth century were ones in which the middle classes enjoyed unparalleled confidence. All the secrets of science and medicine would, it was believed, be revealed through trained processes of observation. Interpretive looking would lead to greater knowledge and understanding of the natural world, religion, the origin of species, and the recesses of the mind, offering a window into the psyche. This was an age of optimism and empiricism. The advent of photography, far from killing painting, rather highlighted the importance of vision. The painter's act of looking and recording in this new era of photomechanical reproduction had a new urgency.<sup>145</sup> Words such as 'Impressionist' with no settled definition, were loosely applied to novel ways of seeing, supported by new developments in the science of optics.<sup>146</sup> Glances, glimpses, long concentrated looking, and the staccato activity of a painter referring constantly between a canvas and a selected motif were, as I shall explore, all acknowledged for their intrinsic quality.

Although the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite movement is detectable in English art up until 1914, notably in the work of John William Waterhouse, it is largely a spent force by the end of the century, although it continues to influence and shape artistic expression.<sup>147</sup> The original aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had long been achieved, and its position as a movement at the fin de siècle was more diffuse and also the most difficult to define. Yet it is

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<sup>145</sup> See for example, Lindsay Smith's *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) which explores the intersections between Victorian literature, painting, and photography.

<sup>146</sup> Kenneth McConkey, *The New English: A History of the New English Art Club* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2006), p. 24.

<sup>147</sup> The ripples of the Pre-Raphaelite revival throughout the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth were played out predominantly in the work of Waterhouse, Thomas Cooper Gotch, and Frank Cadogan Cowper. Painting with even greater naturalistic intensity and affected by the presence of photography and the challenge posed to visual authenticity by combination printing, the absorption of Pre-Raphaelitism into Salon accredited naturalism defined new sets of possibilities rather than a stale, reheating of familiar Pre-Raphaelite tropes. The movement was, however, more diffuse and less marked than in its early and more vehement days.

part of a tremendously rich and eclectic artistic epoch that is sometimes referred to as the Aesthetic Movement or as Post-Pre-Raphaelitism. Certainly, in the much quoted words of Henry James whose novels I read alongside the artistic expression of the late Pre-Raphaelite Thomas Cooper Gotch: 'It is the art of culture, of reflection, of intellectual luxury, of aesthetic refinement, of people who look at the world and at life not directly, as it were, and in all its accidental reality, but in the reflection and ornamental portrait of it furnished by art itself in other manifestations; furnished by literature, by poetry, by history, by erudition.'<sup>148</sup> If the later presence of Pre-Raphaelitism was an expression of the final rich flowering of late Victorian civilisation, an epoch that was soon to be swept away for ever by the forces of Modernism and the Great War, an examination of the painters at the fin de siècle suggests that they, like the poets, the novelist, and playwrights, were experimenters with the human psyche, receptive at levels beneath consciousness, who had abandoned alliances to the modes of tradition in favour of a more solitary path. The possibility of using what you could see in order to paint what you could not, posed fundamental theoretical questions which challenged the common belief that a painting can be seen all at once, and its message immediately grasped. There was now a growing consciousness of the need to expand the frame of reference and for the artist to lead his or her audience out of quotidian realities, an idea played out in the ripples of the Pre-Raphaelite legacy throughout the 1890s in the work of Waterhouse and Gotch among others.

### ***A Bloomsbury Family, 1907***

We derive our perception of meaning in a picture from relationships within it; we have to see how a figure fits into a background or stands away from it; how two, three, or more figures are related or juxtaposed. If we consider the domestic space and its objects as part of a larger semiotic system, a nuanced reading of the artistic language of domestic interiors would suggest that space, place and object serve to express dynamic processes within people, among people, and between people and the total environment. So it is that despite the presence of the entire

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<sup>148</sup> Henry James, *The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956), p. 144.



**Figure 1.1.**  
Sir William Orpen, *A Bloomsbury Family* 1907  
(Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh)

family in Sir William Orpen's domestic scene, there is a disturbing sense of isolation, alienation, and anxiety. *A Bloomsbury Family* (figure 1.1) (1907) depicts the artist William Nicolson and his immediate family. Nicolson's wife, the painter Mabel Pryde, is standing by the door. Sitting at the table from left to right are the Nicolson children: Nancy, who married the writer Robert Graves; Tony, who died during the war in 1918; and Ben, who would become Britain's foremost abstract artist, and the husband of Barbara Hepworth. Standing in the foreground is Christopher, or 'Kit', wearing a type of frock often worn by young boys at this date. Kit would later become an architect. Orpen himself is reflected in the convex mirror.

On the most basic of levels, William Nicolson's presence in this family scene is anomalous. There are few men of working age in artistic domestic scenes, for it is assumed that



middle-class husbands and fathers were frequently absent from home, preoccupied with a life concerning political economy and business outside of the private sphere of the domestic. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall point out, men in representations of the Victorian middle classes at home were often understood as ‘the absent presence, there to direct and command but physically occupied elsewhere for most of their time.’<sup>149</sup> Yet despite his prominence in the foreground of the painting and his appropriation of much of the left of the frame, Orpen’s patriarch’s very physical presence signifies less of a cohesive force of obedience and good for his family, and more the problematic view of family relations at the turn of the century. For in spite of the appearance of a recognisable domestic family environment – the cosy dining room with a table dressed for tea at its centre - patriarchal authority is usurped by a sense of alienation and anxiety; both parents retreat from emotional interaction with their children, and the overwhelming motif of the painting is of the isolation between individuals in a family. The family members neither appear to look at, nor interact with, each other, a pattern replicated and repeated numerous times in the images of solitary individuals hanging on the wall, and significantly surrounding the mirror in which Orpen’s image itself is reflected. If the purpose of a painting within a painting is to convey a nuanced message to the viewer, Orpen’s numerous indeterminate images that cover the wall convey the problems in attempting to fix an identity without a narrative, whilst their position surrounding the reflection of the artist suggests the capacity of art to reflect and represent that problem. However, it is also worth noting that the mirror is also the prominent source of light for an otherwise quite sombre painting, not because of Orpen’s reflection, but because of the reflection of the large window towards which three of the four children and Mabel gaze. As I have argued, the window is both a point of transition between closeted domestic space and the possibilities of transgression of that space, and Nicolson’s family look beyond his sober authorial presence to the light beyond the domestic. It is no surprise then that Mabel, too, is stood alongside that other symbol of transition, the doorway, her hand already extended to the door handle in readiness for her flight away from this

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<sup>149</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (first published 1987; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 181.

tense familial scene. All four of the children look away from their parents, their relationship no longer one of adult domination and child subordination, but of a boredom at the roles they have been obliged to perform, signified by Tony's head-in-hands position, but also an expectation of the possibilities of new identities as Nancy and Kit gaze out of frame with looks of anticipation and curiosity.

***Mrs Cyprian Williams and her Two Little Girls, 1891***

Despite its conformity with traditional familial groupings of mother and children, Philip Wilson Steer's remarkable painting of 1891 (figure 1.2) also challenges the ideology of Victorian domesticity. The adult sitter, Mrs Williams, was herself an artist, who exhibited with Steer at the New English Art Club (NEAC), a society born at a time when democracy, self-help, and cooperative ideals were in the air. Through the 1890s the NEAC continued to thrive and by the time King Edward came to the throne, it was an accepted institution, filling that place which the Pre-Raphaelites had occupied a generation earlier.<sup>150</sup> The first meeting of the NEAC was held early in 1886, and its first exhibition was at the Marlborough Gallery, opening on 12<sup>th</sup> April of that same year.<sup>151</sup> The inaugural exhibition contained fifty-eight works by painters who were mostly in their late twenties or early thirties, that is, born around 1860, in the heyday of Pre-Raphaelitism. For the purposes of this thesis, it is significant to note that both Steer and Gotch were founder members. There was no president, and those attending the club would elect a chairman at each meeting. Whilst there was also no manifesto, there was a mission statement which declared that its 'some 50 members [were] [...] all more or less united in their art sympathies. They have associated themselves together with the view of holding an Annual Exhibition, hoping that a collective display of their works, which has hitherto been impossible, will prove not only of interest to the public, but will better explain the aim and method of their art.'<sup>152</sup> Certainly the subject matter of Steer's portrait may be traditional, but its execution suggests the 'art sympathies' that would shape and inform much of the work produced by the

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<sup>150</sup> William Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (London: Cardinal, 1975), p. 134.

<sup>151</sup> McConkey, *The New English*, p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> Lomax, *The Golden Dream*, p. 62.



**Figure 1.2.**

Philip Wilson Steer, *Mrs Cyprian Williams and her Two Little Girls* 1891  
(Tate Britain, London)

NEAC. The perspective of the portrait is unconventional in that the point of view looks downwards from one corner, rendering Mrs Williams in profile. Her two daughters are seated on a hearth – ironically the symbol of a home’s love, comfort, and security – that cuts across the picture diagonally, and the girls are then seen from above. The angled division between mother and children reinforces the strange sense of alienation created, in the first instance, by the picture’s unfamiliar composition. The uneasy shift in scale from Mrs Williams to her daughters, and her gaze away from them lost in thought, reinforces an undefined sense of separation. The authoritative line of Mrs William’s severe profile – she was known for her distinctive features and volatile temperament – and the sharp angle of her arm and hand on the sides of the chair dominate the foreground, but suggest a woman ill at ease, anticipating rising to leave, her thoughts elsewhere. Whilst one daughter has discarded a doll in favour of a picture book, the other, dressed almost identically and still cradling her doll, looks up apprehensively at her

mother's intimidating presence, as if seeking clarity on the terms of their relationship, on the roles they should be playing.

***Sarah Bernhardt, 1879***

Depicting subjects retreating from any emotional interaction with their children, it is no surprise that such images as Steer's and Orpen's challenged the paradigms of intense protection, insulation, prolonged dependence, and delayed responsibility that characterised the ideal childhood for the Victorian middle classes. Indeed, what is significant in both of these images is the introspection exhibited by the individuals and the resulting isolation from other family members that suggests a degree of psychological withdrawal, a dramatic shift away from the closeted and controlled theatre of home. Little wonder then that some artists were drawn to painting portraits which showed familiar people having superior thoughts in familiar settings, pictures which portrayed the beauty of isolated contemplation. Indeed, the paintings that represented the Aesthetic Movement attempted to grasp at the shadows of psyche that such introspection symbolised, often by looking for a talisman, an object that would contain more than itself, which would have grafted on to it ideas and emotions that negated the need for personal qualification within hackneyed settings to suggest the solitary human image itself might exert symbolic power.<sup>153</sup> Attempting to portray a sense of temporary detachment from the world of ordinary affairs, the woman in figure 1.3 picks up an object – a small sculpture or a piece of Staffordshire pottery – she gazes upon it; she is lost in thought.<sup>154</sup> This painting, along with those by Orpen and Steer, visualised the aesthetic experience by suggesting to the viewer what they themselves might ideally look like when looking. Significantly, Jules Bastien-Lepage's sitter was already a famous and popular stage actress in France who made her English

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<sup>153</sup> My reading of the Aesthetic Movement has been informed by Bernard Berenson's *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* (New York: Pantheon, 1948), Michael Cohen's *Engaging English Art: Entering the Work in Two Centuries of English Painting and Poetry* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1987), and *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>154</sup> Kenneth McConkey, *Memory and Desire: Painting in Britain and Ireland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), pp. 52-55.





**Figure 1.3.**  
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Sarah Bernhardt* 1879  
(Private Collection)

debut at the London Gaiety Theatre in 1879, the year of the portrait's production. As such a popular performer, the actress Sarah Bernhardt was instantly recognisable to those who gazed at her image, and thus resonated as familiar, becoming all things to all people, a kind of 'everywoman'.

As Kenneth McConkey observes, however, such images 'transpose the beauty of the object into that of the woman. They objectify the woman and carry the covert message that in the presence of art, the viewer might, with heightened consciousness of self, also become art [...] The experience of art [...] is an invitation, principally to male viewers, to contemplate a woman's beauty.'<sup>155</sup> The talisman, the object held in the picture, has been sacrificed to its painted viewer, who, in turn, has become the new object of contemplation for us, the external viewer. Any notion of solitary female introspection as a force for female autonomy then, becomes subsumed by her objectification.

### ***Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl, 1864***

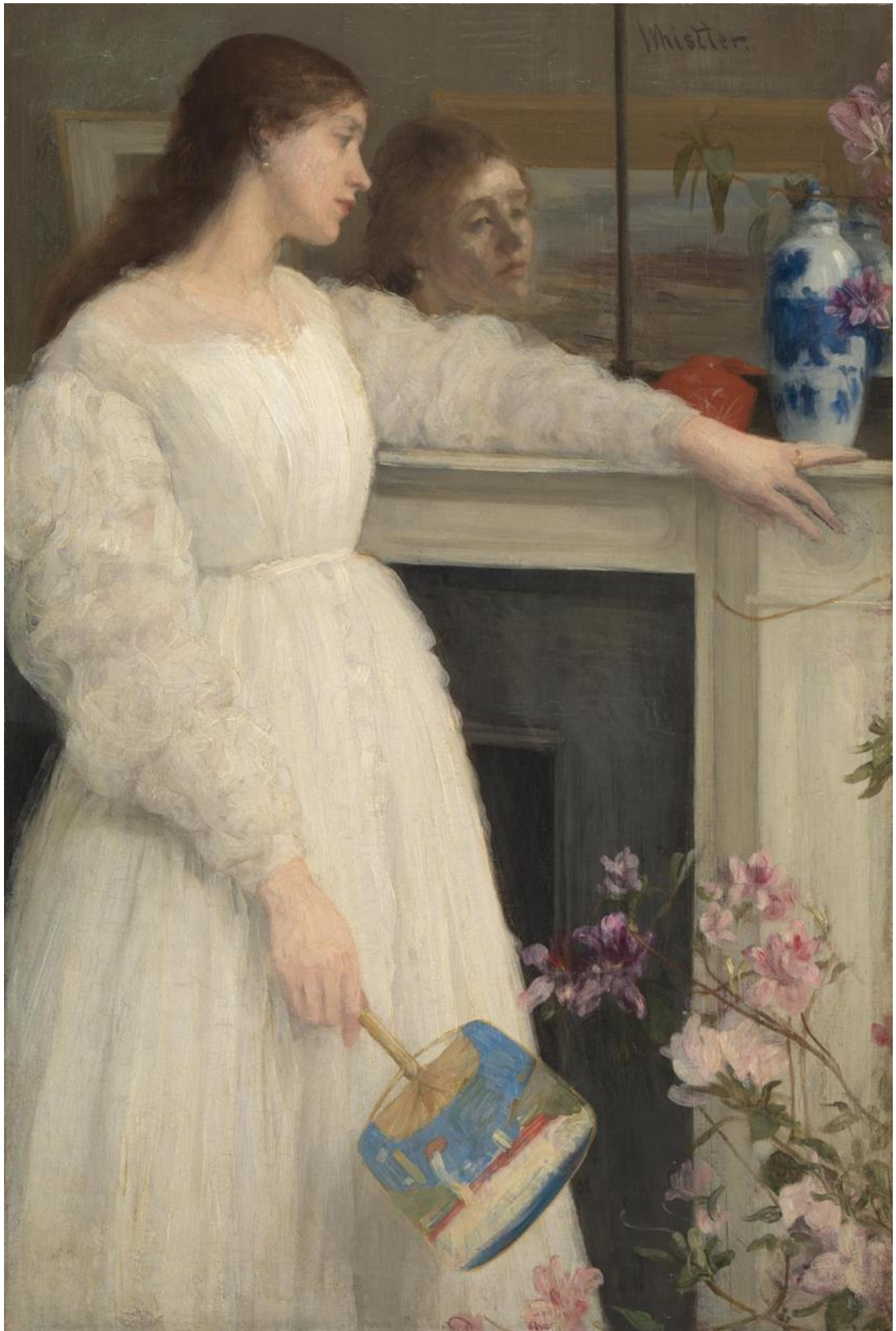
McConkey reads the modern origin of this strand of painting in the 1890s in James McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, (figure 1.4) (1864), a work which re-entered the art market in 1893 and was sold for approximately ten times what Whistler had been paid for it.<sup>156</sup> The painting shows a young woman, understood to be Whistler's mistress, Jo Hiffernan, inside the house they shared in Lindsey Row, Chelsea. In a white, bridal dress, the young woman gazes abstractedly at Japanese style chinaware on the mantelpiece, her languid arm reaching toward the aesthetic objects, reaching to touch beauty for which the objects are the talisman. Appearing to lose workaday consciousness, the mirror captures the woman's uncanny reflection at the fleeting moment of isolated introspection, a reflection that suggests more than the simple reverie suggested by her original image, and rather a moment of deep and troubled contemplation. Indeed, in its capacity to reflect back to the viewer an image that might not

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<sup>155</sup> McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 55.

<sup>156</sup> McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 262.





**Figure 1.4.**  
James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* 1864  
(Tate Britain, London)

otherwise have been detected, the reflection is potentially at odds with the woman's own idealised image, and it is this reflection that assumes the greatest potency. Certainly, the image of the wedding ring so prominently displayed on her left hand, but whose own reflection is obstructed by the talismans, suggests an incongruity between its significance in defining the painted figure's place as a married woman and its absence in the reflected image which is both unfixed by such markers whilst paradoxically understood as the more authentic.<sup>157</sup>

### **Thomas Cooper Gotch: Transforming Traditions**

Between Whistler's painting and Gotch's girl paintings of the 1890s, and as I have explored in my introduction, major developments in the fields of psychoanalytic theory had occurred – children and childhood were now accorded a new status of significance, and it is in Gotch's paintings that the tensions exhibited by the objectification of women in paintings like those by Bastien-Lepage and Whistler began to be addressed. Indeed, I suggest that in Gotch's portraits of solitary girls, there is a subtext, which, despite being informed by a multiplicity of influences garnered from across Pre-Raphaelitism, Naturalism, and the Aesthetic Movement, is significant for its treatment of girlhood. No longer narrow, literal, naturalist reconstructions, nor an abandonment of the literal to evoke the ideas beyond it, Gotch's domestic paintings, the arresting canvases featuring solitary young girls that he began to produce in the 1890s, suggest instead the themes of transformation proposed by psychology where the commonplace had become portentous.

#### ***The Heir to All the Ages, 1897***

Set within a domestic interior, but with the potential for symbolic interpretation, Gotch's portrait of his daughter, Phyllis, entitled *The Heir to All the Ages* (figure 1.5) (1897) demands comparison with the works by Bastien-Lepage and Whistler already discussed. First exhibited at

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<sup>157</sup> For further readings of this painting, see also: Richard Dormant and Margaret F. MacDonald, *James McNeill Whistler*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1994); Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (eds), *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1997); Andrew McLaren Young, Margaret F. MacDonald, Robin Spencer with the assistance of Hamish Miles, *The Paintings of James MacNeill Whistler* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).





**Figure 1.5.**  
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Heir to All the Ages* 1897  
(Private Collection)

the Newlyn Gallery, Cornwall, *The Heir* was Gotch's major work of 1897 and later shown at the Royal Academy wherein its description was of 'a very modern little girl in a frock of rose and gold brocade, who stands against a wonderful grey curtain holding a jewelled reliquary, and looking sideways at the spectator with all the naïve indifference of childhood.'<sup>158</sup> Of course, the reliquary talisman is a repository of the bones and relics of the past, whilst the title of the painting suggests the girl as inheritor of the treasures of learning, tradition, and the achievements of her ancestors. As future exhibition catalogues would go on to explain, every child that is born enters unconsciously into possession of the treasures of the past, inherited and accepted, without question, as their right.<sup>159</sup>

It is also worth noting how the changing concepts of memory influenced the notions of ancestral inheritance and behaviours. Much of the mid-nineteenth-century debates on identity had turned on the relationship between conscious and unconscious memories, whilst acknowledging that memory itself was profoundly unreliable rendering stable identity too then, an illusion. Metaphors of unconscious memory as a *palimpsest*, a storehouse, or a set of concentric circles were gradually replaced by a collective concept of 'organic memory', in which 'bodily behaviour becomes increasingly automatic, *instinctive*.'<sup>160</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth have explored how the child of the fin de siècle was understood variously as the sum of their ancestors performing 'in a drama,' an 'unconscious witness,' and 'the stage on which old battles are endlessly re-enacted' rather than an autonomous individual.<sup>161</sup> There are, however, a number of anomalies in Gotch's painting that would benefit from a nuanced reading. The first is clearly the stance of the subject, whose look 'sideways' demands nothing less than complete engagement with the viewer, a subject whose concern is less with the talisman she holds and more with a consideration beyond the scope of the frame.

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<sup>158</sup> Lomax, *The Golden Dream*, p. 114.

<sup>159</sup> See Exhibition Catalogues, Mr. W. T. Wright and Miss Kate E. Pierce, F.L.A., *Exhibition of Pictures and Sketches by T. C. Gotch* (Kettering: Alfred East Art Gallery, May 1916), p. 3 and Miss Kate E. Pierce, F.L.A., *A Memorial Exhibition of Pictures by Thomas Cooper Gotch* (Kettering: Alfred East Art Gallery, March, 1932).

<sup>160</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, 'The Unconscious Mind and the Workings of Memory,' in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 65-72 (p. 72).

<sup>161</sup> Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, 'The Unconscious Mind', p.72.

Whilst the art critic Charles H. Caffin wrote of the painting in 1910: ‘in the child’s face is [...] only a certain awed submission, as if she had been summoned from her play to assume this rôle,’<sup>162</sup> I would argue that the girl’s expression is far from submissive; her languid eyes suggest a tedium and lack of interest, whilst her bearing is confrontational in its directness and astute poise. The brocade of her dress is echoed by the backcloth of heavy decorative curtains, and both, therefore hint at concealment and a lack of transparency, role-playing and theatricals. Similarly, the reliquary that symbolises her rich inheritance is rather more contentious as an object than usually thought, for, as Caffin argues, ‘It has been put *into* her hands, which also seem to have been arranged around it, for they do not consciously grasp their burden’<sup>163</sup> (my italics). Despite being obliged to carry the repository of female traditions, this child, detached from any other frame of reference – a parent, a sibling, a suitor – eschews the nature of such traditions to portray both a detachment from them and a refusal, therefore, to accept them.

Gotch’s daughter Phyllis was a powerful influence on his creative mind, and she was nine years old when she was taken on a trip to Italy with her parents in the winter of 1891-1892.<sup>164</sup> Gotch had, for some time, been painting children in portraits and thematic subjects, and even in his anecdotal paintings of local situations in Newlyn he was more concerned with the human expression and the emotion of the figures than the detailed depiction of their setting. But the Italian trip is understood as crucial to Gotch’s artistic development, in terms of his new use of colour and pattern, his gradual abandonment of typical Newlyn subject material, and the introduction of a more spiritual or psychological motive in his paintings, as it was here that he was to find inspiration for his emerging symbolist work.<sup>165</sup> For despite a strong and consistent admiration for the work of his fellow artists at Newlyn, and the general aim and tendency of the

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<sup>162</sup> Charles H. Caffin, ‘A Painter of Childhood and Girlhood’, *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, 120.720, (American Edition, 1910), 929-930 (pp. 929-930).

<sup>163</sup> Caffin, ‘A Painter of Childhood and Girlhood’, p. 929

<sup>164</sup> Pamela Lomax, *A Winter in Florence 1891-1892: Cameos from the Life & Times of Thomas Cooper Gotch* (Penzance: Shears & Hogg Publications, 2001)

<sup>165</sup> Lomax, *A Winter in Florence*, p. 11.

school, 'he felt far from confident that his own temperament could ever find adequate expression within those lines.'<sup>166</sup> In Italy, Gotch

was particularly influenced by the work of Benozzo Gozzoli and the other Primitives of the fifteenth century. They in their way had been realists, eager to interpret the movement and play of life; but from the circumstances of their experiences, with a freshness of observation and naïveté of feeling the very reverse of the sophistication of modern realism. Moreover, and this was the most important element of their art in its influence upon Gotch, their realism was the embodiment of an idea.<sup>167</sup>

Like the Pre-Raphaelites before him, Gotch deferred to pre- or early Renaissance art, demonstrating a shared belief with the earlier Brotherhood that 'paramount examples of pure and sincere art-making could be found in Italian and Northern European art of the fifteenth century, from before the era of the Italian painter Raphael (1483-1520) and his followers, the "Raphaelites"''<sup>168</sup> taking inspiration instead from *Quattrocento* antecedents.

But as I have argued, Gotch was not a strict follower of the earlier Brotherhood, for he combined their principles of detail being the truth to nature with the more esoteric ideas of the Symbolist Movement. Since 1886, when the art critic Jean Moréas had published his 'Symbolist Manifesto' in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*, Symbolism reigned as the foremost avant-garde movement: 'Its goal – to express the inexpressible, to suggest ideas through visual imagery, to give form to dreams and imaginings – fostered a broad range of subjects and visual imagery.'<sup>169</sup> However, in the 1890s, it was still less a matter of one dominant artistic style, than of newly emerging styles mixing with existing concepts available to artists and creating fluid boundaries between styles. Gotch pursued these hybrid strategies and understood just how this new type of realism and its premium on exacting detail was put to the service of an idea, the spiritual idea, which gave this art life and purpose. Significantly, he found the Italian

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<sup>166</sup> C. Lewis Hind, 'T. C. Gotch and his Pictures', *The Windsor Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly for Men and Women*, 4 (July 1896), 272-279 (p. 279).

<sup>167</sup> Caffin, 'A Painter of Childhood and Girlhood', p. 924.

<sup>168</sup> Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, Alison Smith, with contributions by Elizabeth Prettejohn and Diane Waggoner, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant Garde* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), p. 10.

<sup>169</sup> Michelle Facos, 'The Visual Arts', in *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. by Michael Saler, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 641-660 (p. 643).

idealisation of the theme of youth and childhood an inspiration and fixed on an ambition to reinterpret this in a modern context, using however, Woman, not Man, as representative of this ideal: 'Gotch suggested that Woman, as an organism and in spirit, was the superior of the male. This being in conflict with the state of affairs as it then was, he worked, through his allegorical art, for the amelioration of the condition of women and children.'<sup>170</sup> Thus, although some of his paintings are of known individuals, his images of childhood were not portraits as such but were painted to symbolise a new understanding of the idea of childhood as a concept. Although Gotch may have used 'the iconographical conventions of early Italian and Flemish art'<sup>171</sup> to clothe his purpose, this purpose, as I have suggested with *The Heir to All the Ages*, came from a lateral interest in abstract ideas that had begun in 1878 when Gotch had flirted with ideas of socialism, aestheticism, and progressive social policy. The theme of childhood, so often the ostensible subject of Gotch's imagery, leads my discussion of his work at the fin de siècle, whilst his representation of the experience of childhood isolation informs wider theories of female development and autonomy. It is therefore my contention that the paintings of solitary girlhood that Gotch produced in the 1890s mark both a change in direction of his career as a painter, but more universally, a radical understanding of the changing perception of childhood and femininity as ideological concepts.

### ***My Crown and Sceptre, 1891***

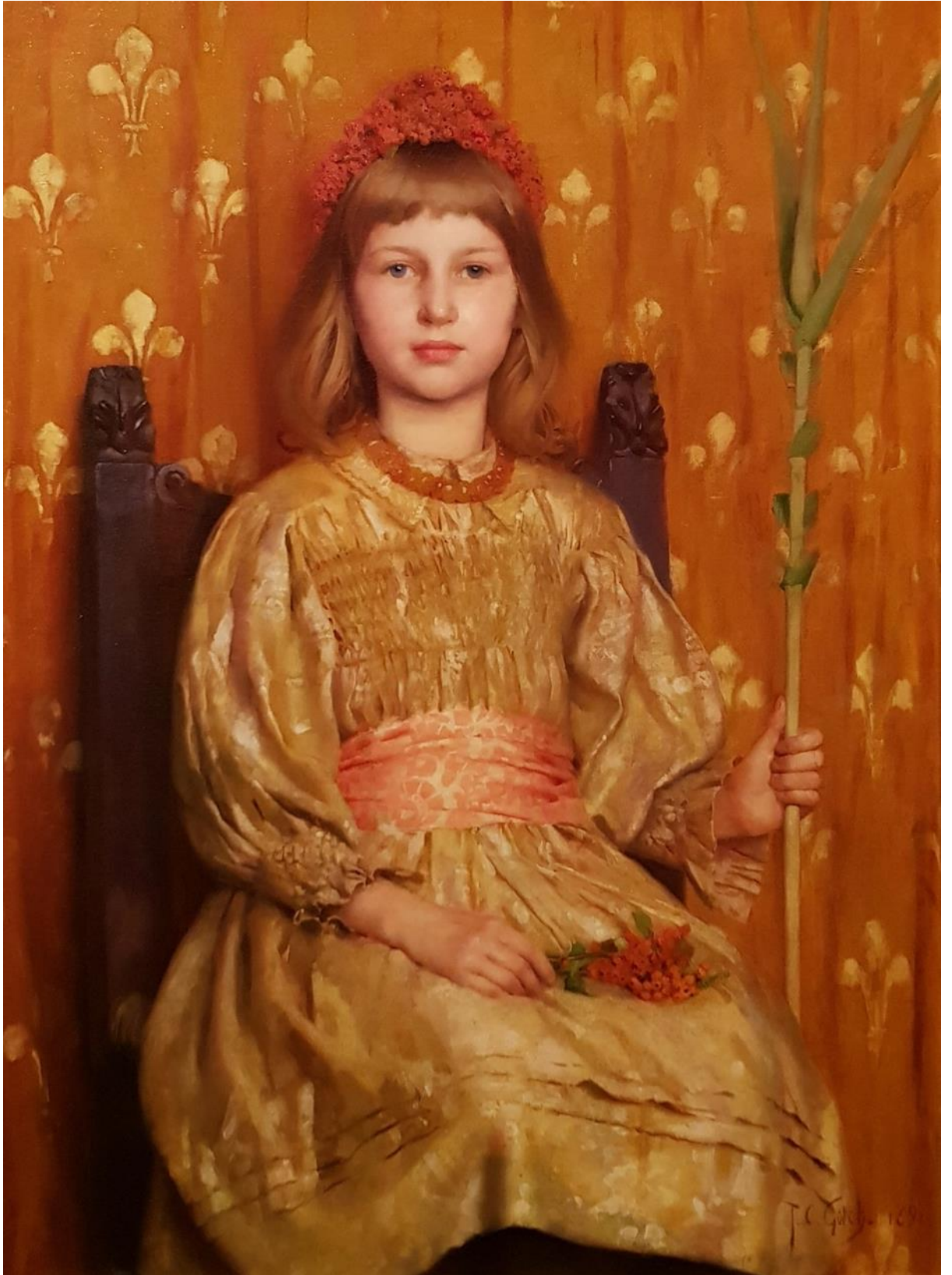
While in Florence, Gotch painted his daughter in a pose that in subject, message, and mood, took the first positive step away from the Newlyn School ethos. *My Crown and Sceptre* (figure 1.6) (1891) was completed in Florence and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1892 and is widely accepted as the first in a series of paintings produced over the next forty or so years which developed the theme of young girls awakening to the realities and legacies of womanhood. There are few critical appraisals of the image, and Gotch's own description of the

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<sup>170</sup> *My Crown and Sceptre* Archival Files, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. This quote appears to be from Anthea Brookes, *Victorian Painting*, the catalogue for an exhibition of the same name in November-December 1977, (London: Fine Art Society, 1977).

<sup>171</sup> John Christian, *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art, Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1998), p. 122.





**Figure 1.6.**  
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *My Crown and Sceptre* 1891  
(Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia)

painting is rudimentary at best: ‘a portrait of Phyllis, she holds a reed in her left hand and wears a crown of red berries.’<sup>172</sup> Caroline Fox and Francis Greenacre mention the painting in passing at the end of their chapter on Gotch in *Artists of the Newlyn School*, but there is little acknowledgment of the significance of the painting, either for Gotch’s work, or its wider context. Their account runs as follows: ‘the artist’s daughter sits on a chair as if asked to pose in the middle of a charade. She is crowned with berries and her sceptre is a green reed. It is a *plein air* work carefully observed within the artist’s studio in Florence.’<sup>173</sup> Their description of the work as *plein air* is curious; the backdrop of gilded fleur-de-lys drapery that echoes the gold of the sitter’s dress and the amber of the large beads around her neck, belies any notion of this image as *plein air*. Sat upright in a formal chair of carved dark wood, Phyllis’s attachment to her clasped objects of reed and bunched berries is as mere ornament, enhancements for her own commanding pose rather than the establishment of a relationship with nature. For these are outside objects bought inside to a domestic space for a purpose. Thus, the small posy of berries on the sitter’s lap originates from the same source as those that have made her crown and as such, they are adaptable and disposable, and function to embellish the model, to establish her role of self-made authority. Indeed, the hint of arrogance and possible ribaldry in her expression, and her posture of superiority suggests Gotch’s changing perception of both Phyllis as an individual, but more widely, the notion of autonomous yet domestic girlhood.

Certainly despite Caffin’s understanding of the picture as ‘a pretty fancy [that] may have originated as nothing more,’<sup>174</sup> there is a deeper significance to this painting, for, as I have argued, it marks a moment of liberation, of transience for the girl child, a rite of passage that acknowledges yet defies the legacy and inheritance of traditional domestic womanhood. It is not fancy that has regulated the formality, the composition, and the context of this picture; it is the reappraisal and subsequent reshaping of the inheritances of girl and womanhood into an image

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<sup>172</sup> Lomax, *A Winter in Florence*, p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> Caroline Fox and Francis Greenacre, *Artists of the Newlyn School, 1880-1900*, 2nd ed (Newlyn, Cornwall: Newlyn Orion Galleries, 1979), p. 177.

<sup>174</sup> Caffin, ‘A Painter of Childhood and Girlhood’, p. 925.

that combines both realism and the realisation of symbolism to challenge the orthodox portrayal of childhood and open a new space of solitude and autonomy for the child of the fin de siècle.

### ***The Child Enthroned, 1894***

*My Crown and Sceptre* is understood by the few critics of Gotch's work as the prelude to the painting for which he is perhaps best known, *The Child Enthroned* (figure 1.7), the first image transforming the second into something of an icon. Regarded as the nucleus of all his subsequent work, the painting made a great impact when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1894, *The Times* describing it as 'one of the most original [works] in the whole exhibition.'<sup>175</sup> Gotch's contemporary, Charles Lewis Hind, tells us that *The Child Enthroned* 'found many lovers. Small wonder when one comes face to face [...] with this serious child of the unclouded brow and the fair unadorned hair, clad in so glorious a robe, and with aureole about her head.'<sup>176</sup> Yet, however delightful Hind's description, *The Child Enthroned* was misunderstood by a number of contemporary critics as a cross-dressing child Jesus. F. G. Stephens in the *Athenaeum* called it 'a remarkable and noble outcome of that mood of which Bastien-Lepage is the most popular representative. [...] There is something almost Byzantine in the still sweetness and joyous serenity of the comely boy with Flemish features, about which long straight tresses of pale golden hair fall to his shoulders.'<sup>177</sup> Stephen's assumption that the picture represented the youthful Christ was also shared by critics when it was shown at the Paris Salon two years later.<sup>178</sup> Certainly the hieratic pose, rich brocades and flat halo seemed to proclaim a dependence on the portraiture of the Old Masters and other art historical precedents dealing in male authority figures. Little wonder then that upon a superficial glance, *The Child Enthroned* effected such gender inversions.

But as I have suggested, and as Alice Eden has argued, 'upon more than a superficial

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<sup>175</sup> 'The Royal Academy', *The Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1894, p. 16.

<<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive/frame/article/1894-05-05/16/1.html>> [accessed 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020], p. 16.

<sup>176</sup> Hind, 'T.C. Gotch and his Pictures', p. 279.

<sup>177</sup> F. G. Stephens, 'T. C. Gotch', *Athenaeum*, No. 3471, (5<sup>th</sup> May 1894), p. 587.

<sup>178</sup> Christian, *The Last Romantics*, p. 122.





**Figure 1.7.**  
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Child Enthroned* 1894  
(Private Collection)

glance, this picture is not a standard Victorian apotheosis of the child, but differs from the many contemporary genre pictures of “simple, inconsequential, homely episode[s]”.<sup>179</sup> Represented in isolation, detached from a familial composition of ‘real’ children living ‘real homely’ lives in familiar and contemporary times, Gotch’s vision of girl child autonomy is raised to an unprecedented level; indeed, *The Times* obituary focused on Gotch’s dissent in painting such an image.<sup>180</sup> The child looks beyond the viewer, and our inability to fathom her female psychology keeps the figure isolated, elevating her composure, her power, and her autonomy. Her steady gaze, endowed with strength and determination contrasts with the ideological construct of a readily distracted, malleable, female gaze.

The physical reproduction of the sensual, material world is omnipresent in the painting and despite its defamiliarisation of domestic space, its very distortion of the familiar threatens to overwhelm the child subject rather than set her free: the gold brocade embroidery on the black velvet cushion, the green satin slippers, the sheen of the loosely folded satin sash around the girl’s waist, the close texture and rich pattern on the child’s cloak, the tactile lacy texture of the two outer borders of the dossal, and even the grain of the wood in the middle ground enclose the sitter in ‘an unnatural, excessively animated, congested and cropped interior, [...] a captive of ideology.’<sup>181</sup> Boxed in by a rigorous symmetry of artificial domestic construction and architectonic harmony, ‘the deliberate denaturalisation and emphasis on the rigours of design could be read superficially as a confident allusion to stability.’<sup>182</sup> However, the precariousness of the image cannot be denied, for it teeters on the edge of the visible and the invisible, a composition that simultaneously evokes ritual and ceremony whilst articulating doubt in their confining authority. As Eden explains: ‘the notably garish and excessively unnatural colours create doubt and undercut the confidence of the image; aesthetic ruptures and contradictions

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<sup>179</sup> Eden, ‘Women, Representation and the Spiritual’, pp. 67-68.

<sup>180</sup> Gotch’s obituary was published in *The Times* on May 4<sup>th</sup> 1931. ‘His “Child Enthroned”’, it read, had ‘a certain intensity of feeling which carried off the too-literal style in which it was painted. To some extent the great success of this picture was a hindrance to Gotch because it led him to repeat himself in other works conceived in the same convention.’ <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive/frame/article/1931-05-04/16/14.html>> [accessed 14 October 2020], p. 16.

<sup>181</sup> Eden, ‘Women, Representation and the Spiritual’, p. 78.

<sup>182</sup> Eden, ‘Women, Representation and the Spiritual’, p. 78.

serve to challenge hegemonic ideology.’<sup>183</sup> The suggestion of a space beyond the picture frame is evident in the confrontational gaze of the child. Her eyes are fixed intently upon something far ahead in the distance. The chess board pattern of the floor before the throne implies the possibility of infinite space, whilst the tensions between the physical humanity of the girl and the artificial domesticity of her environment are further enacted through the contrast between the flesh of her physicality and its aesthetic surrounds. The fingers that overlap the arm of the throne emerge from an overly large gown – the sleeves have been pulled up and are bunched around the elbows, and its lengths fall and trail below the dais in ample folds – whilst her face is doubly framed, first by her golden hair and then again by the perfect round of the aureole. The contrast between the flesh and the artifice disrupts any sense of continuity between child and place. The isolated and solitary body emerges untainted from the luscious trappings that would subsume it, the hands authoritatively spread across the wooden arms of the throne, the mind and the imagination – the construction of self – framed by a symbol of eternity. As female child and thus the future of biological woman, *The Child Enthroned* eschews the trappings of her environment to suggest instead her position as an infinite icon of new possibilities, a regenerative force for the future.

The bodily flesh of the girl child then emerges in Gotch’s painting as a challenge and affront to the patriarchal household, the frail and mysterious body of the female a means to both interpret the domestic ideal and articulate the anxieties that arise out of it. The home, the *locus amoenus* of Victorian family life, was always simultaneously a potentially dangerous and erotically charged place; the separation of spheres and the ideology of domesticity, precisely insofar as it established the home as feminine space, generated this particular danger and related anxieties.<sup>184</sup> Thus by the last two decades of the century the notion of home as a frightening place in which identity was threatened or challenged as well as nurtured and in which the authority of the female was not guaranteed to be beneficently exercised had become a critical focus of national and international debate, a debate that was explicitly and insistently centred on

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<sup>183</sup> Eden, ‘Women, Representation and the Spiritual’, p. 78.

<sup>184</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 225.

female power.<sup>185</sup> So whilst the Victorians needed to re-inscribe and reassure their audience that the female was subject to the Law of the Father, such reassurance of patriarchal dominance may be read as necessary precisely because of the awareness of female transgressive potential.

### **Edvard Munch's *Puberty*, 1894-1895**

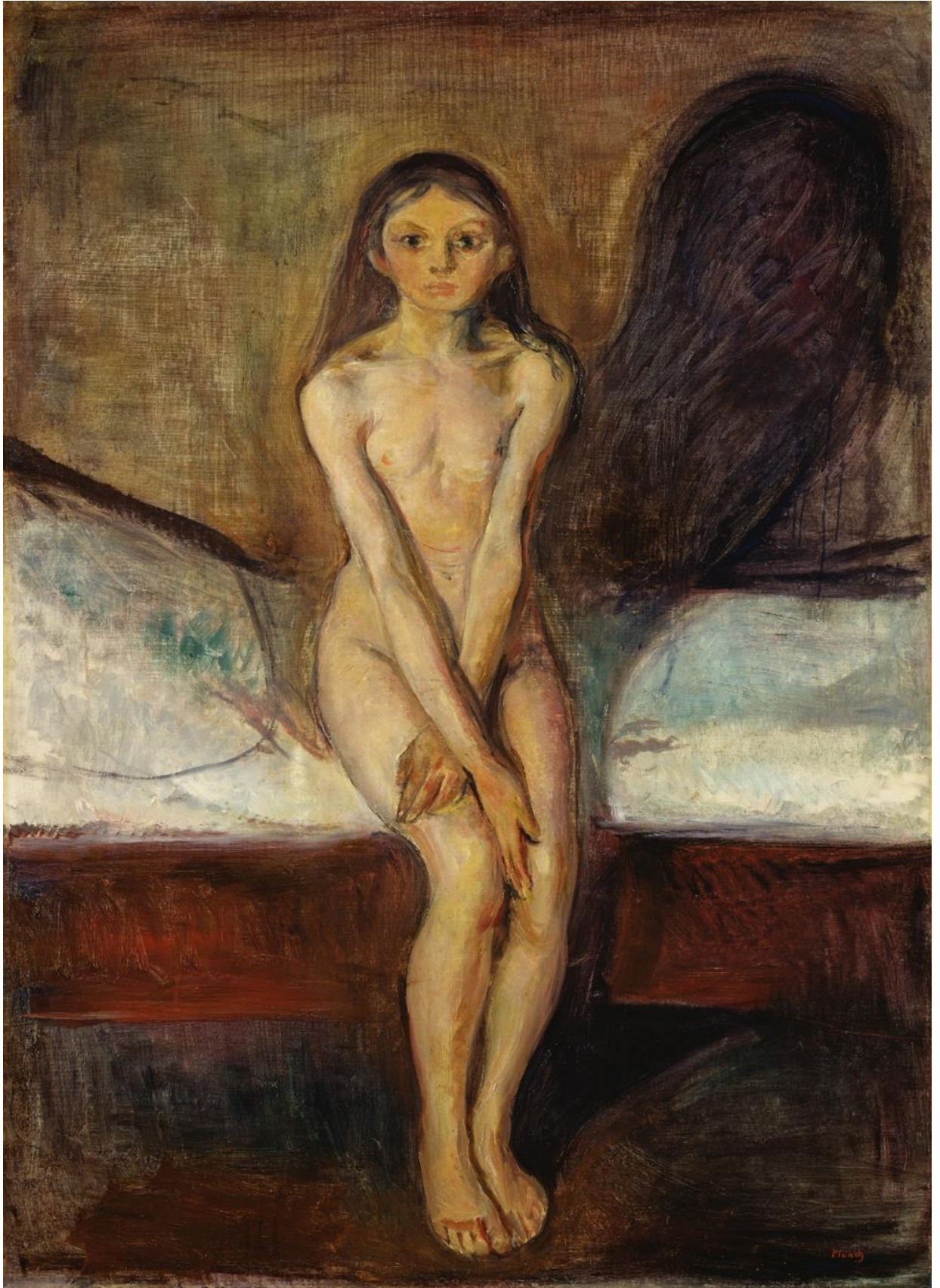
The female child body of Edvard Munch's *Puberty* (figure 1.8) (1894-1895) projects this dichotomy. The composition is simple; a naked young girl sits on the edge of a bed, her body clinched together vertically in contrast to the bed's horizontal lines. To the left of the girl is a cushion, to the right, a large dark shadowy shape that appears to stand proud of the lighter wall. Legs clamped together, her slight arms crossed across her genitals, the girl's body-clinch creates a bounded form that an outline could be drawn around. Even the toes join in a single curve. If the arms hung looser a gap might open up between the shoulder and the elbow, the elbow and the wrist, but there are no gaps anywhere. The girl's body, the flesh, makes a single unified shape, an impermeable, untouchable form, and nothing in the picture breaks into this shape, intrudes on its defined boundary, or even overlaps it. But any distress the girl may be feeling at her naked affrontery and suggested by her guarded posture is negated by way of her blunt and challenging stare, for the viewer's eye is led from the pale flesh of the sitter to her eyes wide open looking out of the frame, beyond the confined domestic space. As a portrait of adolescence and isolation, *Puberty* projects the uncertainty of transition, of culturally understood female bodily function and purpose juxtaposed with individual identity and ownership that originates in the place of home.

Significantly though, the painting's expression of isolated fortitude is mitigated by a second protagonist, the dark shape alongside the boundaries of the female child's body. It is not a shadow; it is not shaped like the girl's body, although its definition suggests an enlargement of the girl's head, of the seat of her thinking. But as a shadow it does not fall as it should, across the bed, up the wall. It is a rounded, dark mass attached to her body as tightly as her body is

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<sup>185</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 227.





**Figure 1.8.**  
Edvard Munch, *Puberty* (ENG), *Pubertet* (NOR) 1894-1895  
(Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Norway)

attached to itself. It emanates from her hips and flows down and across her thighs, the only single intrusion across the fleshy top of one thigh. It swells and hangs in the air alongside her like an ectoplasmic apparition, but its liquid shape sucks tight onto the girl's left side, like a pool of liquid clinging to the hard edge of a coin, and its outline creeps all the way down her leg to the bedroom floor. Critics have often interpreted this shape as male sexuality, looming large over the vulnerable, pubescent girl battling the isolating phenomenon of puberty with its inherent fears and even suicidal anxieties.<sup>186</sup> And yet its very ambiguity suggests its susceptibility to interpretation. It possesses qualities of the symbolic shadow, although it is not a shadow. It is both external and internal to the girl, a projection of her soul's condition, the tangible yet abstract visual expression of the birth of a curiously transgressive and sentient creature, the symbol of the girl's own dawning persona at the point of nascent maturation.

### **The Enigma of the Nursery and Schoolroom**

The angular lines of the body of the lone and guarded female figure of Munch's painting conform to the harsh, geometric outline of the barren interior of her bedroom. This bodily identification with the domestic environments of childhood, of the nursery, the child's bedroom and schoolroom is compelling, for these child-centric spaces in the nineteenth-century home are the most mysterious of places, although crucially, they are not fictionally represented as escapist fantasy worlds.<sup>187</sup> They have their own special customs and behaviours, for they are understood as the places where day-by-day the miracle of the transformation of the 'primitive' child into civilised individual is being enacted. Societal demands on the child, and the things for which it must be educated, are determined outside individual influence. The individual child must submit, more or less, to varying educational aims and methods, according to his or her cultural

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<sup>186</sup> The Polish novelist, dramatist and poet, Stanislaw Przybyszewski's anthology *Das Werk des Edvard Munch*, published in Berlin in 1894 was the first publication devoted entirely to Munch. Contemporary critics who have considered the significance of this black shape in *Puberty* and other Munch works include Elizabeth Prelinger and Michael Parke-Taylor, *The Symbolist Prints of Edvard Munch: The Vivian and David Campbell Collection* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1996), and Arne Eggum, *The Masterworks of Edvard Munch* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979).

<sup>187</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that the nursery was often renamed the schoolroom and used for educational purposes. Such a title gave it a purposeful air and was favoured by governesses. The nursery space and that of the schoolroom are therefore understood as interchangeable in this chapter.

and social surroundings, and the kind of environment, the tone prevailing in the family, the parents' characters and the general treatment meted out to the child play a decisive part in the formation of the child. As micro-environments within the larger framework of the family home, the nursery or schoolroom are small, enigmatic, isolated worlds, islands of apparent safety with fear and mystery walling off their surroundings. They afford their child inhabitants no opportunity of making comparisons with the world outside, and every event within them seems just on this account unique and is invested with heightened significance. The result is a sultry atmosphere in these detached places, arising from fear of the world outside, and perhaps an unappeased longing for closer intimacy with the parents. The nursery and schoolroom are thus made necessary and conditioned by the lengthy period of development which is required for the 'civilising' of children in order that they may sustain the struggle for existence and replicate and reproduce the status quo, fashioning the child into an adult appropriate to his or her surroundings.

Unsurprisingly then, the design of the nursery 'became a subject of increasing concern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,'<sup>188</sup> and from the 1870s onwards, decorative advice literature devoted page space to the location and furnishing of the nursery. The category of beauty had become considerably more important to the decoration of the home than utility, and the domestic environment, including the nursery, increasingly appeared in discourse as a site of artistic experience. The period of the fin de siècle saw the development of elaborate furniture and decoration designed specifically for children, and parents drew on an increasing range of products to decorate and adorn these child-centric places, investing in their child's private space both emotionally and materially. As Hamlett observes, the material culture of the nursery was richly figurative, often literally didactic, and into the late nineteenth century, 'the evangelical moral message [...] continued to be transmitted through physically inscribed domestic objects. While not always explicitly religious, these messages clearly dictated correct behaviour.'<sup>189</sup> The objects and furnishings of the nursery and schoolroom could then be used to

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<sup>188</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 120.

<sup>189</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 121-123.

instruct children on the values of neatness, order, and standards, and reformers and purveyors of design extolled the contribution of domestic decoration to the growth of public and private virtue. Moral order and codes of conduct were connected to, and their messages derived from, a visible neat arrangement of objects and furnishings that defined both physical limits and parameters, and psychological expectations and behaviours. Indeed, as Bourne Taylor observes: ‘Children and the insane were often compared to one another in the growing field of mental science: both became feminized, both were seen to need to learn self control, self esteem and moral coherence through the benign surveillance of the family – the central metaphor for the reformed, domesticated asylum.’<sup>190</sup> The nursery could function then as a space in which girls could begin to practise the domestic arts that would require their attention when they married and took charge of their own households. In this respect, the nursery space can be understood as a place of ownership only inasmuch as it provides a stage for a girl’s performative acts that anticipate more significant forms of familial service.

As I have already remarked, the physical limits of the nursery were enshrined in the domestic geography of the middle-class home. The ideal Victorian home tended to boast an interior that combined ‘homely comfort and happy grandeur’<sup>191</sup> in order to produce both the physical and psychological ‘feeling of a protected, womblike enclosure.’<sup>192</sup> In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard develops a rational view of domestic space and identity in the middle-class home, arguing that the comfort of home is grounded in a fantasy of perfect congruence between inner and outer, between selfhood and world,<sup>193</sup> and draws upon this image of the home as a womb-like bower to illustrate his point: ‘Before he is “cast into the world,” [...] man is laid in the cradle of the house. [...] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.’<sup>194</sup> Yet paradoxically, much effort went into the creation of spatial

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<sup>190</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, ‘Between Atavism and Altruism: the Child on the Threshold in Victorian Psychology and Edwardian Children’s Fiction’, in *Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood*, ed. by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 89-121 (p. 95).

<sup>191</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 11.

<sup>192</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 11.

<sup>193</sup> Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 96.

<sup>194</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 7.



boundaries in the late nineteenth-century home, into fracturing Bachelard's 'earthly paradise of matter',<sup>195</sup> a notion that conflicts somewhat with the trope of an enshrining familial enclosure. Significantly, this coincided with a quantifiable shift in marital behaviour. There was a steady fall in fertility across the population from the 1870s, most marked by the middle classes, a trend that historians have associated with a shift in middle-class sexual practices borne out of a growing culture of sexual restraint in marriage and a culture of abstinence.<sup>196</sup> Marriage was characterised by an increasing emphasis on love and companionship and an element of physical restraint that in turn influenced the way in which the home was arranged and utilised. Intimacy between couples was heightened by the evocation of personal and private space, and its relationship to the body. Thus the arrangement of rooms and objects was determined by what Hamlett understands as the '*perceived* needs of the family – the need to *construct appropriate relations* between family members, rather than the need to secure individual privacy'<sup>197</sup> (my italics). So it was then that the ideologies concerning gender and family life that delineated the notion of family and home in the late nineteenth century could follow girls into the nurseries and schoolrooms and threaten the apparent boundaries of personal space. As Sonya Sawyer Fritz argues, the privacy of the nursery was vulnerable and conditional, easily disregarded by other family members at any time, and an indication that the self-deferment girls were supposed to practise in the home was expected to be constant and absolute, extending even into private spaces.<sup>198</sup>

The material culture and the domestic spaces of home worked symbiotically in conjunction with familial relationships then; the domestic boundaries delineated by rooms, and the walls, windows, and doors therein acted to create the distinctive set of intimacies and

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<sup>195</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 7.

<sup>196</sup> Jeanne Peterson believes that family size declined partly because of the use of contraception, Jeanne Peterson, *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 64. Carol Dyhouse shows that feminists of the 1890s promoted the restriction of the family through abstinence in marriage, Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 170. More recently, Simon Szreter's *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain 1860-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) has argued for a culture of abstinence from 1870 onwards.

<sup>197</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 210.

<sup>198</sup> Sonya Sawyer Fritz, "'A Room of Her Very Own': Privacy and Leisure in the Victorian Girl's Bedroom", *Girlhood Studies*, 8.2 (Summer 2015), 38-53 (p. 43).

distances demanded by the expectations of the late nineteenth-century middle-class family, setting forth a staged space wherein a series of perceived actions should be performed. At the same time, the experience of childhood changed in the final decades of the nineteenth century as families also became smaller. The average number of children per family dropped from six to between three and four, and was accompanied by a shift in ideas about how children should be raised.<sup>199</sup> Of course, parenting varied from family to family, from home to home, and whilst there is no single characterisation of late Victorian middle-class domesticity, there is little doubt that the placing of children at a distance from their parents in the attic space of a nursery or schoolroom in order to control the terms of their relationship had a crucial impact on childhood experience and development.

### **Maisie Farange**

#### **The Dead Schoolroom**

In Henry James's novel, *What Maisie Knew*, Maisie's isolation is specifically evoked through the place of her upstairs 'dead schoolroom',<sup>200</sup> where,

with the habit, above all, in her watch for a change, of hanging over bannisters when the door-bell sounded [...] what she heard at such times was a clatter of gaiety downstairs; the impression of which, from her earliest childhood, had built up in her the belief that the grown-up time was the time of real amusement and above all, of real intimacy (p. 43).

Although the isolated nursery system was not necessarily synonymous with neglectful parents because of its potential, as I have observed, to be lovingly arranged and frequently visited, Maisie's schoolroom is remarkable in the other extreme. James's description of this private child space is of a desolate asylum adorned by her governess, Mrs Wix, with 'a Japanese fan and two rather grim texts' (p. 59). Of course, within any room, some objects are purely functional whilst others are purely ornamental. Because of the emphasis on the latter in the construction of the late Victorian nursery and schoolroom, the lack of ornamental objects in

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<sup>199</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 8.

<sup>200</sup> Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (first published 1897; London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 44. All subsequent quotations from the novel are from this edition.

James's description would suggest some significant disruption in the 'normal' life of the household, and particularly in the relationship of its inhabitants towards the child figure. The sparsity of Maisie's schoolroom contrasts sharply with the fashions of the era to shroud and envelop the places of childhood development and learning in civilising furnishings and didactic objects, and of course, such a bare or neglected interior could be understood as a polemic image of psychic distress: 'mamma kept them rather low on the questions of decorations' (p. 59). And yet, such lack can also be understood less as neglect and distress, and rather, the originating and enabling backdrop and framework to Maisie's remarkable maturation. Her private place of growth does not replicate and reproduce the material culture of the Victorian home in miniature but is rather an empty space of possibilities for reshaping and redefining both the behaviours and the status of the fin-de-siècle child figure. Indeed, its very austerity provides the blank canvas on which Maisie can imprint a new image of herself. Unencumbered by the constraints of prescriptive ideologies of domesticity, Maisie's spiritual isolation in the bare space of the schoolroom is intrinsic to her self-development, and in this respect, it is a place of embryonic growth that resonates somewhat with Bachelard's womb allegory. James's text then takes the idea of a securely bounded middle-class nursery and looks, not beyond it, but into it, placing the self-conscious representation of childhood and the domestic within a complex contemporary debate on the relationship between social development and psychological transformation.

Never sent to school, and with no peer group, Maisie grows to adolescence in this nursery schoolroom, and in a set of circumstances that keep her apart from the formal education of textbooks and schools. Isolated in what John McCloskey calls 'the cage of her own consciousness',<sup>201</sup> she is insulated even from the companionship of other children. Nor does she have any religious instruction and her social tuition occurs through interactions with parents, governesses, and other adults, although even here, she does not learn even the traditional rudimentary graces and accomplishments of young ladies of nineteenth-century middle-class

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<sup>201</sup> John C. McCloskey, 'What Maisie Knows: A Study of Childhood and Adolescence', *American Literature*, 36.4 (Jan. 1965), 485-513 (p. 486) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2923181>> [accessed 6 August 2019].

families. Indeed, of any area but that of her continuous and severely limited environment, it appears she knows very little. Thus, her process of understanding and development proceeds, with minor variations, out of that same domestic environment, an environment which includes the same people, severely limited in number, for a considerable span of years, and emanates from her environment of containment and its restrictions. Her awareness and comprehension develop from a continuing process of interaction with this strictly limited domestic environment, for the same few situations and the same few people recur and reappear as the empirical fabric of her education.

For many of James's contemporaries, Maisie was understood primarily as the solitary, innocent filter through which the base nature of the adults in this domestic space could be expressed, 'a credible picture of childish innocence, preserved in the midst of glaring evil',<sup>202</sup> 'ignorant, peace-loving, and possessed of that weary craving for rest and home and some one to cling to.'<sup>203</sup> But as Lynn Wardley has remarked, 'while the text has been read for its own moral take on the shift from Victorian to modern morals—and has garnered attention from contemporary moral philosophers—*Maisie* is less interested in the child's morality than in her capacity.'<sup>204</sup> Indeed, it is my contention that Maisie's domestic environment, which is, of course, 'normal' to her, and lacks the standards and contrasts 'by which to judge in any but an empirical, unsystematized sense,'<sup>205</sup> is, paradoxically, the space and place that will ultimately be, not her undoing, but the very backbone of her autonomous development. James's authoritative documentation of Maisie's perceptions is borne out of her isolated state and its response to the familial yet warped environment of her childhood. His sensitive grasp of the child's response to external stimuli is both triggered in isolation and privacy, and results in compounding such states. As I shall explore, the mark of her education, 'what she knows', is not her innocence, her childhood 'sweetness' or even an apparent 'corruption' of these supposed

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<sup>202</sup> Unsigned review, *Manchester Guardian* (28 September 1897) in *What Maisie Knew*, p. 267.

<sup>203</sup> Unsigned review, *Pall Mall Gazette* (11 October 1897) in *What Maisie Knew*, p. 269.

<sup>204</sup> Lynn Wardley, 'Fear of Falling and the Rise of Girls: Lamarck's Knowledge in *What Maisie Knew*', *American Literary History*, 28.2 (Summer 2016), 246-270 (p. 250) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/618730>> [accessed 24 February 2020].

<sup>205</sup> McCloskey, 'What Maisie Knows', p. 492.

traits. It is, rather, the perception and dawning awareness of the shifting, relational quality of her familial milieu and an incipient ability to draw uncomplicated inference and to make autonomous comparisons and judgements unencumbered with the restrictions of expectation and tradition.

### **Familial Disintegration**

Christina Britzolakis recognises that James's novel is clearly marked by debates that preoccupied the adults of the fin de siècle, for it begins with the divorce of Maisie's parents, Ida and Beale Farange, an event that forms the basis of the plot, and which Britzolakis reads as obviously emblematic of a wider social disintegration.<sup>206</sup> In her parents, Maisie, at the age of six, loses what we understand as the central reference points in her life, the absolutes on whom children appear to rely in their process of identity formation and socialisation. Her estranged parents have little interest in her except as a conveyor of barbed messages to each other, and she acquires a second set of parental figures that ironically mirror the first: the governess employed by her father, Miss Overmore, and her mother's lover, Sir Claude. Dissolved from its biological foundation, the function of parenting is exposed for its somewhat shaky construction, and when both surrogate parents marry the respective biological parent only to enter into an affair with one another, the tropes of home and family become relational in the extreme. For *What Maisie Knew* anticipates and articulates the expanding fracture of the nuclear family and the dissolution of the extended one through the experience of a single, solitary child and her domestic environment. Indeed, Maisie's parents and their partners interact in a complex and unpredictable series of domestic couplings, but it is through Maisie as filter that we, as readers, observe the clandestine nature of these courtships, told that she simply perceives 'that something beyond her knowledge had taken place in the house' (p. 69). As everyone speaks over and around her, Maisie is excluded from the adults' discourse to the extent of seeming absent: 'Maisie had a greater sense than ever in her life before of not being personally noticed' (p. 107). As I shall

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<sup>206</sup> Christina Britzolakis, 'Technologies of Vision in Henry James's "What Maisie Knew"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 34.3, The Turn-of-the-Century American Novel (Summer, 2001), 369-390 (p. 378) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1346072>> [accessed 24 February 2020].

explore, her isolation and the absence of her conscious thought – our view is restricted to what she sees, hears, and says in dialogue with other characters, but not what she thinks – suggests that her subjectivity is not perceptible or decodable within the socially constructed webs of meaning which comprise her familial environment. As Susan Honeyman argues, ‘James brings attention not to Maisie’s innocence (despite many critics’ insistence on interpreting her so) but to her exclusion from adult society and discourse.’<sup>207</sup>

However, it is my contention that just such an exclusion is, paradoxically, the basis of Maisie’s challenge to traditional constructions of girlhood, and its attributes of purity, innocence, and daughterly obedience. In the unstable society of the fin de siècle, James lays bare the trope of familial heteronormative relations with the child simultaneously at its centre and a lowly subordinate in the hierarchical structure, and exposes its falsities for the adult self-interest that they serve to advance. It might appear, of course, in the first instance, that the adult lives of the text seem to establish a pattern of departure *away* from the familial, patriarchal centre; each remarries after the divorce but these new liaisons appear to scarcely remake the family; Maisie’s father is chronically absent and finally determines to disappear for good by going to America (with a woman who will support him); and her mother reappears always in the company of a new gentleman friend. Likewise, ‘gender instability is seen as a symptom of the pathology of modern life, notably in Sir Claude, the feminized aristocrat, and Ida Farange, Maisie’s billiards-playing, sexually predatory mother.’<sup>208</sup>

And yet, the substitution of mates, and the reformation of every new coupling propels each and every adult in the text back towards the familiar familial, because ultimately, no adult player is able to break away from the security and confines of the stage of home. Her biological parents, their lovers, and her governesses subvert and then endlessly attempt to reconstruct the roles of stable familial discourse. The same game is repeated interminably, ‘in which the moves

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<sup>207</sup> Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 35.

<sup>208</sup> Britzolakis, ‘Technologies of Vision’, p. 378.

– constant acts of possession – seem the same and yet are different.<sup>209</sup> As Martha Banta argues, James’s adult characters are fixed in type and must endlessly repeat what they are,<sup>210</sup> keeping the only identities their domestically structured types allow them. As Wardley observes, Maisie’s role in these manoeuvres is as ‘a prop or pawn’, an accessory to the affirmation of the heteronormative couplings they continuously undertake:

Maisie finds herself ‘on her mother’s breast’ only when Ida is trying to impress a suitor [...] When her stepmother, Mrs Beale, encloses Maisie in her ‘encircling arms,’ the embrace is choreographed to attract Sir Claude, who has expressed regret that he did not marry a ‘family-woman’ in Maisie’s mother: ‘Sir Claude watched [Mrs Beale] as she charmingly clung to the child’ [...] Beale is no more a ‘family man’ than Ida is a ‘family woman’; both hope to profit from signaling some parental instinct.<sup>211</sup>

Even after finding her mother unexpectedly at the Folkestone hotel, Maisie, Sir Claude and his wife ‘grouped themselves like a family party; [...] the mother patting the child into conformities unspeakable’ (p. 154). Ida’s attempts to manipulate Maisie and overcome her resistance make for uncomfortable reading, ‘drawing on the bodily rhetoric of maternal tenderness to “pat” her child, rather like a mud cake, into conformity with her deeply unmaternal wishes.’<sup>212</sup> Maisie’s exclusion from this discourse highlights the socially constructed codes of behaviour and rules of engagement that such ‘playing’ entails, but which are alien to her. Indeed, the world of adults appears, paradoxically, like a children’s game to Maisie: ‘It sounded, as this young lady thought it over, very much like puss-in-the-corner, and she could only wonder if the distribution of parties would lead to a rushing to and fro and changing of places’ (p. 72). In this respect, Adrian Poole argues that ‘Maisie quickly learns to see the world around her as theatre [and] she ponders the scenarios provided by her bewilderingly multiple parent-figures,’<sup>213</sup> whose repeating patterns of social charm and engagement are followed by disillusionment and bitterness. But

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<sup>209</sup> Juliet Mitchell, ‘What Maisie Knew: portrait of the artist as a young girl’, in *The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James*, ed. by John Goode (London: Methuen & Co, 1972), pp. 168-189 (p. 174).

<sup>210</sup> Martha Banta, ‘The Quality of Experience in What Maisie Knew’, *The New England Quarterly*, 42.4 (December 1969), 483-510 (pp. 501-502) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/363468>> [accessed 20 June 2019].

<sup>211</sup> Wardley, ‘Fear of Falling’, p. 253.

<sup>212</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 329.

<sup>213</sup> Adrian Poole, *Henry James* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1991), p. 100.

‘since this is a novel in which alliances proliferate endlessly because they can be endlessly reshuffled, we can never depend on any pattern to endure, much less to prevail, and neither can Maisie.’<sup>214</sup> Maisie’s parents separate and then relinquish their roles to step-parents who themselves disestablish, creating an environment of perpetual displacement. Rather than restoring the family by replacing the parents who have failed, the step-parents’ attempts to occupy the parental place and create family spaces only extends the chain of unsatisfactory familial arrangements that the divorce initiated.

With this frailty of relations comes a possibility of frailty of feeling – the chance that if affection, or indeed, Maisie’s whole *raison d’être* is generated by her placement in the pattern, it may prove unreliable, or be cancelled altogether when those patterns shift. Of course, such frailty exists only if Maisie’s position is considered and qualified against a hierarchical framework of adult-child relations, as daughter, step-daughter, as charge, as pupil. For in *Maisie*, the legitimacy and arbitrary authority of the family structure is undermined and exposed for all its performative fakery. James sets the stage of the theatre of home for his adult players to cast Maisie in whatever role suits them – like her nursery space, Maisie feels herself to be a kind of blank on to which the adults load parts of their stories<sup>215</sup> – but the arbitrary and self-serving nature of such adult constructions is exposed by the rapidity with which they shift. Maisie absorbs and responds to their expectations within a range of domestic environments in whatever way she can make sense of them, for hers are not judgements based on preconceptions and traditional behaviours, but responses that are logical, unsocialised, uncontrived, and which accentuate her isolation and exclusion from the complex and culturally relative codes that revolve around familial dynamics.

Cast in this role of isolation and alienation, Maisie’s passage toward knowledge and autonomy suggests the experience of a gradual unveiling of the systems of representation and the untenability of Maisie’s position within those domestic structures. In this corrupt familial

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<sup>214</sup> Carren Osna Kaston, ‘Houses of Fiction in “What Maisie Knew”’, *Criticism*, 18.1 (Winter 1976), 27-42 (p. 30) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23099640>> [accessed 7 August 2019].

<sup>215</sup> Poole, *Henry James*, p. 99.



setting, all adults seek their own advantage, and they employ ever-new double-edged strategies to get what they want. And yet, although Maisie's developing self is constituted and formed in a far more complex domestic environment than earlier childhood selves, this is, for her as an individual, a liberating experience wherein new ways of childhood are tested. Through Maisie's responses the domestic space is defamiliarised in terms of social interaction and the way in which pivotal, private familial roles are performed. Thus, when discussing one of her father's mistresses, 'the Countess', Mrs Wix reveals that Maisie's father, Beale, has become a kept man of sorts: "She pays him!" But Maisie's response draws attention to the cultural and societal breakdown in their communication: "'Oh, *does* she?" At this the child's countenance fell: it seemed to give a reason for papa's behaviour and place it in a more favourable light' (p. 201). To Mrs Wix, pay scandalises the affair even more, but Maisie's response is unfettered by such socially constructed codes, and the exchanging of monies is rather evidence of the woman's generosity. Indeed, Maisie's response exposes the hidden workings of the adult world. Whilst they pretend to have 'real' identities, the adults are in fact determined by space and place, the sites they occupy, the relations they inhabit, and the representations they make of themselves to each other. The private houses in the text guarantee no privacy but are instead theatres where the adults meet to publicise themselves and each other, stages for them to 'show' and to 'represent'. So it is that the foregrounding of such autonomous reactions from Maisie reflects not only her discursive isolation but also her detachment from the culturally relative codes that revolve around intimate relations within the performative space of home. To know from the place of the isolated, displaced daughter, as distressing as the effort might be, constitutes a challenge to the patriarchal model of family authority, but also, as I shall explore, the means to empowerment.

*Maisie*, is then, the story of a young girl who exists, for the most part, outside of the parameters of the traditional family but who, I argue, ultimately triumphs without the appearance of an ideal parent who it appears, need never be located within the scope of the text. From its outset, James's novel casts Maisie as an isolated figure and the first paragraph expresses the necessity of the intervention of the law to make up for the deficiencies of her

‘natural’ family: ‘The litigation had seemed interminable and had in fact been complicated; but by the decision on the appeal the judgement of the divorce-court was confirmed as to the assignment of the child (p. 4). Under the terms of her parents’ divorce, Maisie is decreed to spend six distressing and embattled months in rotation with each of her parents. Julie Rivkin considers, however, that whilst the law’s strategies might be designed to restore a wholeness [and a wholesomeness?] and a home to this fractured family, the apparent equity of the final arrangement is less a fair balance than a compounding of errors for the solitary child.’<sup>216</sup>

Transferred between homes, between parents, at six-monthly intervals, Maisie is used repeatedly by those parents to further their own dissatisfaction and drive her from traditional familial territory, but paradoxically, I suggest, closer to autonomy borne out of her position of solitude. For the case of this isolated child takes a twisted turn in James’s estimation of her. Maisie may appear to be neglected in the architecture of the multiplying relationships she has gone some way to creating, but I would suggest that such ‘neglect’ is paramount to her ‘escape’. Rather than sharing the view that the prospect of a child isolated is a cause for sorrow, James suggests that there may be good cause to celebrate her isolation, for the ways that it might advance society beyond a potentially unhealthy attachment to a vision of childhood, family, and home more imaginary than real. For Maisie’s condition of deprivation is, unexpectedly, the catalyst that propels her towards self-development. The multiplication of parental figures can never be a sufficient substitute for the Victorian family ideal, for the divorce litigation ‘has developed into a logic of surrogation that augments the imbalance it is designed to remedy.’<sup>217</sup> However, it is divorced from this familial trope that James’s protagonist learns to develop, to acquire knowledge. So whilst her apparent abundance, in the conventional understanding of ‘two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all (p. 75) is actually a means of understanding her dispossession from the ‘natural’ nuclear family, its lack of anchorage and determinism are also the means by which to trace her maturation to selfhood. In the grip of

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<sup>216</sup> Julie Rivkin, ‘Undoing The Oedipal Family in *What Maisie Knew*’, in *The Turn of the Screw and What Maisie Knew: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Neil Cornwell and Maggie Malone (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 194-219 (p. 199).

<sup>217</sup> Rivkin, ‘Undoing the Oedipal Family’, p. 201.

foster/step-parents and a governess, Maisie's 'virtual', artificial family parodies the real and destructive family to which she biologically belongs and confirms that the 'family' is a social and mutable unit instead of a biologically fixed and essential one. The petulant bickering and bartering over the child – this literal and figurative laying claim to her – suggest her status to the adults as mere possession, and indeed, paradoxically, alienates and isolates her exponentially from the familial ties of home. Unlike the homelessness of the orphan, Maisie's condition of deprivation amidst abundance formats a solitude wherein her autonomy flourishes.

Under the pressure of her varying disappointments, it is then necessary to think about Maisie withdrawing her love from her various 'parents' and turning instead to the world beyond the domestic for her satisfaction. For it is adult activity, as I have suggested, that takes place in the space of the home, the place where domestic disharmony is played out in front of the child, and where, as Adrian Poole remarks, 'the inner spaces she [Maisie] knows are not exactly full of pleasure and treasure. The doors are mainly shut in her face, and, when they are not, the drawing room is a lurid theatre for grown-up "scenes" to which she is a pained witness or worse, to her shame and bewilderment, a bit-part player.'<sup>218</sup> For she is made to endure to excess the child's sense of being on the outside whilst being trapped on the inside, 'out of place' in the fin-de-siècle trope of home, isolated from within. Maisie's isolation is made manifest in the way that she is treated, which, as Kevin Ohi observes, 'the text registers with an unnerving sangfroid.'<sup>219</sup> Beyond being told how awful she is – a 'little nuisance' (p. 161), a 'little horror' (p. 166), and 'an obstinate little pig' (p. 144) – she is left in no doubt that her father 'wishes [she] were dead' (p. 162) and 'her mother loathes [her], loathes [her] simply' (p. 139). Within the confines of adult domestic space she is obliged to reflect on 'the larger freedom with which she was handled, pulled hither and thither and kissed' (p. 9), on the pinches the gentlemen give her at her father's house while the ladies never touch her, on the pats she gets from Beale, the

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<sup>218</sup> Adrian Poole, 'Introduction' to Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, ed. by Adrian Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. vii-xxvi (p. xi).

<sup>219</sup> Kevin Ohi, 'Narrating the Child's Queerness in *What Maisie Knew*', in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, ed. by Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 81-106 (p. 85).

playful whack she gets from Mrs Beale, on the chuck under the chin from Sir Claude. Maisie is 'prodded, poked, pushed, pulled, and smothered in hugs to which she is curiously irrelevant, offered as they are not to her but to the gaze of some spectator.'<sup>220</sup> Treated almost as an automated doll, with no opinion of her own, no self-originating feelings and wishes, it is no surprise then that Maisie withdraws her love from these self-interested adults for whom these moments of apparent intimacy of touch are about their needs being met rather than hers. In these adult spaces of home the divisions of the adult-child hierarchy are replayed to highlight the symbolic and ritual role of this domestic space. Maisie is 'toyed' with within the physical and ideological boundaries to utter the existence of family, to articulate its distinct being in the social world through its displays of arbitrary power and authority.

### **Psychological Emigration**

*What Maisie Knew* can be understood then as a novel that mistrusts the adult and the domestic relationships it represents, and Maisie's motivations and actions can be understood as a child's psychological emigration from her parent's house. For Maisie does not withdraw from the place of home, but from either papa's or mamma's, wherein she spends her time under their 'roof' (p. 18 and p. 26), not in a family home, but in a parent's house. For James, homes are not 'homes' as they are traditionally understood, they are habitations, places where adults live, habits are formed, and children pass to and from. The hackneyed trope of home and its comforting familiarity and stability function only as an idea for James, much like childhood itself. Indeed, home is reimagined as Home, a place to play out the drama of behaviours on a stage of familiarity but which, in truth, is an institution that mocks such rituals and exposes their charade, and which is called to our attention in the somewhat chilling sequence: 'the only solution finally meeting all the difficulties [of whom to assign custody] was, save that of sending Maisie to a Home, the partition of the tutelary office in the manner I have mentioned' (p. 4). It is, however, important to acknowledge James's subtle appreciation of what this parental role entails. Whilst her mother is 'in no hurry to reinstate her' (p. 28), her father's wish

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<sup>220</sup> Ohi, 'Narrating the Child's Queerness', p. 86.

to send her to school ‘was just what would bring her mother down: from the moment he should delegate to others the *housing* of his little charge he hadn’t a leg to stand on before the law’ (p. 29, my italics). Parental responsibility is reduced to that of ‘housing’ the child, the most rudimentary and basic of obligations, in a phrase that conveys not only the self-interest of Mr Farange but more importantly, the detachment with which such a custodial office is performed.

The division of Maisie, at six-monthly intervals, from one roof to another, thus typifies her role as parental possession and is well documented, for she is described as ‘the little feathered shuttlecock that they fiercely kept flying between them’ (p. 12). Maisie’s ‘two homes’ are, however, highly significant. Their very existence is an obligation on the child to move, traversing through a ‘domestic labyrinth’ (p. 69). She bounces back and forth between parents and houses, usurping the idea of home as a place of stasis, but also forging a child of movement, a propelled child, who learns to psychologically contain the divided reality of her existence. The very notion of migration back and forth creates a new space, an uninscribed place of new possibilities, of unfixed and undefined identity, a world of the unknown, the mysterious and clandestine. Indeed, Poole has argued that even her name, ‘Maisie’ ‘lends a little magic to the rhythm and ring of [the] title. [...] Maisie is amazed and amazing and caught in a maze which she finds her way out of,’<sup>221</sup> a space created in the guise of the domestic and the familiar place of home but which, like her own transformation of childhood, is full of guesswork, fantasy, wondering, and intuition. As Shuttleworth observes, ‘the idea of the maze also comes to represent the inner state of her mind’<sup>222</sup> whilst the inner geography of her mind replicates the labyrinthian interior of the middle-class home with its secret spaces and inaccessible places.

Using the language of the interior architecture of the domestic world with which she is so familiar, Maisie imagines that life is ‘like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors’ (p. 26). ‘Everything’, she concludes, ‘had something behind it’ (p. 26). In place of familial expectation and knowing, Maisie’s own interiority models itself on these spaces of domestic secrecy and isolation. For Maisie is adrift between houses, between loyalties and allegiances,

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<sup>221</sup> Poole, ‘Introduction’, p. viii

<sup>222</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 328.

‘on nobody’s [side]; [...] She was in the presence, she felt, of restless change: wasn’t it restless enough that her mother and her stepfather should already be on different sides? That was the great thing that had domestically happened’ (p. 72). Like Lewis Carroll’s adventurous Alice, Maisie finds herself tumbling down a rabbit hole into an undiscovered new space that exists somewhere between the pretence of stability and hierarchical authority, tropes which are understood as contingent upon familial harmony in which every player observes their role. Poole suggests that Maisie gleans comfort from the knowledge of the existence of another house, that ‘wherever she happens to be on the spot [...] there is always “the other house”, and the opportunity to make comparisons, between fathers and mothers and governesses, between Captains and Counts and Countesses.’<sup>223</sup> Indeed, he argues, ‘It is one of the main ways in which Maisie gathers her “knowledge”.’<sup>224</sup> But in both houses, despite the semblance of a new and/or better family, Mrs Beale and Sir Claude and Mrs Wix, the pieces of this Victorian jigsaw of domesticity do not fit together to create a familial whole, and nor is there a place for them to do so, despite the couplings and re-couplings of its adult players. The concepts of both home and family are no longer reliable, enduring units rooted in biological absolutes, but transient arrangements that appear as synecdoche for the social world of the fin de siècle.

### **Crossing Boundaries**

James’s households of disharmonious domesticity are characterised then by thresholds and movements to and from places of familial permanence that are exposed for their insecurities and fabrication. Maisie recognises that the space for self-development has to come from without, from these points of transition, of threshold, and impermanence, to initiate change from within: ‘She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self, or, in other words, of concealment’ (p. 13). Maisie understands the significance of doors and gates, windows and thresholds, doorsteps and ‘locked lips’ (p. 13) which divide the inside from the out. But the boundaries between inside and out cannot be simply separated; the

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<sup>223</sup> Poole, ‘Introduction’, p. xi.

<sup>224</sup> Poole, ‘Introduction’, p. xi.

interior is not simply the bounded territory defined by its opposition to the exterior.

Consequently, the thresholds are the points of maximum tension, where the space of domesticity is strained to its limits. As an individual crossing thresholds and boundaries anew, Maisie's reading of familiar tropes of space and place is quite different, and her solitary migration subverts any reading of domestic space and results in a radicalised spatial experience. For her role as messenger between parental houses is as the enabling catalyst that both disrupts and ultimately dissolves the patriarchal family. Her six-monthly stints wherein she is possessed by halves are eclipsed by a wholeness derived from isolation, in a space of transience and homelessness. As Michelle Phillips explains:

Maisie represents for James the singular and remarkable exception to the rule of symmetry that governs the narrative's larger design. In fact, he imagines her as the means for new, insidious combinations, [...] she is the intermediary through which they [the adults] communicate, connect, and of course do battle. But Maisie is no ordinary center, no ordinary go-between, epitomizing as she does the precise opposite of that which she connects, divides and mediates.<sup>225</sup>

As well as finding herself caught between the opposing principles of parents, step-parents, competing governesses, and their respective houses, her transience, her movement, unravels the superficial virtues of family – propriety, tradition, patriarchy, and convention – as she performs a solitary and intense irony, highlighting society's most ubiquitous expectations and turning them inside out and upside down. Moving from place to place, from house to house, Maisie is possessed of a solitary interior core that not only keeps pace with the back and forth but flourishes because of it, her sense of interiority isolated and transitional.

For Maisie steps over and across the boundaries of the safe middle ground into the open space outside. In taking a step across the restraining walls of the old system of identity, Maisie not only exposes that system for what it is, but she also opens up a new space, a blank canvas, like the space of her nursery, on which a future has yet to be inscribed. Approached twofold, Maisie's old world order is discredited for the falsity of its claim of absolute reference points,

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<sup>225</sup> Phillips, *Representations of Childhood*, p. 42.

whilst her isolation without reliable parent figures within established family homes forces her to employ new modern strategies of behaviour. As Timo Müller observes, in contrast to the rather clearly delineated beliefs and conflicts of many nineteenth-century novels, ‘James increasingly comes to depict his characters’ social environment as a conglomerate of ever-shifting positions, strategies, and alliances.’<sup>226</sup> Like the houses it inhabits, Maisie’s family is a transient arrangement, and given her isolated state and her volatile and ever-shifting parents, she needs to observe her environment carefully and react flexibly. As Teresa Michals argues:

No literary child has ever watched adults with quite the same electrified and electrifying attention as do the focal child characters of Henry James’s middle period. Their gaze gives a new strangeness and new attraction to adulthood. Morgan, Maisie, Miles, and Flora are immersed in the social world of adults in order to highlight their deeper and tantalizing exclusion from it, [...] they resemble James’s adult characters in their passion for intense observation. But what they observe is adults. Or rather, they observe their own distance from adulthood.<sup>227</sup>

Certainly Maisie’s observations give her a sensitivity to the subtleties and ramifications of her familial environment, and in order to try and understand it, she assumes a distant, spectatorial attitude, where she can see herself as if from the outside. For Maisie’s main support is a ‘sharpened sense of spectatorship, [...] the long habit, from the first, of seeing *herself* in discussion and finding in the fury of it [...] a sort of compensation for the doom of a peculiar passivity. It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass’ (pp. 80-81, my italics). James is deliberately separating out the premises of perception from the presuppositions of a given social code and generating a vision of new spaces and new horizons. Maisie’s ‘direct perceptions’ allow her the gratification of ‘arriving by herself at conclusions’ (p. 75), the possibility of seeing and knowing beyond the window, possibilities that the sympathy of the novel is unequivocally committed to.

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<sup>226</sup> Timo Müller, *The Self as Object in Modernist Fiction: James, Joyce, Hemingway* (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), p. 111.

<sup>227</sup> Teresa Michals, ‘Henry James and the Invention of Adulthood’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 44.2 (Summer 2011), 229-248 (p. 237) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41289246>> [accessed 20 June 2019].



Maisie's progress towards autonomy comes from managing her movement between people, but also from learning to manage the distance she will tolerate between herself and others, when to take things in and when to shut them out, when to speak and when to be silent. As Poole observes, 'Everyone comes too close to her at some point, even Sir Claude, whose presence she feels in Kensington Gardens, "like an object brought so close to her face that she couldn't see round its edges" (p. 104).'<sup>228</sup> And despite the pressure on the late nineteenth-century mother figure to put the 'right' amount of space between themselves and their children – too much contact could result in a child being spoilt and headstrong; too little and the parent/child relationship could be lost forever – it is Maisie's concerns with space management that dominate the text. Indeed, her greatest dread is the intrusion of her mother, Ida, into the schoolroom. Such invasions can turn her solitary space into 'a cage at a menagerie' (p. 71), whilst her mother's unpredictable displays of intimate affection confirm her identity as a mechanised fantasy of motherhood that assaults Maisie's physical and psychological space. Looking and acting robotically, all hard edges and contrived gestures, Ida's rare embraces of Maisie make her daughter feel 'amid a wilderness of trinkets [...] as if she had suddenly been thrust into a jeweller's shop front, but only to be as suddenly ejected with a push' (p. 108). As I have suggested, Ida's intimate relationships break down only to reform with a different partner, for she is perpetually driven to obey the ideologies of her female gender in pursuit of a heteronormative coupling. In the same way, her forwards and backwards displays of mothering suggest an endless attempt at the creation of a pre-determined trope that she is powerless to imagine herself beyond. Indeed, the three women of the novel each seek out a heteronormative framework in order to progress, and they cleave to its rules: Ida with her succession of gentlemen friends; Mrs Beale with Ida's husband and then Sir Claude; and even Mrs Wix, who operates by a code which she applies mechanically to any situation with which she is confronted, and whose primary motivation is the re-establishment of a roof over her head. Lacking money and even first names of their own, Mrs Beale and Mrs Wix desperately pursue

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<sup>228</sup> Poole, 'Introduction', p. xix.

their relationships with children and men, relying on their beauty and dogged devotion respectively to advance a return to a state of perpetual monotony, ‘a community of blankness and [...] the endless theme of intercourse it would afford’ (p. 250). Rather than providing alternative choices for Maisie’s development, these adult women ‘are not at all sympathetically drawn,’<sup>229</sup> but are understood, with an element of relief, as representative of what Maisie will *not* become, a theme of fictional fin-de-siècle girlhood that will recur time and again via the pathway of solitude that overrides rules and expectation.

### Prescient Feminism

For *What Maisie Knew* demonstrates James’s growing awareness of the fin de siècle as a transitional era for English society.<sup>230</sup> In his notebooks, he records a ‘Revolution in English society by the *avènement* of the women’, a phenomenon that signals ‘the great modern collapse of all the forms and superstitions and respects, good and bad.’<sup>231</sup> Yet it is my contention that James’s ‘prescient feminism’<sup>232</sup> anchors itself not in adult women but in the figure of the isolated girl child, in whom ‘he explored *to their very source* the ideals of feminine innocence and decency and chastity’<sup>233</sup> (my italics). For from the outset, James’s novel records the girl child as the exceptional individual who will serve as the originator of a new direction at the fin de siècle:

The theory of her [Maisie’s] stupidity, eventually embraced by her parents, corresponded with a great date in her small, still life: the complete vision, private but final, of the strange office she filled. It was literally a moral revolution, and it was accomplished in the depths of her nature. [...] She would forget everything, she would repeat nothing, and when, as a tribute to the successful application of her system, she began to be called a little idiot, she tasted a pleasure altogether new. (p. 13).

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<sup>229</sup> Barbara Eckstein, ‘Unsquaring the Squared Route of *What Maisie Knew*’, in *The Turn of the Screw and What Maisie Knew: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Neil Cornwell and Maggie Malone (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 179-193 (p. 186).

<sup>230</sup> Tessa Hadley, *Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 65.

<sup>231</sup> *The Notebooks of Henry James*, eds. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 194 and p. 196.

<sup>232</sup> Eckstein, ‘Unsquaring the Squared Route’, p. 186.

<sup>233</sup> Hadley, *Henry James*, p. 4.

The upheavals and restorative attempts at familial propriety that Maisie witnesses suggest her critical observation of the upheavals in the structures of the imagination, in the stories that a nineteenth-century society has told itself and lived by. As a model of new energies liberated, Maisie is the catalyst for new beginnings, new ‘pleasures’ borne out of such upheavals, and she herself flourishes at the cost of adult convention and propriety, unlearning adult frameworks from a place of isolation to re-inscribe them anew. Whilst James’s adults have their meaning and value invested in ideals and ideas which exist with alarming independence from anything Maisie can see or believe in, as Edward Wagenknecht notes, the cast of characters ‘are judged almost wholly by reference to their attitude toward and relations with her [Maisie],’<sup>234</sup> a recurring trope that I explore again in Chapter 2 in Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* and in Chapter 3’s reappraisal of Stephen Crane’s novel, *Maggie*. For change, permanent change, James suggests, must begin at society’s beginning, at childhood, to bring about revolutionary transformations that resonate from beginning to end. Change can inscribe fundamental and original reappraisals and rewritings of childhood and its position in the adult-child hierarchy. In laying bare the falsity of the familial framework and isolating his ‘little wonder-working agent’<sup>235</sup> James creates a space and place for Maisie to acquire, and rejoice in, a growing sense of power and authority as she moves toward independent judgement in the final chapters of the text.

In the closing chapters, set in Boulogne, away from the familial environments and old homes that have delivered a pitiful space for Maisie’s development, but that have, paradoxically, in their lack of constraint, enabled her burgeoning consciousness, the scenes take place with little narratorial guidance, and Maisie claims an isolated centre stage whilst the narrator takes a back seat. Indeed, as Müller notes, the final chapters of *What Maisie Knew* have been likened to a morality play or classical tragedy, for there are no subplots, no digressions,

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<sup>234</sup> Edward Wagenknecht, *Eve and Henry James: Portraits of Women and Girls in his Fiction* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), p. 121.

<sup>235</sup> Henry James, ‘Preface’ to *What Maisie Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 3-12 (p. 5).

and the plot moves continuously and climactically toward the final confrontation.<sup>236</sup> Maisie moves through the various ‘foreign’ French settings, and these very spaces, Jean Blackall explains, become indicative of her internal development and each gradually accrues symbolic overtones:<sup>237</sup> ‘I so despair’, our narrator tells us, ‘of tracing her steps that I must crudely give you my word for its being from this time on a picture literally present to her’ (p. 206). In her detachment from both the physical and metaphysical settings of home and family, Maisie is empirically distanced from conjectured norms of domestic daughterhood.

In their Boulogne hotel room, Maisie sits with Mrs Wix, who reproaches her for an absence of ‘moral sense’ while all the pleasuring world of France offers itself up to the child from outside the window.<sup>238</sup> This window and its accompanying balcony are sites of transitional tension for they offer a view onto another world for Maisie, spaces wherein she can refresh herself with a renewed draught of solitude amongst the atmosphere of the customs and manners of France. Sat alongside Mrs Wix, however, urging her lessons in respectability, conscience, and obedience, the hotel room itself is a site of domesticity made miniature, shrunk into its most basic of requirements, the enclosed space for the performance of Anglo-Saxon propriety that recalls the familial disturbances of London but in contrast to the sensual and beautiful world of pleasure outside the window. Away from home the parody of domesticity is instead laid bare in this hotel room, and the room, and Mrs Wix’s regulating position in it as the authority on decency and nineteenth-century morality, jars with Maisie’s awakening and imaginative sense of exciting liberations, of far off horizons, and beckoning new experiences:

‘What I did lose patience at this morning [says Mrs Wix to Maisie] was at how it was without your seeming to condemn – for you didn’t, you remember! – you yet did seem to *know*. Thank God in his mercy at last, *if* you do!’

The night, this time, was warm and one of the windows stood open to the small balcony over the rail of which [...] Maisie had hung a long time in the enjoyment of the chatter, the lights, the life of the quay made brilliant. [...] [T]he casement was still wide, the spectacle, the pleasure were still there, and from her place in the room, which, with

<sup>236</sup> Müller, *The Self as Object*, p. 137.

<sup>237</sup> Jean Frantz Blackall, ‘Moral Geography in *What Maisie Knew*’, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 48.2 (Winter 1978/79), 130-148 (p. 135) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/513544>> [accessed 27 August 2019].

<sup>238</sup> Hadley, *Henry James*, p. 15.

its polished floor and its panels of elegance, was lighted from without more than from within, the child could still take account of them. She appeared to watch and listen; after which she answered Mrs. Wix with a question: 'If I do know?' 'If you do condemn.' The correction was made with some austerity (p. 208).

Mrs Wix, incapable of 'the great ecstasy of a larger impression of life' (p. 170) possessed by the girl whose 'vocation was to see the world and to thrill with the enjoyment of the picture' (p. 170) cannot distort the world for Maisie. James is widening the scope of the rabbit hole here, a space outside the window that with all the force of hierarchical adult authority Mrs Wix is trying to close down, even though Maisie in the shadowed inner room can still see the lights reflected from outside. And despite being understood as a 'figure of safety'<sup>239</sup>, Mrs Wix is an anachronism of the fin de siècle, out of time and out of place. She comments on the proceedings and offers a 'contrastive perspective'<sup>240</sup> to highlight them, and in this respect, her function 'is that of the chorus of classical tragedy',<sup>241</sup> a trope that will recur in Chapter 3 in the work of both Stephen Crane and Arthur Symons. Muriel Shrine suggests that as the direct antithesis of Ida Farange, Mrs Wix becomes the embodiment of the mother-figure for Maisie, radiating feelings of kindness, fidelity, and concern.<sup>242</sup> More recently Wardley has also read Mrs Wix as fulfilling the role of 'a net beneath her [Maisie]', and argues that 'even the canniest little monkey requires an attachment to an adult or adults to survive her childhood.'<sup>243</sup> My own reading of Mrs Wix at one level, however, resonates more with that of Eckstein, who reads the character's attachment to Maisie as necessary to avoid the formalist symmetry that has plagued the novel's characters and serves to thwart Maisie's development,<sup>244</sup> although Eckstein also concludes that even at the end of the novel, Maisie is 'not free.'<sup>245</sup>

I would claim, however, that Maisie's state of isolation is the very catalyst for both her autonomy and its ensuing freedoms. Rather than radiating toward the meagre offerings of Mrs

<sup>239</sup> Wardley, 'Fear of Falling', p. 250.

<sup>240</sup> Müller, *The Self as Object*, p. 137.

<sup>241</sup> Müller, *The Self as Object*, p. 137.

<sup>242</sup> Muriel G. Shine, *The Fictional Children of Henry James* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 120.

<sup>243</sup> Wardley, 'Fear of Falling', p. 250.

<sup>244</sup> Eckstein, 'Unsquaring the Squared Route', p. 190.

<sup>245</sup> Eckstein, 'Unsquaring the Squared Route', p. 190.

Wix, Maisie embarks on a new developmental journey of her own making. Mrs Wix is unable to comprehend the imaginative side of Maisie, for the imagination of this girl child is the ability to consider new and different ways of being in an echo of Alice Woods's commitment to child knowledge and development. With no need for her governess to assume the role of moral guardian, of informative parental figure, and least of all, affectionate companion, Mrs Wix is demoted, by Maisie herself, to the position of literally 'nobody' (p. 226). Interestingly, it is this bastion of morality and convention, Mrs Wix, who has noticed Maisie's developing autonomy. Mrs Wix, who may be the least unconventional of those adults in Maisie's diminished circle of domestic experience, and whose presence suggests tradition and conformity, observes of her charge whilst in France, "You're coming out" (p. 226). Of course, Maisie already knows: "Why shouldn't I?" she says. "You've come out. Mrs Beale has come out. We each have our turn!" And Maisie threw off the most extraordinary little laugh that had ever passed her young lips' (p. 226). Not merely a matter of sharply increased knowledge, Maisie's 'coming out' is her own awareness of the authority and power that she can exert over the adults to best satisfy her *own* needs and demands, and her delight in it is revolutionary. Maisie's appropriation of the adult-child hierarchy, her independence, her developing individuality, and her autonomy are actively engaged in this situation, wherein her demands are for Sir Claude alone: "Him alone or nobody" (p. 226). Mrs Wix's cries for herself and her charge, "Not even *me*?" are met with the contemptuous, "Oh, you're nobody!" as I have observed above. Indeed, Maisie seems wilfully intent on having, in the end, nothing and nobody, perpetuating her solitude, a somewhat perverse desire perhaps, for a child, but understanding its value for self-awareness and development, she acknowledges its necessity for pursuing her own desires and a life on her own terms.

### **Self-Custody**

Thus, the intricate domestic battles enacted in various parental houses are concluded with what Carron Osna Kaston reads as 'an act of self-custody'<sup>246</sup> as Maisie demands to possess the

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<sup>246</sup> Kaston, 'Houses of Fiction', p. 28.

material of her life in a new plot, a new narrative, one that is governed by environmental structures of her own design. In this school of domestic experience, Maisie's isolation has taught her the complex relations of husbands, wives, and lovers, and most crucially, of the child/parent dichotomy and the debunking of the myth of family and the environment of home. The 'self-custody' she achieves at the end of the novel is not then a reflection of her parents' pursuit of their own desires. Such desires, as I have argued, necessitate a perpetual retelling of hackneyed tropes that expose, paradoxically, both their careless self-indulgences and reliance on uniformity and familiarity. Consequently, in preferring to confine their charge to a succession of possible meanings uttered by the adults in search of power and authority, none of the parental figures of the text intentionally open up a space or place for her development. Rather it is her own isolated position coupled with an inner autonomous compass that produces the chief aim of Maisie's education: emancipation from the nursery or schoolroom, from the domestic spaces of home, to enable the setting forth from these places and, without rancour, the dismissal of her parents as a factor in her concerns. The true education of autonomy and authority is thus born out of the unshackling of adult restraint by the child herself: 'Somehow, now that it was there, the great moment was not so bad. What helped the child was that she knew what she wanted. All her learning and learning had made her at last learn that; [...] Bewilderment had simply gone or at any rate was going fast' (p. 260). In her profitable act of 'self-custody', Maisie challenges the fictions of life invented for her by those around her. Her management of the text's adults is the model for autonomous, emotional survival, a means by which to escape the social and cultural fray and she lays claim to the material of her life, using it to become the self-styled artist of her situation with a growing sense of her own agency.

Reared in a sequence of domestic situations continuously revolving around her isolated self, it is, perhaps, inevitable, that at 'the death of her childhood,'<sup>247</sup> Maisie is 'a new centre altogether,'<sup>248</sup> at the centre of her own world but also at the threshold of another, an ego no longer versed in the training and restraint of nineteenth-century behaviours, but one prepared to

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<sup>247</sup> James, 'Preface', p. 9.

<sup>248</sup> James, 'Preface', p. 9.

satisfy itself through a detached appraisal of situations far beyond her adult companions' conventional powers. Equipped with an isolated and opaque consciousness, an interiority detached by choice, Maisie reveals the failings of the adults of the text, but crucially, as I have argued, without resembling or repeating them. For her methods, whether through her silences, her withdrawals, or her secrets, separate her from, rather than connect her to, her surrounding prescriptive order. Indeed, her detachment, her isolation, give her a new kind of freedom, a freedom from the unencumbered and unconditional, to embark upon an autonomous journey through calmer, more considered environments, through 'the quiet sea' (p. 264) of her maturation. In a world where 'proper' identity has been found wanting, Maisie possesses the power, the authority, to not only challenge the expected order of the family, which is exposed as a construct rather than an essential condition, but also to be able to cast it anew, to serve as an origin herself. For 'instead of simply submitting to the inherited tie,'<sup>249</sup> Maisie's perceptions relocate cultural and societal authority in the figure of the girl child, whose discourse fashions a new form of autonomy and identity with far-reaching implications. For Maisie 'has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension,'<sup>250</sup> a light that connects the personal with the universal, and that reaches out to justify a fresh, new appraisal of girlhood at the fin de siècle and beyond.

The isolated girl, the child removed from the familiarity of familial domestic space embodies the fundamental reconceptualization of the girl figure. Flipping the switch on various disempowering images of the girl child, James and Gotch present images of young, female minds and bodies that defy simplicity and transparency when detached from the construct of domesticity which would traditionally shape and define them. Gotch's paintings reject the burden of female tradition and challenge hegemonic ideology, whilst in Maisie, as Wardley suggests, 'the resolution of the text [indicates] Maisie's movement away from the Girl's biocultural training for courtship, marriage, and maternity [...] and on to more open seas of self-

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<sup>249</sup> James, 'Preface', p. 5.

<sup>250</sup> James, 'Preface', p. 9.



development in response to environmental challenges.’<sup>251</sup> As I shall explore further in the experience of Beth in Chapter 2, Maisie and her fin-de-siècle contemporaries see a future in which they too will be grown women, but it is through such foresight that they discover the power to choose, to renounce the roles played before them in favour of something different. Maisie has witnessed the debilitating effects of marriage and remarriage on the novel’s adult players, most tellingly on her own mother, whose perpetual liaisons have made her ‘awfully ill’ (p. 161), and who, at the end of the novel, *intends* to go abroad, to ‘live for myself at last, while there’s still a handful left of me’ (p. 162). But as Wardley observes, Maisie is aware that Ida ‘is not so much cutting loose as moving on (from Beale, Sir Claude, Lord Eric, the Captain, the Count, and Mr. Perriam) to her new man, Mr. Tischbein, whose name means “table leg,” to prop herself up.’<sup>252</sup> As the nuclear family and its domestic space dissolve, it is Maisie who is cut loose, wielding the scissors herself to self-isolate from familial ties. Detached, and all ‘at sea’, she is, nonetheless rescued from a future that would otherwise follow the same, well-trodden, and unsatisfactory path. Mrs Wix might speak ‘not only as if Maisie were not a woman, but as if she would never be one’ (p. 230), but as far as the women of the novel are concerned, thankfully, she never will be.

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<sup>251</sup> Wardley, ‘Fear Of Falling’, p. 251. Note: Wardley recognises the ‘Girl’ as the literary-historical figure (usually white and middle to upper-middle class) identified as the product of an education for marriage.

<sup>252</sup> Wardley, ‘Fear of Falling’, p. 263.

## Chapter 2: The Natural Landscape and the Solitary Girl Child

### Introduction

‘Nature,’ J. Hillis Miller tells us, ‘in the Wordsworthian sense of trees, mountains, and daffodils [...] does not count for much in nineteenth-century novels as a primary source of value and meaning.’<sup>253</sup> Miller’s hypothesis is that for many Victorian writers, nature, despite its textual presence, is not the primary interest. It is present but displaced by the writers’ concern for subjectivity and language and functions figuratively as a metaphor for that that cannot be described literally. He suggests, therefore, that nature plays a neutral role, merely as the indication of some human sense. For Miller, nature often functions as a measure of the economic worth or social standing of an individual or a family who own the fields, parks, and estates of the text, as in the novels of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope. Or, he argues, nature may exist ‘in an entirely negative way, as an expression of the impossibility of life in solitude, outside society’<sup>254</sup> whereby the Wordsworthian rejection of human society for the greater authenticity of an unmediated relation in solitude to nature, is itself rejected in favour of belonging; belonging to a community, sharing space and place and acquiring meaning through shared effort and communion. Indeed, in his assessment of a number of canonical Victorian texts, including *Adam Bede* and *Wuthering Heights*, Miller claims that nature acts as no more than sign, as emblem, a resource, albeit a major one, of figurative language to define and qualify relations between people through a sublimation of the natural environment.

First published in French in 1974, *The Production of Space*, the seminal work of the Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, also seeks to understand the relationship between humanity and nature. In his discussion of social spaces, Lefebvre acknowledges the nature of space whereby, considered in isolation, space is an empty abstraction, a place where individuals and groups appropriate the space in question in ways not dissimilar in argument to Miller’s

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<sup>253</sup> J. Hillis Miller, ‘Nature and the Linguistic Moment’, in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (London: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 440-454 (p. 442).

<sup>254</sup> Miller, ‘Nature and the Linguistic Moment’, p. 442.

assessment.<sup>255</sup> For both critics, spaces play a part in both social and political practice, for space incorporates, defines, and reproduces social actions and behaviours. Any activity in space is restricted by that space, for space decides what activity may occur. Space dictates the law of its requirements because it implies a certain order, and therefore also a certain disorder. It commands bodies, and behaviours, gestures, actions and reactions. From the outset, however, Lefebvre argues that “Nature” cannot operate according to the same teleology as human beings.<sup>256</sup> At its most fundamental level, the natural world provides the resources for creative and productive activity on the part of humanity, but it does not labour itself, for its resources are spontaneous and unaware of their use and significance. Nature, he claims, functions differently as space because it *does not* labour; it *creates*, producing individual ‘beings’, a particular tree or flower, horse or fruit, that appear with violence, generosity, and spontaneity, into what Lefebvre calls ‘the vast territory of births.’<sup>257</sup> It is not, therefore, part of the labour and production process, although Lefebvre recognises its ongoing appropriation, its ‘murder’ by humanity, ‘by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse, as also by labour and its products.’<sup>258</sup> For Lefebvre then, the space of nature is not staged. It is rather a space of modification, wherein individual unique ‘beings’ are born, grow, and ripen, wither and die, but also where the possibilities for transformation are infinite. The space of nature departs from the continuity and cohesion of communal or shared spaces, where the relationship of both the individual and collective ‘users’ of the space implies a tacit agreement of expectations and behaviours, that is, a spatial consensus. Indeed, the more a space partakes of nature, the less it may enter into the social relations of its subjects.

The space of nature as a place of departure outside of the discourse of labour and its products and into the realms of spontaneity and creativity will inform the readings of the fin-de-siècle works in this chapter. These images and texts, I argue, offer a reappraisal of the space of

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<sup>255</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (first published 1974; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 57.

<sup>256</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 70.

<sup>257</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 70.

<sup>258</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 71.

nature, and dispute its appropriation by Romantic and Post-Romantic sensibility for the purposes of serving either adult desires or societal demands. The turn-of-the-century child figures of this chapter are isolated in reimagined natural environments and therefore their possibilities for transformation are twofold: both through their familial and community detachment and their engagement with a natural landscape that modifies behaviours. In light of Miller's argument, nature functions in these texts and images, not as a measure of value, nor as a marker of the impossibility of a solitary life, but rather as the catalyst for rebirth and progressive transformations that reflect Lefebvre's claims for its function.

### The Edenic Child

There are a limited number of conventions for representing children – alone rather than in full family groups – in the English sister arts, and it is not surprising therefore, that one of the most frequent conventions in verse and paint is that of showing the solitary or isolated child in a garden, in the sense of a place bounded or enclosed in some way, where vegetation is encouraged and controlled by mankind.<sup>259</sup> Research into Romantic sensibility, nature, and childhood is already well documented, establishing the figure of the child as important in his or herself and not merely as a diminutive adult, and possessing a fundamental nature of 'innocence' that has its origins in the natural world.<sup>260</sup> The reworking of this romantic image of the child in the second half of the nineteenth century took the child's place as the symbol of potential, of growth and fertility, to create an image of frailty and pathos, a child for whom the encroachments of modern, industrial, urban society were the chief source of pain. The more urban and desolate society appeared to become, the more childhood came to be understood as a

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<sup>259</sup> See for example, Julia Thomas's chapter 'Childhood' in *Victorian Narrative Painting*. Thomas reads Charles Robert Leslie's painting *A Garden Scene* (1840) as 'tinged with a sense of sadness and loss [...] poignantly evoked by the boy's isolation.' The painting's evocation for nostalgic games in a garden idyll of play and sunshine reveals more about the needs of the adult spectator, Thomas argues, than those of the child. Julia Thomas, *Victorian Narrative Painting* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000).

<sup>260</sup> See for example, *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. by James Holt McGavran, Jr. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991), Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), Neil Cocks, *The Peripheral Child in Nineteenth Century Literature and its Criticism* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare 1880-1940*, ed. by Roger Cooter (London: Routledge, 1992).

safely-enclosed garden where an idealised way of life remained in touch with nature and preserved the virtues of earlier periods of the history of mankind. Indeed, as Raymond Williams has observed, ‘there could be an endless retrospect to a time before [...] any landlords existed, an idea drawn not only from the Christian idea of the Garden of Eden—the simple, natural world before the Fall—but also from a version of the Golden Age which is more than that of a magically self-yielding nature, [...] the idea of a primitive community.’<sup>261</sup> Perceived as a paradise lost in the land of the Industrial Revolution, the pastoral cottage life was imagined by the urban middle classes as the embodiment of a simple, pure, and innocent ideal. Little wonder then that rural children could be thought to convey symbolic, biblical significance.

This particularly special case of figure/landscape combination of children in a rurally cultivated or gardenlike landscape in art and literature appears to present an idyllic combination that seems able to shut away the associations of time and mortality, cultural hierarchies and socio-political differences. Ensconced within a rural idyll, such children appear as images of freshness and innocence; they evoke ideas of the inhabitants of Eden before the Fall. These landscapes are not wild; there is an element of cultivation and careful breeding which the vegetation and children show equally. Yet the enclosure and husbandry which is implicit or explicit in such works can be ambiguous – protecting but also inhibiting, for the childhoods and the landscapes are both ideologically charged and historically variable constructs.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, as Lefebvre explains, ‘visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part, to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still

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<sup>261</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (first published 1973; London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), p. 42.

<sup>262</sup> George Eliot’s novels *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861) embrace this fondness for an agrarian England freighted with nostalgia for a pre-industrial past. The landscapes of these novels are presented with clarity, bound together with pleasures, although the experience of their child protagonists suggest that suffering and wrongdoing may be present in the most idyllic of scenes. The painting *Saturday Afternoon* (1893) by William Gunning King and much of the oeuvre of the watercolourist Helen Allingham (1848-1926) (whose work I discuss in this chapter), are pictorial examples of idyllic, bucolic scenes peppered with similarly constructed children of innocence and contentment.

remain fundamentally part of that space.<sup>263</sup> Any landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings, and the juxtaposition of children and landscape further transforms its meaning, depositing yet another layer of cultural representation. Indeed, the images and texts that I discuss in this chapter suggest differing attitudes towards, and understandings of, childhood autonomy from the mid- to late nineteenth century, and the rural landscapes therein can be read as literary spaces whose spatial structures capture and reflect, as well as transform and empower, these changing developments. The significance of the bucolic environment in informing these narratives is therefore complex. The rural landscape or garden concurrently both fosters and escapes routines and is therefore especially poignant as a space or place to realise and explore childhood autonomy. In emblematic terms, the landscape equals the sitter's time of life: the garden is childhood, a place of growth, nurturance and development. But it is also a literal background with a possibility for its own narrative and philosophic content. And formally too, the visual, painted landscape enters into various colour and compositional relationships with its foregrounded subjects.

### **John Everett Millais**

From the very inception of the Brotherhood, landscape was a key element in the Pre-Raphaelite style.<sup>264</sup> The determination of the Pre-Raphaelites to paint with the conception of 'truth to nature' acquired from John Ruskin's first volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) is clearly reflected in their approach to landscape painting. As John Everett Millais understood the phrase, it meant painting figures from life in open air scenes of natural daylight, with a wealth of circumstantial detail. The delineation of every leaf and flower was exacted upon a white canvas in colours that boldly discarded the brown hues and unnaturally dark shadows that were still courting favour in the Victorian art world. Although, as Christopher Wood has suggested, this

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<sup>263</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 87.

<sup>264</sup> An exhibition at Tate Britain, London, in 2004 entitled 'Pre-Raphaelite Vision: Truth to Nature' was 'devoted to the revolutionary approach to landscape painting in the 1850s by [...] the Pre-Raphaelites' and included works by John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Ford Madox Brown. It showed how the landscapes of these and others were influenced not only by the natural world, but also by contemporary ideas of science and religion, and the theories of John Ruskin. See the exhibition catalogue of the same name, ed. by Alison Staley and Christopher Newall, and published in 2004 by Tate Publishing.

practice often led to a relentless accumulation of compressed detail and an ‘airless, artificial effect that is certainly not realistic’,<sup>265</sup> the landscape backgrounds in Millais’s paintings are often important only as settings for the figures and the narrative, and although he did paint some landscapes, he was never to become a pure landscapist. Yet his landscape details are exceptionally well-observed, and, as I shall suggest, they serve both to echo and intensify the emotional situation of the figures therein.

The inception of the Brotherhood in 1848 was motivated by a shared aversion to both contemporary academic painting and the eminent eighteenth-century English portraitist Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), the Royal Academy of Art’s founding president, who the Brotherhood referred to as ‘Sir Sloshua’. Of the Brotherhood’s initial seven members of painters and writers, Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti had received academic training at the institution and, as Lindsay Smith observes, were ‘interested in exploring, if only to begin with in thought, a new national style based on a critique of the Royal Academy’<sup>266</sup> although in terms of subject, Millais, like Reynolds before him, made the child central to his art. Indeed, Robert Polhemus has rightly asserted that of all the Pre-Raphaelites, ‘John Millais [...] made the child a crucial Victorian subject of faith, erotics, and moral concern, and imagined perceptions and conceptions of childhood that have great historical significance.’<sup>267</sup> At first sight, however, it may appear surprising that Millais drew upon Coventry Patmore’s ballad, ‘The Woodman’s Daughter’, to depict an alternative representation of the Fall in terms of stolen childhood innocence. The 1844 version of the narrative that Millais knew tells the story of the woodman’s daughter, Maud, who falls in love with the squire’s son, Merton. In adulthood, the social divide between them precludes any public relationship. He deserts her, and she drowns their love child and loses her mind. Yet Patmore’s poem begins

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<sup>265</sup> Christopher Wood, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1983), p. 81.

<sup>266</sup> Lindsay Smith, *Pre-Raphaelitism: Poetry and Painting* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2013), p. 15.

<sup>267</sup> Robert M. Polhemus, ‘John Millais’s Children: Faith and Erotics: *The Woodman’s Daughter* (1851)’, in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 289–312 (p. 289).

with Maud as an industrious young woman at her spinning wheel, living happily with her elderly father:

In Gerald's Cottage by the hill,  
Old Gerald and his child,  
Innocent Maud, dwelt happily;  
He toil'd and she beguiled  
The long day at her spinning-wheel,  
In the garden now grown wild.<sup>268</sup>

Significantly, Patmore's family model is ensconced in an agrarian environment, the paired lives of Gerald and Maud part of the ebb and flow of the rural world that surrounds them, naturalising the model of the family that appealed to the Victorian belief that, 'The nest of the feathered kind is for the nestlings, the home of human-kind is for the children.'<sup>269</sup> Nineteenth-century voices urged parents, men included, to involve themselves fully with their children and spend ample time with them, doing away with surrogates and rivals, assuring the parents that they were the sole and absolute source of the child. Over and over, James Kincaid argues, this child-rearing discourse transfers the being of the child to the parent, reaching for a variety of metaphors to suggest openly that the 'child' is nothing more than what it is constructed to be, nothing in itself at all.<sup>270</sup> The most common of these metaphors was that of 'the nursery', wherein the children, the 'little tender flowers' are entirely dependent on the gardener-parent, on the wisdom with which the frail and delicate plant is reared and nurtured.<sup>271</sup> Significantly, the nursery analogy necessitates intensive and prolonged inspection of the progeny: 'The watchfulness over the young child, by day and night, is the first sacred duty, to be universally inculcated.'<sup>272</sup> Yet in Patmore's poem, Maud and Merton 'took their walks / Uncheck'd, unquestion'd; yet / They learn'd to hide their wanderings / By wood and rivulet, / Because they could not give themselves / A reason why they met.'<sup>273</sup> Patmore's lines voice the threat to mid-nineteenth-

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<sup>268</sup> Coventry Patmore, 'The Woodman's Daughter', in *Poems* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1928), p. 411.

<sup>269</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>270</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 90.

<sup>271</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 90.

<sup>272</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Their Children* (London: Hirst Smyth and Son, 1878), p. 65.

<sup>273</sup> Patmore, 'The Woodman's Daughter', in *Poems*, p. 413.



century child innocence that arises from independence and autonomy bestowed through neglect. Old Gerald's protective custody is left wanting, and as I shall suggest, whilst Millais's painting sanctifies childhood as all-important, it too draws attention to the diminished responsibility of the parent in a rural idyll.

### ***The Woodman's Daughter, 1851***

Although intertextuality here posits itself as a blatant correspondence in image and text of the same title, Millais's *The Woodman's Daughter* (figure 2.1) (1851), painted in the third year of his Pre-Raphaelite production, takes only three of the poem's nineteen stanzas for its illustration.<sup>274</sup> Yet despite this, both painting and poem suggest mid-Victorian art and literature were forming and rendering the desire for, and myth of, childhood innocence and highlighting a growing sense of the potential abuse and victimisation of the child that could occur when the child was granted autonomy and left unprotected. *The Woodman's Daughter* is an image of especially radiant cultural meaning and importance. It conveys a view of children and their subjectivity within a rural landscape that has huge resonance, for it is a complex view of childhood autonomy that emerges from the child in isolation, whereby as freedoms are given, liberties are taken. Paradoxically, it is the presence of the agrarian landscape that facilitates this transaction. The father as gardener/woodman (the nursery allegory is poignant), labours away, unable to protect his daughter from the cold but beautiful upper-class boy luring her from him with fruit which she holds out her hands to willingly receive. The children are rendered in Millais's painting as gazing, desiring beings, fixed on each other. Paradoxically too, their fixation on one another comes from her 'curious, trusting good-nature and from [his] selfish desire for mastery, [...] from gazing and being gazed at, from being both subject and object.'<sup>275</sup> He looks as if he expects her compliance to his will. As Polhemus has argued in his essay, in featuring children from different classes, the narrative of the painting 'make[s] problematic conventional ideas about "proper" social station and class division.'<sup>276</sup>

<sup>274</sup> Millais illustrates stanzas six, seven, and eight of Patmore's poem.

<sup>275</sup> Polhemus, 'John Millais's Children', p. 295.

<sup>276</sup> Polhemus, 'John Millais's Children', p. 290



**Figure 2.1.**  
John Everett Millais, *The Woodman's Daughter* 1850-1851  
(Guildhall Art Gallery, Corporation of London)

I would add that the picture, as inseparable from social history and class, also exposes the power of male exploitation of the female, and thus the power of gender to delineate the limitations of mid-Victorian child autonomy. The paterfamilias of *The Woodman's Daughter* represents an institution under threat, and yet, in Millais's painting, it is not only childhood but particularly *female* autonomy that requires regulation and containment in order to maintain the *status quo* of Victorian societal values. Within the bright yet sinister landscape of hereditary power and economic and gender inequality, Millais refigures Edenic temptation. The pretty squire's son, adorned in a striking red tunic and pristine white stockings proffers the fruit to the peasant girl in her plain, drab dress, whose cupped hands suggest her eagerness to receive his gift. The female in Millais's composition is no Eve, no instigator of movement or action, but 'fixed between the blade of her father's swinging axe and the fatal fruit at the end of the boy's rigid, [somewhat phallic], arm.'<sup>277</sup> Caught midway between the two tropes of male authority in the picture, Maud's role, her place, is defined by the one's indifference and the other's attentions, and she assumes the role of an object of exchange, a passive respondent to a new arm of gendered authority. Merton, the squire's son, displaces Old Gerald as the enabler, as the symbol of patriarchal power that formed the bedrock of mid-nineteenth-century society. The reversal of roles is clear; the nineteenth-century boy child is parent of both cultural and sexual destiny *and* the symbolic order which are determined by both his class and his gender. In contrast, the woodman, the arbiter of childhood, is, in Millais's perspective, diminished in authority, and he is beholden to a boy far younger in age, but whose class status relegates the elder protector to a background figure who appears small in both stature and significance in relation to the exotic child.

The woodman's obligation to toil and strive, to bend and dig, contrasts sharply with Merton's leisurely and idle stance against the trees of the forest under cultivation by the elderly labourer, and it is therefore worth noting that the notion of an idle child was a particular concern for the Victorians. In the first of his *Alice* books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, originally

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<sup>277</sup> Polhemus, 'John Millais's Children', p. 295.

published in 1865, Lewis Carroll parodies Isaac Watts's 'Against Idleness and Mischief',<sup>278</sup> a poem whose fierce sentencing of children to hard, industrious labour was a feature of much writing on the subject of the lazy child. Similarly, but less memorably than Watts's verse, *Children and What to Do With Them*, an anonymous publication of 1850, argues that 'regular employment, and a total banishment of idleness, are *requisite* in the life of a properly brought up child.'<sup>279</sup> Indeed, it is the leisure time of the squire's son in Millais's painting that contrasts with the labour of Old Gerald, and on this point, Polhemus's observations are worth quoting in full:

Notice that the woodman grips a tool, but the boy holds fruit and a whip. The only visible metal, often a symbol of masculinity in art, shows in the boy's belt buckle, and in the woodman's axe head. Metal, here, signifies work for the lower class, but ornament for the ruling class. The gaudily belted lad, leaning against a tree, has berries to give away, but the beltless labourer, lifting his powerful veined arms in the service of property, has no fruit for his daughter. Intent on his work, unaware of, or complicit in, the drama of seduction behind him, the father must acquiesce passively, it seems, in whatever transaction is taking place. The demeaned parent is looking the other way.<sup>280</sup>

Thus, the visual disparity between the three figures suggests the shifting nature of autonomy in the mid-nineteenth century, identifying the codes of culture that children must learn when the present father is absent, and the absence of the mother is present, when the solitary female child emerges as an acquiescent subject at the mercy of economic and gendered autonomous desire. The effect of Millais's painting is to render childhood precious, to reverence it as a time of innocence and potential virtue, but also to show the figure of the girl child as vulnerable, requiring vigilant adult concern and protection. In framing his narrative painting with an apparently timeless cultural space, namely the pastoral idyll, Millais creates a picture that looks to naturalise scenery and society and to suggest the harmonious ease with which natural surroundings reflect and endorse the ideas of traditional hierarchies. Authority is seamlessly transferred from the patriarchal labourer to the boy child of wealth and leisure via the

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<sup>278</sup> Watts's poem was published in his *Divine Songs: Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715), a collection of moral songs for children and one of the most popular children's books during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The poem and Carroll's (or Alice's) parody of it are in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (first published 1865; London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>279</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 93.

<sup>280</sup> Polhemus, 'John Millais's Children', p. 295.

appropriation of the girl child as property in an environment whose very image of traditional countryside pursuits and echoes of Edenic nostalgia naturalise such undertakings. Of course, the image seems to suggest, the girl would have no say over her destiny; of course the woodman would inevitably have to concede authority to another, albeit a child, whose wealth and status elevate him beyond the reach of even the girl's father; and of course, such wealth and status dominate and thus determine the agrarian way of doing things. Childhood isolation and autonomy in the mid-century were, it appears, still engaged in perpetuating the traditions of delineated boundaries of gendered spaces and familiar tropes.

### **Illustration and the Idyllic School**

For a period of over twenty-five years, between about 1855 and 1882, Millais also contributed to the remarkable outpouring of fine black and white illustration in books and periodicals in Britain. Although illustration itself was not a novel phenomenon,<sup>281</sup> Millais recognised that the narrative element which so preoccupied him in paintings like *The Woodman's Daughter*, could also be dealt with in a highly direct manner through illustration. Indeed, as early as 1855, Millais, and his fellow Pre-Raphaelite artists, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Arthur Hughes contributed wood-engraved illustrations to the book *The Music Master, A Love Story and Two Series of Day and Night Songs*<sup>282</sup> by the then celebrated Irish poet, William Allingham (1824-1889). Millais and Rossetti provided a single design each, whilst the remaining seven were entrusted to Hughes. Millais's career as an illustrator was both prolific and industrious, whilst his ability to vary his style according to subject matter ensured a varied and continuous output of designs to accompany poetry, prose, children's books, and contemporary and reprinted literature.<sup>283</sup> He continued to illustrate throughout his career, and as late as 1882, long after most of the other Pre-Raphaelites had abandoned the activity. However, as their contributions

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<sup>281</sup> For a comprehensive survey of a range of Victorian illustrative material and its relation to narrative painting, see Julia Thomas's *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004).

<sup>282</sup> William Allingham, *The Music Master, A Love Story and Two Series of Day and Night Songs* (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1855)

<sup>283</sup> Paul Goldman, 'The Art of Illustration: Millais, the Pre-Raphaelites and the Idyllic School'. Lecture given Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010, at the Museum of London <<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/the-art-of-illustration-millais-the-pre-raphaelites-and-the-idyllic-school>> [accessed 9 June 2020].



declined, so another group of artists, more dedicated specifically to illustration came to prominence. They have become known, somewhat inaccurately, as The Idyllic School, chiefly because their subjects, sometimes idealised, occasionally verging on the sentimental, were regularly devoted to depicting poor people in rustic surroundings leading honest Christian lives.<sup>284</sup> Many of the group have faded into obscurity, not least because their work is scattered in obscure volumes or long forgotten and neglected periodicals.<sup>285</sup> Yet their influence in preserving the idealised view of rural village life as a content, picturesque, and idyllic place should not be underestimated, despite often presenting the hard facts of country living depicted through the characters of children. Indeed, as childhood came to be understood as one moment in life closest to a lost Eden, it was inevitable that the natural environment should inform the ideal space and place for child development and growth, despite its physical demands. In harmony with nature, the child in a bucolic landscape pointed to the regressive desire for a pre-industrial, rural world that was mythically associated with the purity and moral simplicity of an earlier agrarian age. Perpetuating a romanticised, untroubled pastoral vision of agrarian landscapes that carefully omits mud and poverty in the country child's laborious life, The Idyllic School often presented the viewer with an overtly pretty image of happy little children living and working contentedly in a forever sunny Eden.

### ***Minna*, 1904**

In the work of Helen Allingham (1848-1926), one of the most prolific and popular of the Victorian watercolourists, the influence of The Idyllic School is most notable. Echoing Pre-Raphaelite attention to meticulous detail, the landscape in Allingham's oeuvre is painted in such a way that it is possible to identify every plant and flower. Indeed, the cottage garden is so prominent in *Minna* (figure 2.2) (1904), that the solitary child appears subsumed by nature, merging into the surrounding plants and flowers and becoming part of her Edenic surroundings.

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<sup>284</sup> Goldman, 'The Art of Illustration'.

<sup>285</sup> See for example, George John Pinwell's *The Island Bee* and *The Shadow*, published in a gift book of 1867 entitled *Wayside Posies*, ed. by Robert Buchanan, and Frederick Walker's *Broken Victuals* published in an anthology of 1866 entitled *A Round of Days*, ed. by Edward and George Dalziel.





**Figure 2.2.**  
Helen Allingham, *Minna* 1904  
(Private Collection)

Whilst the child in Allingham's picture occupies but a small portion of the painting, her central composition and gaze out of the frame draws the viewer's eye irresistibly. Despite being produced at the beginning of the twentieth century, Allingham's spotlessly clean child in her virginal-blue pinafore and white bonnet enveloped in an old-world garden of full blooms harks



back to the Ruskian ethos of ‘truth to nature’ which had reverberated through much of the nineteenth century. Unsurprisingly, Ruskin himself, in *The Art of England* greatly admired Allingham’s work, praising her skill for ‘painting the real inheritance of childhood in the meadows and fresh air.’<sup>286</sup> Ruskin’s attention to the significance of the juxtaposition of the child and the rural landscape, ‘no railroads in it, to carry the children away with, [...] no tunnel or pit mouths to swallow them up, no league-long viaducts—no blinkered iron bridges’,<sup>287</sup> suggests the insulated journey towards adulthood that many Victorians envisaged as the ideal route for the protection of childhood innocence.

### ***The Orchard, c. 1887***

Yet paradoxically, as Jenny Kitzinger argues, perceived childhood innocence ‘is an ideology used by adults to deny children access to knowledge and power and hence actually increases their vulnerability.’<sup>288</sup> For the purposes of protecting their ‘innocence’, Victorian middle-class children were cloistered from the adult world for fear of its corrupting influence. In art and literature they were simultaneously ensconced within rural idylls that both romanticised childhood innocence, and also excluded those who did not conform to the ideal. The adults who championed childhood used innocence as an excuse to exclude children from the adult world, and indeed, to isolate them from other children’s experiences. In this respect, Thomas Cooper Gotch’s *The Orchard* (figure 2.3) (c. 1887) appears at first glance to justify comparisons with Allingham’s painting. The diminutive solitary girl figure in smock and dominant straw hat is part of the delicate overall pattern of tree trunk, grassy sward, and wild-flowers, whose highlights are echoed by a glimpse of sunlight above. Like Allingham’s figure, Gotch’s image of the child, believed to be his daughter Phyllis, becomes part of the composition of the

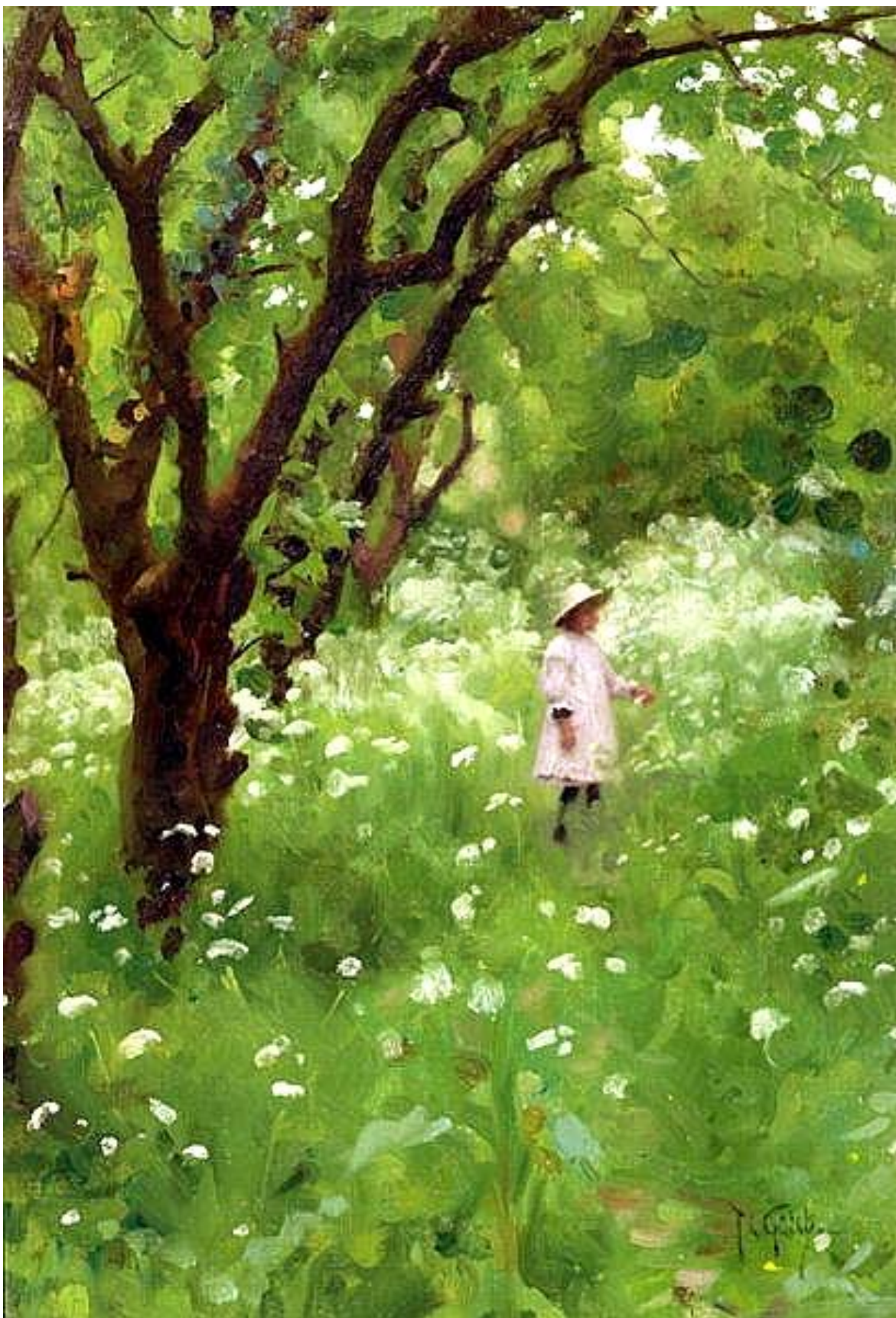
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<sup>286</sup> John Ruskin, *The Art of England: Lectures Given in Oxford* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1884), p. 97.

<sup>287</sup> Ruskin, *The Art of England*, p. 103.

<sup>288</sup> Jenny Kitzinger, ‘Who Are You Kidding? Children, Power, and the Struggle Against Sexual Abuse’, in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. by Allison James and Alan Prout (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 145-166 (p. 148).





**Figure 2.3.**  
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Orchard* c. 1887  
(Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering)

landscape. Yet her silent contemplation within a landscape that verges on abstraction, suggests that Gotch was already beginning to be more concerned with the nature of his child figures than the detailed description of their setting. Gotch's rural idyll is painted with a free mixture of smooth-drawn strokes and square-ended brushwork, but the dominance of the tree, its trunk and over-reaching branches juxtaposed with the solitary child, suggests an association that is not merely arbitrary. As Douglas Davies argues, trees, as objects of thought, 'possess a peculiar appropriateness arising from their historical significance and their physical features, [...] a physical manifestation of ideas.'<sup>289</sup>

Developing an intellectual motive beyond the literal description of what lay before him, Gotch's painting dispenses with the hackneyed assimilation of childhood, nature, and innocence, to evoke a more spiritual and symbolic motive into his work, that is, the use of symbolism to depict emerging new ideas about childhood, autonomy, liberation, and transience. In an abstract landscape, there is a need to expand the frame of reference, to elucidate other purposes through different levels of reception to the visual. As Kenneth McConkey observes, 'Painters sought correlations between the natural world and that of the spirit.'<sup>290</sup> Writing about 'The Aims of Art', George Frederic Watts alluded to this sense of the richness of moods and memory acting upon lived experience in the artist's mind. 'Perceptions and emotions', he declared,

are shut up within the human soul, sleeping and unconscious, till the poet or the artist awakens them. Nature is full of similes – symbols and parables to the eye of faith, poetic suggestions to the poetic sensibility. Where the expression of these is vague, as in music, the utterance will be differently construed, and in the art that would be suggestive rather than representative of material fact, very various emotions and definitions may be conveyed.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Douglas Davies, 'The Evocative Symbolism of Trees', in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 32-42 (p. 33).

<sup>290</sup> McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 163.

<sup>291</sup> George Frederick [sic] Watts, 'The Aims of Art', *The Magazine of Art*, Vol. 11 (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1888), 253-254 (pp. 253-254).

Thus, the solitary tree in *The Orchard* may be read as a talisman, an object that contains more than itself, that has ideas and emotions grafted on to it, whilst the human image itself exerts symbolic power. Significantly, the stance of the child figure in Gotch's painting echoes the upright structure of the tree; they are the dominant parallel verticals in an otherwise abstract landscape. The girl's back is turned to the tree, not in a rejection of nature, but in a display of liberation, an idea of symbolic and spiritual 'detachment'. A letter from Christopher Gotch, a descendent of the artist, to the Alfred East Art Gallery in Kettering, acknowledges the significance of this small painting, claiming that 'it is probably the earliest example of a TCG [Thomas Cooper Gotch] Impressionistic painting. [...] To my mind "The Orchard" is of great importance.'<sup>292</sup> The abstraction of the landscape returns the focus of the painting to the solitary child figure, and anticipates the symbolism and spiritual motive that was to dominate Gotch's child paintings for the final decade of the nineteenth century. Indeed, as I have suggested in Chapter 1, and as this chapter will confirm, with each work to follow, Gotch sought to emphasise the emotion, the character, the wilfulness, and the autonomy of the female child subject within a myriad of natural landscapes.

### ***Jeanne d'Arc écoutant les Voix, 1879***

At the end of the nineteenth century, the *plein air* artists were in the ascendant. The direct inspiration of nature was the dominant creed and the belief in the importance of painting in the open air was the most binding principle of the early Newlyn School artists, including Gotch, whose connection to the group has been established in the Introduction. Stanhope Forbes, another significant member of the group described the movement retrospectively in 1900 as representing:

one of those distinct waves of feeling which occur occasionally in Art, as in Literature, and the tide had set in strongly in favour of out-of-door work and a very thorough study of all its changing effects. It was a breath of fresh air in the tired atmosphere of the studios, and painters began to see that it needed more than the occasional visit to the country to get at the heart of its mysteries; that he who wished to solve them must live amongst the scenes he sought to render, and become thoroughly familiarised with

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<sup>292</sup> Christopher Gotch, Archival Files. Letter to Su Davies, Curator at the Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering. Dated 13<sup>th</sup> June 1995.

every aspect of nature. Not only for the landscape painter, who had perforce always made the country the scene of his labours; but *equally for him who desired to study humanity in relation to its surroundings*, was it essential that he should closely study every changing mood of out door life <sup>293</sup> (my italics).

Gotch had settled in Newlyn in 1887 and had initially identified with the ethos and trends of the School whose palettes were modelled on the approach of the celebrated French realist Jules Bastien-Lepage, treating local subjects in sombre tones, and depicting themes typical of the local domestic life.<sup>294</sup> Admired for his ‘uncompromising realism’ and ‘an absolute fidelity to nature’,<sup>295</sup> Bastien-Lepage’s *Jeanne d’Arc écoutant les Voix* (figure 2.4), exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1880 and again at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, astonished observers as a formidable *tour de force* and prompted a critical debate concerning the theoretical possibility of applying methods suited to the observation and analysis of present phenomena to a historical scene. For Bastien-Lepage’s commitment to naturalism deployed artifice to efface the footprints of that artifice. Meaning in the work is generated by the fact that everything appears to exist as the artist saw it, and so persuasive is the rendering of appearances that the viewer is compelled to conclude that the painter not only saw it, but saw it all together at one time, even in the most spectacular and elaborate of compositions. A picture not derived from lived experience but grounded in a material reality of bucolic hardship and labour, *Jeanne d’Arc* depicts the moment when the spirits of Saints Michael, Margaret, and Catherine appear as ‘real’ presences to the medieval teenage martyr in her parents’ garden. The tapestry-like surface of the painting is evocative of traditional peasant crafts, reflecting the naturalistic landscape that appears as a confluence of gardens, overhanging trees and branches, and a myriad of overgrown pathways, obstructed by garden implements and debris that, nevertheless, offer glimpses into more distant spaces just beyond the reach of the viewer’s eye. And although the riot of activity pushes all the visual drama into the front of the frame, filling the viewer’s field of vision, one cannot but help imagine that which lies beyond the frame, an echo, perhaps, of the female child figure’s own

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<sup>293</sup> Fox and Greenacre, *Artists of the Newlyn School*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>294</sup> See for example, Bastien-Lepage’s *Saison d’octobre* (October) (1878), *Le colporteur endormi* (The sleeping peddler) (1882), and *Pauvre Fauvette* (Poor Fauvette) (1881).

<sup>295</sup> Fox and Greenacre, *Artists of the Newlyn School*, p. 18.





**Figure 2.4.**  
Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Jeanne d'Arc écoutant les Voix* 1879  
(The Met Fifth Avenue, New York)

ability to listen to the spirit voices, to hear beyond reality. As McConkey suggests, the allusion of perceiving spirits, seeing beyond quotidian realities, presented a ‘challenge to post-Darwinian materialism. Henceforth the mere look of a *Jeanne d'Arc* figure might suggest more than what was literally represented. A “Lady of Shalott” or an “Ophelia” might do the same.’<sup>296</sup> Indeed, this naturalistic history painting studied in detail in a garden with a live model amidst a profusion of botanical detail evoked inevitable comparisons to the Pre-Raphaelite landscapes of the Brotherhood, but also influenced the reshaping of the late Pre-Raphaelite figure/landscape

<sup>296</sup> McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 165.

paintings that emerged in the final decades of the nineteenth century,<sup>297</sup> and it is therefore pertinent to explore its influence on Gotch's own work.

### ***A Golden Dream, 1893***

Gotch himself, as I have established in Chapter 1, was not a strict follower of the earlier nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Instead, he combined their principles of detail being the 'truth to nature' with the more esoteric ideas of the Symbolist Movement, believing his work had 'its birth in a sincerity of purpose and a reverence for Nature.'<sup>298</sup> A latent interest in abstract ideas began to develop, as I have argued, in 1887, with *The Orchard*, but his large canvas of 1893 entitled *A Golden Dream* (figure 2.5), was certainly inspired by Bastien-Lepage's *Jeanne d'Arc*, whose combination of realism and the realisation of spiritual or symbolic fact had become Gotch's principle concern. Infused with mythology and history, the possibility of using what he could see in order to paint what he could not posed fundamental theoretical questions which challenged the entire naturalistic project. Gotch's late nineteenth-century landscapes were not so much snapshots of particular places as an attempt to convey the feelings, the whole sensory experience, of landscape and its cultural signposts.

Juxtaposed with a symbolic Eve, the *plein air* garden of *A Golden Dream* suggests Gotch's changing perception of the child figure within landscape.<sup>299</sup> It explores the idea of a rite of passage, an act of liberation, the ending of an idealised trope, and the transient and ephemeral period between passivity and autonomy. Gotch's contemporary, the art critic and historian, Charles Lewis Hind, was especially interested in the painting's imaginative qualities, writing that the viewer could read into it what they would, but that it was an 'agreeable fancy', whether the painting 'may picture a real maiden plucking fruit in a Kentish orchard, or she may be a dream-child gathering phantom blossoms in fairyland.'<sup>300</sup> Despite his obvious enthusiasm for

<sup>297</sup> See especially John William Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* (1888) and *Ophelia* (1894).

<sup>298</sup> Lomax, *The Golden Dream*, p. 15.

<sup>299</sup> *A Golden Dream* may also be read in reference to the Greek myth of the Hesperides. According to the myth, the Hesperides, a triad of nymphs (the daughters of Hesperus), guarded the golden apples that grew within Hera's secluded garden. Ladon, a hundred-headed dragon, was also placed in the garden to guard the apples. Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Frederic, Lord Leighton both illustrated the myth in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

<sup>300</sup> Hind, 'T. C. Gotch and his Pictures', p. 279.



**Figure 2.5.**  
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *A Golden Dream* 1893  
(Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston)

the work, Hind's term 'agreeable fancy' somehow diminishes the significance of both painter and painting to mere amusement. But Gotch had always been interested in the examination and illumination of the inner meaning of the visual world, and, as I have argued, at the fin de siècle was developing an intellectual motive beyond the literal description of what lay before him. So whilst Gotch's solitary girl figure can be read as a symbolic Eve, she represents a changing perception of female autonomy. For *A Golden Dream* is characterised by a stylistic reinterpretation of the biblical story that dispenses with the presence of Adam and the serpent as originator and deceiver respectively. Gotch's Eve is imagined as an individual, detached and therefore liberated from the myth that would contain her, and her actions are those of a female free to choose, to invoke self-determination and satisfy an autonomous desire.

Writing in 1910, the art critic Charles H. Caffin, argued that Gotch was ahead of his



contemporaries in his appreciation of the emerging views of both womanhood and childhood; that 'in its attitude toward childhood, Gotch's motive is abreast of the most modern thought' and that his paintings from 1891 onwards reflect 'the possibilities of betterment in allowing woman freer scope for her capacities.'<sup>301</sup> Abandoning the restraints demanded by the realistic treatment of natural landscapes and the traditional subjects of the Newlyn painters, Gotch's *A Golden Dream* is a sophisticated, reflective study that challenges the more pedestrian aspects of realist painting with an illuminated vision of girlhood. With a developing consciousness of interpreting anew the gendered relationship between the female child and her surroundings, Gotch's monumental 'Eve' plucks a golden apple from the branch of a gilded tree whose branches frame the top of the canvas. The wildflowers, the deep purple velvet poppies, and golden foliage border the base, but extend upwards towards the girl's chest, where a thistle-like wild bloom sits like a medal of honour. Her secular dress covers her body almost entirely, and, no longer subject to the sexualised and gendered biblical narrative, she assumes an unexpected autonomy. By positioning her centrally in the composition, she is empowered, and her right arm reaches out with an authoritative gesture to take the forbidden fruit. Contrast this bold, determined action with Maud's capitulation in the image of *The Woodman's Daughter*, whose cupped hands eagerly and pathetically await the fruit from Merton, and whose presence in the image is reliant upon a context of male authority and female subordination. Gotch's Eve transcends the Edenic landscape and brings a new, assertive and enlarged sense of space to a composition otherwise restricted to a somewhat suffocating biblical garden. Crucially too though, the garden is also symbolic; its golden trees are not as 'nature intended', and its narrative is therefore not a narrow, literal, naturalist reconstruction of Genesis, but a transcendence of the literal through allegory and invention that takes the viewer beyond quotidian realities in both subject matter and handling.

### **Sarah Grand's Progressive Trilogy**

Ideas of childhood, adolescence, and dream states were at the forefront of Gotch's thinking.

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<sup>301</sup> Caffin, 'A Painter of Childhood and Girlhood', p. 926.



Potent allusions to spirituality, to inner longings, and mystic power caught the mood of the times and Gotch was fêted at the Salon and won medals in Chicago and Berlin.<sup>302</sup> His reflections on the rising consciousness of a female ‘place’ in society and the freedoms anticipated and achieved by girls and women at the fin de siècle may have worn a mystic cloak, but they were no less real for it. And whilst Gotch developed his own evocation of girlhood and autonomous desire in the visual arts, Sarah Grand, an ‘outsider’ on the British literary scene, also embraced the opportunity of her time on the edge of a new century, to search for new and better means of conveying the sense of a female mind in conflict. Grand’s interest in psychological complexity, particularly that between female expression of desire and autonomy is not only an exploration of the ‘dynamism of her characters’ impossible choices’<sup>303</sup> but an interest that also had ‘aesthetic consequences that cry out to be put in relation to modernist formal innovations.’<sup>304</sup> Highly conscious that a new age needed new art forms and new artistic expression in general, Grand’s novels are characterised by technical innovations – ruptures of narrative triggered by new associations and new observations, experiments with language and myth, and flights of fancy and dreams that violate realism – that are suggestive of Gotch’s late nineteenth-century oeuvre and, as Gerd Bjørhovde suggests, the beginnings of Modernism.<sup>305</sup> And despite appearing on the surface, like Gotch, to be somewhat ‘conventional’ in her choice of subject matter, Grand’s work, like his, represents a disruption that subverts from within, a kind of Trojan horse that changes the content and form of traditional artistic representation and marks out a new line in female narrative. Both image and text anticipate new ideas of what it might mean to be female, beginning, of course, with the child, from where all new beginnings must start by usurping the old to offer a new vision of what might be. Reflecting both a growing

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<sup>302</sup> *My Crown and Sceptre* was exhibited ‘on line centre N. wall Room 7’ at the Royal Academy in 1892. The painting travelled to Chicago in January 1893 for the World’s Columbian Exposition where it was awarded a bronze medal. It received a third class gold medal in 1895 at the Paris Salon (Salon de la société des artistes français) and shared a gold medal with another Gotch painting, *Death the Bride* at the Berlin Centenary Exhibition (Internationale Kunst-Ausstellung) in 1896. Archival Files, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

<sup>303</sup> Clare L. Taylor, *Women, Writing, and Fetishism 1890-1950: Female Cross Gendering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 27.

<sup>304</sup> Taylor, *Women, Writing, and Fetishism*, p. 27.

<sup>305</sup> Gerd Bjørhovde, *Rebellious Structures: Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel 1880-1900* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987), p. 115.

dissatisfaction with the traditional bourgeois literary novel and an emerging awareness of the study of child psychology and its possibilities for understanding anew ‘the mind of the child’ discussed in the Introduction, Grand’s 1897 text, *The Beth Book* works to remake the frameworks and institutions that shape a girl’s life, to imagine new possibilities that result from an isolated communion with the natural world and a determined refusal to conform.

Despite its elaborate and somewhat grandiose full title, *The Beth Book, Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, A Woman of Genius* <sup>306</sup> was understood by its contemporary critics as a story of childhood. Indeed, writing in *The Glasgow Herald*, an anonymous reviewer assures the reader ‘who is alarmed by the ominous sub-title [that they] will be agreeably disappointed to find in the first half of the “Beth Book” a really delightful story of child development’, <sup>307</sup> whilst Frank Harris in *The Saturday Review*, and with markedly less appreciation, fails to make the connection between the predominance of narrative given over to Beth’s childhood and the resulting young woman of Grand’s text: ‘It is the life story, we are boldly told in the beginning, “of a woman of genius”, and so some three hundred pages are spent in describing a myriad of immaterial incidents in the brat’s childhood.’ <sup>308</sup> Other reviewers are alarmed and enchanted in equal measure by the description of Beth’s childhood development which dominates the text, but only in relation to how far they understand it to either conform or deviate from the traditional Victorian girlhood of fiction. Surprisingly, a review in *The Spectator* is the only one that comes anywhere close to understanding the significance of the novel’s preoccupation with Beth, her development, and the environment therein:

The book so far justifies its aggravating and strangely sounding title in that the reader is never allowed to lose sight of Beth for a single moment. She is always on the stage, and dominates and eclipses all the other *dramatis personae*. [...] In the whole range of English fiction here never was a heroine who was described at

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<sup>306</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book, Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, A Woman of Genius*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (first published 1897; Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013). All subsequent quotations from the novel are from this edition.

<sup>307</sup> ‘Sarah Grand’s New Novel’, *The Glasgow Herald* (Friday, 5 November 1897): 4. in Appendix A, *The Beth Book*, p. 543.

<sup>308</sup> Frank Harris, *The Saturday Review* (20 November 1897): 557-558 in Appendix A, *The Beth Book*, p. 545.

greater length or in a greater variety of situations than Beth Maclure, *née* Caldwell.<sup>309</sup>

Beth's monopoly of the text, 'always on the stage' either as a girl, as an adolescent, and eventually as a young woman, subverted a Victorian trope of femininity that demanded reticence and subordination. Her character was sufficiently audacious to govern the narrative, a deviation that, for some, was too challenging to the *status quo*:

Is this really the emancipator who has arrived at last to strike off the shackles of sex, and to right all wrongs that women have suffered since Eve? And is this *how* it is to be done? [...] by being absolutely without the capacity for loving – without tenderness, or goodness, or gentleness, or patience, or unselfishness, or charity, or mercy, or any of the beautiful spirit of true woman-hood. If this indeed be the Modern Woman, this Beth, who “arose early and drew up the plan of her life”, let us beg the antique woman to stay.<sup>310</sup>

Yet fuelled by issues central to the late nineteenth-century women's movement, Beth, I shall argue, understands that there are new ways of living, and Grand's exploration of the qualities of experience, sensory attention, vision, memory, and desire shape the development of her isolated 'child of genius' for whom the natural world and her isolation therein are critical.

Coming as it does, as the third book in Grand's remarkable loose trilogy begun in the late 1880s, *The Beth Book*, I cannot help but infer, represents the culmination of Grand's thinking. *Ideala: A Study from Life*,<sup>311</sup> the first novel in the series, was drafted in 1879 while Grand was still living with her husband as Frances Clarke McFall. It was published at her own expense in 1888. As Jenny Bourne Taylor summarises: 'Its heroine, Ideala, is viewed through the eyes of the male narrator Lord Dawne as she attempts to negotiate her disastrous marriage, suffers nervous collapse, and falls passionately in love with a doctor, before finally rejecting both marriage and romance in favour of a wider sphere.'<sup>312</sup> *Ideala* concludes with its knowingly

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<sup>309</sup> Anonymous reviewer, *The Spectator* 79 (13 November 1897): 691-692 in Appendix A, *The Beth Book*, pp. 544-545.

<sup>310</sup> N. H. B., *Bookman* (New York) 6 (Dec. 1897): 363-364 in Appendix A, *The Beth Book*, pp. 549-550.

<sup>311</sup> Sarah Grand, *Ideala: A Study from Life* (first published 1888; Kansas City, Missouri: Valancourt Books, 2008).

<sup>312</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Introduction', to *The Beth Book*, p. 5.

idealised heroine forging an autonomous identity as a social reformer – an independent subject who ultimately transcends the gaze of the three men who would define her.

The second novel in the series, *The Heavenly Twins*,<sup>313</sup> was written after Grand had separated from David McFall in 1890 after twenty years of marriage and moved to London to embark upon her writing career in earnest. In 1893, the year of its publication, Frances McFall adopted the dramatic and self-aggrandising pseudonym Madame Sarah Grand, a reinvention that signalled ‘a name of power, the mark of a private christening into a second self, a rebirth into linguistic primacy.’<sup>314</sup> And whilst it is not the intention of this chapter to speculate on the autobiographical nature of Grand’s fiction as many others have before, there can be little doubt that her texts express the contemporary cultural, historical, and social rebirth of womanhood that destabilised the dominant gender taxonomies of the late nineteenth century. Although Grand had also arranged to self-publish *The Heavenly Twins*, it was finally taken up by Heinemann in 1893, becoming a ‘publishing sensation on both sides of the Atlantic – described as a “bomb of dynamite” by the journalist W. T. Stead.’<sup>315</sup> The novel’s notoriety sprang in part from the explicit depictions of the effects of venereal disease within the ‘respectable’ marriage of the innocent Edith Beale and her debauched husband, and the heroine, Evadne Frayling’s sexual rejection of her husband on discovering his disreputable past, and her subsequent fall into depression from which she only ever partially recovers. Grand stresses the responsibility placed on the parents in both of these poor matches, an echo of the demands and expectations of parenthood I have demonstrated were so prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, in Evadne’s story, and more particularly in Edith’s, Grand suggests how even loving parents can fail to have sufficiently high standards to ensure their daughters’ safety. Whilst Evadne’s marriage shows the adverse psychological and physiological effects of repressing her sexual

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<sup>313</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (first published 1893; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

<sup>314</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, ‘Ceremonies of the Alphabet: Female Grandmatologies and the Female Autograph’, in *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Domna C. Stanton (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), pp. 21-48 (p. 29).

<sup>315</sup> Bourne Taylor, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

feelings as she agrees to keep up the appearance of marriage for the sake of her husband's reputation, Edith is permitted to marry a dissolute man whose profligacy causes her death. Edith's familial tragedy and Evadne's poignant story of partial resistance and withdrawal are set alongside the somewhat 'lighter' mischief of Angelica and Diavolo Hamilton-Wells – the ironically-named 'heavenly twins' of the title – through whom Grand explores the fluidity and performativity of gender identity by way of the children's subversive role play.

And yet, despite their prominence as vehicles for the expression of female discontent, both *Ideala* and *The Heavenly Twins* express, in fact, the limitations of the extent of female transformative agency available at the fin de siècle. Although the persistent message of both texts is that marriage and motherhood did nothing to benefit a woman's life, the unstable narrative structures in the first two novels of the trilogy, *Ideala*'s authorial male voice and female heroine, and the competing male and female voices in *The Heavenly Twins*, continue to operate within the confines of the patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family. Indeed, despite reaching for a language, a range of characters, and an interweaving of generic conventions and plot possibilities that might interrupt the predictable plots of female actual and imaginative choices, both texts rely upon prevailing authoritative discourses to expose the operations of gender privilege and suppression. The twins themselves serve an important comic function in *The Heavenly Twins*, and their entertaining childhood experiments with cross-dressing and gender switching do illustrate the power of individuals, and particularly children, to unsettle the nineteenth-century dichotomous logic that reproduced sexual difference as gender roles, a structuring process that, as the twins' insights make clear, benefits men. Yet whilst Angelica and Diavolo suggest the construction and resulting fluidity that emerges when gender codes are usurped by child agency, Angelica operates within the confines of prescribed gender roles, and her subversion presents as play, as parody. Although she understands gender as performance, as social construction, her adoption of 'masculine' traits is also no less than masquerade, and she still 'falls' into Victorian female dependency. For Angelica 'collapses into

what Grand calls an “ideal” marriage with her twenty-years-senior husband’,<sup>316</sup> Mr Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, who she calls, alarmingly, ‘Daddy’. Indeed, despite her open subversion of gender tropes, Angelica’s transformation into a child-wife aligns with the definition of the New Woman as one who is strong-minded and virtuous but cannot find happiness. As Deborah Logan argues, for women, like Angelica, ‘caught between her culture’s need for and resistance to social change, such unhappiness represents a poor compromise between equally disempowering alternatives.’<sup>317</sup>

Indeed, Angelica reverts to the child-like state she believes will afford her the freedoms she discovers wanting in adult womanhood. Her desires are channelled into an infantilised relationship with her husband, her passions circumscribed within the confines of a ‘conventional’ marriage, and her identity suggests a profound reliance on a patriarchal figure for definition. It is difficult then to read Angelica’s fate through the lens of the New Woman trope and not feel frustrated. Angelica’s dalliance with gender switching and an illicit romance with ‘The Tenor’ may offer her a liberating experience, but unlike the female protagonist in other New Woman novels, Angelica is reabsorbed into a social order whose position remains unchanged. As Ann-Barbara Graff summarises:

[Angelica] dresses up as her brother and meets clandestinely with a church tenor to talk without regard to gender roles. She attempts to eschew gender absolutely. She understands gender as performance, as social construction. [...] When the masquerade is discovered, he can neither forgive the betrayal of confidences nor converse with her as if gender did not matter. [...] Her side of the intercourse has been rooted in her voyeuristically drawing the tenor out as she regaled him with stories of Angelica’s chaste affection for him. Debased and chastened, she returns to Kilroy who provides her with parodic absolution: “The distressing tension relaxed in that moment, her heart expanded, her eyes filled with tears and overflowed; she could not command her voice to speak, but she threw herself impetuously in to her husband’s arms, and kissed him passionately, and clung to him, until she was able to sob out— ‘Don’t let me go again, Daddy, keep me close. I am—I am grateful for the blessing of a good man’s love.’”<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 117.

<sup>317</sup> Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 204.

<sup>318</sup> Ann-Barbara Graff, ‘Annesley Kenealy and Sarah Grand: Biopower and the Limits of the New Woman’, in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. by Tamara S. Wagner (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2009), pp 271-296 (pp. 288-289).

### Beth Caldwell Maclure

#### Detachment and Imagination

The changes I observe in Grand's novels, however, suggest that as she began to understand better how gendered identities were encoded, she could better restructure those codes through her fiction. It is my assertion that it is from the perspective of child development that Grand saw best the potential for resolving the instabilities and limitations of her female protagonists, an idea that originated in *The Heavenly Twins* but that culminated in the figure of Beth in the final and most ambitious novel of her trilogy. The early chapters of *The Beth Book* conceive of the protagonist's mind as a work in progress, as an open and receptive container for imaginative identification and transformation. Grand's perspective here shares James Sully's sense of the significance of childhood consciousness and the concept of an emerging sense of selfhood evolved through a series of layering of experience and memory, a 'palimpsest of impressions.'<sup>319</sup> Grand's exploration of childhood consciousness in the young Beth focuses on and is dependent upon her creativity and adaptiveness, but, as I shall explore, its approach ultimately goes beyond Sully and the child study movement to consider the female adolescent and young woman. Alice Woods's emphasis on the importance of a high order of imagination in children to be able to see beyond their own lived experiences and to imagine unexperienced and uncharted future lives therefore resonates in Grand's text. The development of Beth's artistic powers, of a desire to express herself are crucial, as Woods tells us, for acts of adult self-custody and self-expression borne from childhood maturation.<sup>320</sup> The tight focus on the emotions, consciousness, and *growth from infancy* of Beth as both female and nascent artist gives Grand's text a depth and complexity beyond that of her earlier work. As Penny Brown convincingly argues, the 'extensive portrayal of Beth's early years is justified by the author on the grounds that, in her view, every incident or impression experienced in childhood, no matter how trivial, is vital in the development of the individual and hence is related in detail'<sup>321</sup> and Grand's own

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<sup>319</sup> Bourne Taylor, 'Introduction', p. 14.

<sup>320</sup> Woods, 'Review of James Sully', p. 259.

<sup>321</sup> Penny Brown, *The Captured World: The Child and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in England* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 170.

narrative concurs with this reading: ‘In several instances it seems to me that the impression left by some chance observation or incident on her [Beth’s] baby mind, made it possible for her to do many things in after life which she certainly never would have done but for those early influences’ (p. 35).

As I shall argue, it is through these ‘impressions’ that Beth’s character matures in her solitary exploration of the world around her. Childhood isolation and solitude would have troubled the psychologists of the child study movement who often assumed that the subject of the late nineteenth-century child study texts and periodicals ‘was surrounded by benign adults, there to study, and facilitate, the development of the child mind; there was no theoretical space that might allow the possibility of a mother who seeks to crush signs of individuality in the child.’<sup>322</sup> Significantly however, although Sully continued to promote the benefits of individual child study, drawing actively on literary texts through a scientific eye in his research, he recognised the necessity for distancing the child from the behaviours and conventions of those same surrounding adults, extolling ‘all the capricious wilfulness, all the quaint fancifulness, all the fun of nature’s own child before it gets clipped into our conventional pattern’<sup>323</sup> (the nursery allegory of the child as a shrub to be tamed and trimmed is poignant and echoes the image of Millais’s *The Woodman’s Daughter*). Beth’s response to her rural environment is spontaneous and instinctive, unconstrained by the strictures of the adult world. Detached from the patterns of convention that would define her, her imaginative spirit, a wellspring of authenticity, is conveyed directly to the reader in a constant shifting between the unsentimental child’s-eye view and the adult narrator’s viewpoint. Indeed, of Grand’s three New Woman novels, it is only *The Beth Book* that articulates this unmediated female point of view, a perspective, as Ann Heilmann observes, borne out, ‘of the exorcism of authoritative discourses in the preceding texts.’<sup>324</sup> Certainly, on the level of narrative, the character of Beth is neither circumscribed nor

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<sup>322</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 302.

<sup>323</sup> James Sully, ‘The Child in Recent English Literature’, *Fortnightly Review*, 61 (1897), 218-228 (p. 225).

<sup>324</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 46.



appropriated by the narrative voice, and the focus is on Beth, the fictional genius who commands language in both its written and spoken forms. Indeed, showing Beth inspired by her surroundings, the sublimity of the landscape, and her isolation within, Grand articulates an engagement and inspiration for her protagonist that not only authorises an imaginative space of choice, freedom, and change, but also actively produces her child genius and, as I shall explore, a far more optimistic image of the possibility of independent female development.

Whilst Teresa Manguam understands *The Beth Book* as ‘an isolated example of a successful nineteenth-century *kunstlerroman*’,<sup>325</sup> the novel starts, like a traditional, fictional (auto)biography, with the birth of its protagonist. And yet, as I have suggested, whilst appearing to conform to traditional modes of narration, the text immediately and ironically sets out to explode those traditions from within. Shocking from its very first page, the novel opens on the day before the infant who will be Beth is born, and portrays, with no sentimental haze, her mother, Mrs Caldwell’s, physical and mental anguish at the most advanced stage of pregnancy:

She was weak and ill and anxious, the mother of six children already, and about to produce a seventh on an income that would have been insufficient for four. It was a reckless thing for a delicate woman to do, but she never thought of that. She lived in the days when no one thought of the waste of women in this respect, and they had not begun to think for themselves (p. 25).

Indeed, as Heilmann has noted, the opening calls Beth’s very existence into question by emphasising her mother’s enforced continuous child-bearing and by suggesting that she would have been well-advised to practise birth control.<sup>326</sup> There is no rosy glow of heroic-suffering motherhood; the family into which Beth Caldwell will be born has not only burdened her mother with too many children and too little food, but also with the appearance of genteel standards to maintain and a husband/father who is an alcoholic, judgemental, repressive, self-satisfied philanderer. And yet, in calling into sharp focus the very undesirability of the familial situation into which Beth arrives, Grand marks her anomalous arrival as the first in a series of

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<sup>325</sup> Teresa Manguam, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>326</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 85.

new beginnings. For as the ‘grey dawn trembled with the first flush of a new and brighter day, the child [Beth] arrived *unassisted* and without welcome, and sent up a wail of protest’ (p. 33, my italics). Beth’s disgruntled arrival marks her out immediately as a singular child, and unsurprisingly, her parents cannot decide upon a suitable name for her:

a hot dispute on the subject above the baby’s cradle [...] ended in a compromise, the mother agreeing to have the child christened Elizabeth if she were not called so; and she would not have her called Eliza, Elsie, Elspeth, Bessie, Betsy, or Bess either. This left nothing for it but to call her Beth, and upon consideration both parents liked the diminutive, her father because it was unaccustomed, and her mother because it had no association of any kind attached to it (p. 33).

Beth, the text suggests, in both name and nature, is an uncommon child whose arrival challenges nineteenth-century preconceptions of a daughter’s ‘place’ within the family structure, whilst, as I shall explore, she simultaneously carves out a new pathway for girlhood emancipation.

### **Dysfunctional Mothering and Dissenting Daughters**

Grand had noted to Gladys Singers-Bigger in 1931, that *The Beth Book* contained a portrait of her own mother, and Heilmann suggests that Grand exorcised the memories of this difficult relationship by ‘spotlighting the dysfunctional mothering to which her heroine is exposed.’<sup>327</sup> Certainly it would appear that in *The Beth Book*, Grand thematised girls’ loss of voice as a result of their mothers’ complicity with patriarchal structures, drawing attention to the silencing of girls during childhood and adolescence and the effect of gender-role conditioning on female psychological development supported by mothers for whom such bondage was accepted and endured. Beth’s mother is herself infantilised, watched, trained, and suppressed by a male public culture in the form of her husband: ‘Mrs Caldwell’s married life had been one long sacrifice of herself, her health, her comfort, her every pleasure, to what she conceived to be right and dutiful. [...] To us she appears to have been a good woman marred, first of all, by the narrow outlook, the ignorance and prejudices which were the result of mental restrictions imposed upon

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<sup>327</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 29.

her sex; secondly, by having no conception of her duty to herself' (p. 299). Indeed, her ignorance and resulting complicity suggest a slavish apathy towards both her own and her daughter's futures and Grand does not permit absolution of blame to Beth's mother in her diatribe against debased male sexuality. Rather, alongside the self-interest and injustice of men, this female indifference, Grand observes, contributes to the continual enslavement of daughters in a gendered jail: 'her mother checked her mental growth again and again instead of helping her to develop it' (p. 51). The consequence of this suppression and denial, and its repetition as played out in relation to daughters, is to reproduce the model of the relationship that Beth comes to recognise and that Adrienne Rich was later to describe in her seminal work, *Of Woman Born*:

it is the mother through whom patriarchy early teaches the small female her proper expectations. The anxious pressure of one female on another to conform to a degrading and dispiriting role can hardly be termed "mothering," even if she does this believing it will help her daughter to survive.<sup>328</sup>

Thus, Beth's often troubled relationship with her mother powerfully externalises the inner struggle of the developing female child whose autonomous ambition and desire in her search for identity take the form of resistance against the very traditions her male-identified, patriarchal mother embodies. As Brown notes, it is with 'Dickensian detail [that] Grand records the physical violence to which Beth is subjected when she attempts to take her learning in hand':<sup>329</sup>

Beth was a piteous little figure, crouched on the piano stool, her back bent between her mother's blows, and every fibre of her sensitive frame shrinking from her violence, but she made no resistance, and Mrs Caldwell carried out her threat. When she could beat Beth no longer, she told her to sit there until she knew that [musical] sign, and then she left her (p. 182).

Beth, who has attempted to play a musical composition her mother considers too advanced for her level, is beaten for her ignorance in attempting to execute signs whose meanings she has never been taught. Beth's artistic ambition is a sign itself for Grand's far wider ambition to

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<sup>328</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (London: Virago, 1977), p. 243.

<sup>329</sup> Brown, *The Captured World*, p. 30.

reform and invigorate girlhood aspiration. Metaphorically speaking, Beth is punished for her desire to make sense of and derive *personal* pleasure from a linguistic (artistic) formation into whose structure she is denied insight on the basis of occupying an inferior (feminine) position. Her 'place' is to internalise her mother's lesson that she is not good enough to proceed *on her own* and to 'die' into subservience. Mrs Caldwell had not developed during her own girlhood or adolescence, and despite her intelligence, she relies on traditional and out-dated ideas of convention that her generation insist on clinging to. Having 'starved herself and her daughters in mind and body in order to scrape together the wherewithal to send her sons out into the world' (p. 300), Beth's mother is constrained and contained in the domestic sphere of home, particularly 'the nursery and the kitchen' where she sat 'inactive and suffered' (p. 300). Mrs Caldwell is, in Grand's own words, an 'old-world' woman and Beth desires more than confinement to the spaces and places of home wherein she observes the shackles of both docility and child-rearing. Whilst as a child she can barely articulate those alternatives, she determines to resist many of the feminine values prized and practised by her mother (submissiveness, self-effacement, and self-denial) because these values are incompatible with her own emerging concept of selfhood.

Significantly, the mental anguish and bodily neglect that Beth suffers (her bedstead, a cot so small that she cannot stretch her legs, is another instance of the close connection between the physical and mental confinement of girls) supports the argument that Grand is exploring and responding to a common female experience of 'otherness'. It is the sense of isolation and estrangement, despair at being the object of constant nagging and recriminations, shame at her ignorance, and moments of suffering that can seem catastrophic to a child, that, paradoxically, lead Beth to a rebellion against a future like her mother's and a desire to experiment with new ways of being, whereby she follows her own concept of truth despite, and perhaps because of, perpetual conflict. It is true, as Brown points out, that 'Beth seems endowed at times with what amounts to an extra sense, a psychic power which she cannot articulate fully'<sup>330</sup> but it is not

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<sup>330</sup> Brown, *The Captured World*, p. 172.

unreasonable to suggest that what Grand is actually exploring are the possibilities of unfettered female difference, energy, and power. Beth's sensitivity and perceptiveness, her stimulated imagination and acute senses, all emerge in conjunction with an outspoken manner, a desire for autonomous agency, and a rejection of the constraining ties of inherited and perpetually replicated roles of female behaviour. The scant attention that Beth receives, paradoxically then, prompts development, and her solitary apprenticeship leads to the formation of her, albeit fragmentary, early identity. Leading not just a double life but a triple one, Beth experiences a childhood composed of desultory lessons and coercion, individual carefree activities, and a necessary indulgence in dreams and imagination.

Beth's withdrawal and unconventionality mark her as an anomaly in the text: 'You ought to be a child', her mother tells her, 'but you're not. Lady Benyon likes you; but even she says you're not a child, and never were. You say things no sane child would ever think of, and very few grown-up people. You are *not* like other people, there's no denying it' (p. 276). Beth's lack of conformity speaks to her family and her peers, not as a sign of the genius-child as Grand imagines her, but as an indication of her awkward singularity and subsequent disruption to nineteenth-century prescriptive female behaviours, 'At a time when anything unconventional in a girl was clear evidence of vice to all the men and most of the women who knew of it' (p. 296). Whilst children who desire lives similar to their parents' lives generally appear to cause far less family upheaval, a child who is both simultaneously dependent upon her parents and yet driven to rebel against their authority exposes the ambivalence produced when trying to effect change from within a culture. Despite being the centre of unrest in her family, Beth still longs for the affection her mother unstintingly lavishes on her older and far more traditional daughter, Mildred, and Beth suffers 'from a continual sense of discomfort [...] for want of proper attention' (p. 69). Mildred is, however, 'an artificial product of conventional ideas' (p. 146) whilst 'Beth, on the contrary, was altogether a little human being, but one of those who answer to expectation with fatal versatility' (pp. 146-147). Such versatility is significant. Conformity and conventionality in the novel emerge as indoctrination, as a masquerade of expectation for both genders, a role-playing that denies children and adults agency, individuality, and

psychological development. *The Beth Book*, however, privileges the notion of difference as an indicator of truth, as an attempt to open horizons beyond social patterns and institutionally approved behaviours and emotions. As the antithesis of both her sister and the ideal of demure femininity, Beth, as I shall explore, emerges as a positive representation of female potential, subverting conventional expectations and positing a new, more vital, role model. Her vitality and resistance to criticism, despite, and maybe because of, her experience of overwhelming moments of unhappiness and isolation, underpin the critique of adult attitudes and behaviours that would insist on perpetuating the myth of nineteenth-century gender conditioning. Indeed, it is the parents' absence of interest in a non-conforming child and the resulting withdrawal of that child which, paradoxically, I suggest, foster the development of the genius.

Limited by her infancy and social constrictions, Beth embodies the idea of 'fallenness' in the Victorian sense of the term, not by promiscuous behaviours, but by virtue of her resistance to a traditional role. Demonstrating the period's fears that female isolation and autonomy threatened the separate-spheres ideology, Beth's aberrant behaviour in rejecting the role of compliant daughter, even in infancy, could be read as a transgression of prevailing sexual and maternal values. Female desire for privacy was 'pathologized as "unnatural," "unsocial," and "insane" [and] resistance to woman's "natural" state was called "morbid self-contemplation."'”<sup>331</sup> Earlier cast as a strictly moral issue, this avatar of fallenness is, in the fin de siècle, pathologized as mental illness, and therefore a scientific issue, one that emerges alongside the new speciality of child psychology. In 1895, Sully's specific scrutiny of the child's mental landscape,<sup>332</sup> attempted to incorporate anthropological insights into his discussion of such standard psychological subjects as the origins of language and of morality.<sup>333</sup> However, medical practitioners in the nineteenth century 'rarely, if ever, stopped to examine the role of environmental agents in accentuating the differences between boys and girls, because they

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<sup>331</sup> Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing*, p. 214.

<sup>332</sup> Sully, *Studies of Childhood*.

<sup>333</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *'Shattered Nerves': Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 234.

viewed those differences as innate—an integral part of the very order of nature.<sup>334</sup> Most Victorian girls certainly had more occasion to experience and resent environmental restraints on their own individuality than did their brothers, who were likelier to escape from parental control, at least temporarily, while at school, and later, at work. Little wonder then that Beth's isolation is scarcely mitigated by the fact that she is not an only child: her older brothers, at school in England, are as absent from the text as they are from her life, apart from Jim, whose position of male privilege impinges inexorably on Beth's existence: a small bequest from Great Aunt Victoria, intended for Beth's education, is hijacked to subsidise his gentlemanly activities in the bar and the billiard-room.

Victorian and Edwardian doctors also regarded any signs of childhood dissent as serious, largely because they believed such signs foreshadowed adult deviancy unless timely preventative measures were taken.<sup>335</sup> Beth's withdrawal into 'morbid self-contemplation' would have been understood as a rebellion that would likely continue, alarmingly, into womanhood, in direct opposition to the feminine traditional attributes embodied in her mother. Significantly, her rebellious withdrawal is unchecked by those closest to her, as Grand observes: 'It is astonishing how small a part Beth's family play in [her] childish recollections' (p. 38), conveying to the reader the enormity of Beth's isolation and solitude in her earliest memories of girlhood, but also the opportunities that such 'neglect' might offer. For whilst Sally Mitchell suggests female isolation fostered mental starvation and feelings of self-doubt,<sup>336</sup> I would argue otherwise. Beth's claim to creativity and intellect is safeguarded from the imputations of heredity nervousness exhibited in her alcoholic father and sickly, violent mother precisely because of her withdrawal into a narrative of isolation that, paradoxically, would mark her, according to the most influential theories of the day, as prone to idiocy, convulsions, degeneration, and criminality. Focusing on the earliest stages of female development, before

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<sup>334</sup> Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 233.

<sup>335</sup> See for example, James Crichton-Browne's 'Psychical diseases of early life', *Journal of Mental Science*, 6 (Apr. 1860), pp. 285-7, 289-91, 303 and Havelock Ellis's 'The Child as Criminal', in *The Criminal* (London: Walter Scott, 1890), pp. 211-14.

<sup>336</sup> Sally Mitchell, 'Introduction', in *The Beth Book* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), pp. v-xxiv (p. xi).

female dissent is quashed by the familial and cultural complicity of self-sacrifice, Grand demonstrates the potential that solitude and isolation in childhood present. Beth's creative talent survives the daily rigours and deprivations of her life through its link with her 'further faculty' (p. 40) and, as I shall demonstrate through her instinctive response to nature, is made possible by her solitude and her transcendence of conventional gendered expectations. During her first experience of institutionalised education, at the age of six in a day school in a little Irish seaport, much of her time is 'spent in solitary confinement for breaches of the peace' (p. 40). Unable to endure restriction and rigid discipline, Beth's senses are sharpened to acuteness by every experience her isolated mind absorbs: 'The books of nature and of life were spread out before her, and she was conning their contents to more purpose than any one else could have interpreted them to her in those days' (pp. 42-43).

### **Isolation, Transcendence, and the Natural World**

Grand explores the potential that a narrative of isolation presents to the development of the mind of the child. Fuelled by an overwhelming desire to be alone, conscious of the class and gender prejudices displayed by her mother, and the behaviours demanded of her as her mother's daughter, Beth's response is to withdraw from both the domestic space and place wherein she is so constrained to actively pursue new lines of thought: 'she did not want to talk. She was thinking about something, and it irritated her to be interrupted. So she tore across the hall and through the kitchen out into the yard, impelled by an imperative desire to be alone' (p. 76). At home, in church, and in school, Beth's desire for solitude must out, for as Grand exposes, self-determination, autonomy, and wider female reform all begin with a move from actor to spectator, from masquerade to introspection. Her encounter in the church with the 'tall slender youth' (p. 257) drives her to seek solitude for company and contemplation: 'she could hardly sit through the service, and the moment it was over she fled. Her great desire was to be alone, if that could be called solitude which contained all the satisfaction of the closest companionship. [...] She made for the cliffs on the Fairholm estate, and when she came to them her intention was to hide herself' (p. 257).



It is, of course, highly significant that what Grand articulates here is not just a childish need to avoid company, to balk from an unwelcome situation, but a specific *desire* that Beth's actions fulfil. Wandering off to places 'whither her people rarely went' (p. 154), we learn that 'Beth lived her own life at this time almost entirely' (p. 197). Grand's phrasing of this short statement encapsulates the psychology and philosophy of optimism that underpin Beth's childhood development, despite its threat to the *status quo*. She *chooses* to be alone, because, as she declares to her teacher Miss Clifford, "I like it best" (p. 316), an expression of her preference and agency that makes no apology for its investment in egocentricity and self-satisfaction. The dynamism of her character's often impossible choices might expose a psychological state of self-contradiction, but this is a condition that Grand associates with the greatest moments of self-discovery, and with the greatest powers of critical awareness. Beth's isolation is observed as the path to freedom of expression, particularly as it is in communion with an alternative means of growth, the natural world. The lack of tenderness and love demonstrated by Beth's family is replaced, in her solitary narrative, by a singular relationship with nature, a relationship that is also instrumental in the development of her creative capacity, her genius.

Beth's solitary communion with the natural world provides an alternative outlet for the development of her creativity for it is an escape from the patriarchal parental supervision that obstructs individual development and arrests potential. Beth's first and most vivid impressions are forged through her response to the outdoors environment, beyond the constraints of home and familial ties and their ordained identities of mother, daughter, sister, wife:

It was the sunshine really that first called her into conscious existence, the blessed heat and light; [...] calling forth from her senses their first response in the thrill of warmth and well-being to which she awoke, and quickening her intellect at the same time with the stimulating effort to discover from whence her comfort came (pp. 33-34).

This early description establishes, from the outset, the symbiotic relationship between female desire and fulfilment couched in elaborate nature imagery, understood by Heilmann as an

explicitly ‘female libidinal economy’<sup>337</sup> of the countryside wherein Beth’s perceptions are exclusive and assured. Indeed, Grand’s language describes Beth’s relationship with nature in specifically erotic terms that simultaneously isolates Beth from a familial role as sibling and daughter and shrouds her in an alternative space of development and growth:

Mrs Caldwell went to visit her relations in England, accompanied by two of the children. It was in the summer, and Jane took Beth to the Castle Hill to see the steamer, with her mother on board, go by. The sea was iridescent, like molten silver, the sky was high and cloudless, and where sea and sky met and mingled on the horizon it was impossible to determine. Numbers of steamers passed far out. [...] They did not [...] interest her much, nor did the policeman who came and talked to Jane. But the Castle Hill, and the little winding path up which she had come, the green of the grass, the brambles, the ferns, the ruined masonry against which she leant, the union of sea and sky and shore, the light, the colour, absorbed her, and drew her out of herself. Her soul expanded, it spread its wings, it stretched out spiritual arms to meet and clasp the beloved nature of which it felt itself to be a part. It was her earliest recognition of their kinship, a glimpse of greatness, a moment of ecstasy never to be forgotten, the first stirring in herself of the creative faculty (p. 39).

As an ‘environmental agent’ fundamental to the account of Beth’s childhood and adolescence, the sheer energy and influence of elemental forces inscribes a sense of uniqueness into Grand’s artist child, whose creative potency and autonomous qualities are the result of her physical and emotional union with all organic and inorganic matter. As I shall demonstrate, Beth’s further faculty and her genius develop and mature in communion with nature, and her self-pleasuring abandonment to the landscape evidently furnishes the most constructive and creative environmental context for the primal forces of her unconscious and artistic (self-) discovery.

In contrast, the periods spent away from the natural world correlate with the bleakest experiences of Beth’s life, as both adult and child: the Irish seaport of her infancy, Uncle James’s household, school, and finally marriage, all impose what Heilmann calls ‘rigid bodily regimes’<sup>338</sup> which threaten to undermine Beth’s further faculty and her artistic gift. The rigidity of enforced role-playing, of dutiful daughter, compliant schoolgirl, and devoted wife, challenge her attempts at self-affirmation because of their dissimulation and concealment of their patriarchal production. Of course, by encoding Beth’s female creativity as natural (elemental),

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<sup>337</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 45.

<sup>338</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 81.

Grand comes perilously close to endorsing the Enlightenment binary opposition which locked ‘man’ into culture and ‘woman’ into nature, so often cited to exclude women and girls from the realm of ‘high’ cultural production. Yet paradoxically, by establishing her female aesthetic in natural discourses from the outset, Grand dissociates her text from what she considered the ‘unnatural’ (because affected and unreadable)<sup>339</sup> texts of Decadence. And as Heilmann argues, Grand also expresses Beth’s primarily sensory responses to the world of nature as ‘signifiers of the “natural” and “authentic” as opposed to the artificial, affected and unbalanced which marks orthodox masculinity. Beth’s spontaneous drives foster creative self-expression; the men, in contrast, are unable to move beyond imposture and self-pretence.’<sup>340</sup> Inverting late nineteenth-century scientific taxonomies, *The Beth Book* promotes feminine intuition and sensory-based knowledge acquisition over more conventional, linear channels of cognition. Thus, the alignment of Beth’s genius with spiritualism and mysticism, with social and discursive formations which take account of female visions and voices, creates ‘a complex presence of spiritual authority, alternately accommodating and subversive’,<sup>341</sup> encoded as a reflection of the spiritual authority of *all* women and girls. For Beth functions as both an exemplary and a representative figure and she posits the possibility for universal female rebirth and renewal. Indeed, far from entrapping her into repeating gender dichotomies, Beth’s relationship with nature and its stimulus for her imagination provides the agency and the capacity for female escape, and the opportunity for empowerment in the pursuit of individual freedom.

Beth’s creativity is thus grounded in the environment of the natural essentially as experienced in solitude. Thus, we discover that wandering alone, she is overcome by the beauty of the orchard at Uncle James’s house where ‘in a wild burst of delight, she suddenly threw her arms around a gnarled tree-trunk and clasped it close’ (p. 116). Hers is a desire to be at one with

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<sup>339</sup> In the local library Ideala discovers shelves of decadent texts that have evidently never been read: ‘The works of art for art’s sake, and style for style’s sake, end on the shelf much respected, while their authors end in the asylum, the prison, and the premature grave. [...] Because nobody reads them!’, *The Beth Book*, pp. 476-477.

<sup>340</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 90.

<sup>341</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, ‘The Ordinary Business of Occultism’, *Critical Inquiry*, 27.1 (2000), 1-20 (p. 15) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1344224>> [accessed 15 September 2020].

the natural world, a reading that I understand to reflect the work of Gotch's *The Orchard* that I have explored earlier. Claspings the tree as a child clasps a parent, or an adult a lover, Beth's relationship with her natural environment is defined as symbiotic, nature's 'authentic' beauty the stimulation and satisfaction for her exploration for new directions and desires. It is significant therefore, that early in the text Grand makes reference to Beth wearing a big black bonnet as 'a sort of Kate Greenaway child,'<sup>342</sup> with a head out of all proportion to the rest of her body, and feeling singularly satisfied—a feeling, however, which was less a recollection than an experience continually renewed, for a nice gown or bonnet was always a pleasure to her' (p. 45). Not unlike the sentimentalised representations of idealised and insulated childhood produced by Helen Allingham, Grand's description might at first suggest a correlation between Beth and the happy little children of Greenaway's works. But Grand's language is critical here. Beth's recollections, from the perspective of womanhood, are 'childish' not of 'childhood' and may therefore be open to question. As Grand writes, Beth 'had a kind of sensation of having seen herself in it [the bonnet]' (p. 45) as one looking in from the outside, conforming to the expectations of nostalgic and idealised images of childhood popular at the fin de siècle, but created by costume, by masquerade. Her recollection becomes rather an idealised reflection that itself suggests the ideology of idealising childhood for the reader.

Authenticity and truth shun the trope of childhood that such idealisation would mask in favour of detailing Beth's journey to self-discovery that is begotten through solitary contemplation, nature, and the development of a further faculty and her genius, her soul. Beth's solitary communion with nature evokes memories of happy association that inform and expand her intellect and fill the void left by a lack of formal education, or parental guidance that, as I have suggested, is often spontaneously given, misplaced, ill-informed, and inconsistent. Indeed, Grand's ability to access the raw emotions that can distort a child's vision of the world is the same vision by which Beth understands that there are new ways of living. As an emerging

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<sup>342</sup> Catherine (Kate) Greenaway (1864-1901) was a children's book illustrator and writer, whose sentimentalised representations of children, often dressed in exaggerated Regency costumes with large bonnets and pantaloons, were popular in the late nineteenth century.

independent female subject, Beth both transcends the gaze of a society that would define her, and, as Bourne Taylor argues, ‘disrupts the dominant narrative of slow incremental evolution.’<sup>343</sup> The publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) marked the emergence of evolutionary psychology and psychiatry in child studies: the long-held and popular notion of the child as an animal or savage was afforded scientific endorsement in theories of recapitulation, and given popular instantiation in Ernst Haeckel’s principle that the life of the individual follows that of the race.<sup>344</sup> Similarly, within the emerging field of anthropology, women, children, and savages were repeatedly linked together as ‘other’, figures that stood outside of the unstated norms of white middle-class masculinity,<sup>345</sup> but for whom there were defined pathways of acceptable behaviours for development and growth. Girls were generally denied an education because at the point of transcendence into adulthood, ‘A woman was expected at that time to earn her livelihood by marrying a man and bringing up a family; and so long as her face was attractive, the fact that she was ignorant, foolish, and trivial did not [...] at all disqualify her for the task’ (p. 143). But Beth’s own growing consciousness, mediated by a knowing narrator from a standpoint of historical distance, disrupts and reconceptualises evolutionary fictions of conventional development and survival. Darwin’s theories of biological evolution had emerged through a combination of working and reworking his hypotheses, attempting to recall and record his own earliest memories, and painstakingly recording the development of his own three children. But in Grand’s novel, it is Beth herself who studies the habits of other people ‘with the patient pertinacity of a naturalist’ (p.226). The power of her childhood observations of the routines, traditions, repetitions, and learned behaviours of those around her also suggest her ability to reimagine new ways of being. Transferring the gaze of a society back from its preoccupation with her behaviours onto itself, Grand not only privileges the power of the senses to inform the imagination, but also the power of solitary contemplation

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<sup>343</sup> Bourne Taylor, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

<sup>344</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 4 and 39-40.

<sup>345</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 4.

to affect change. Thus, upon her return to Rainharbour from a holiday with her Aunt Victoria, we discover that Beth:

had experienced such a change in herself since she went away, that she was surprised to find the streets unaltered; and yet, although they were unaltered, they did not look the same. It was as if the focus of her eyes had been readjusted so as to make familiar objects seem strange, and change the perspective of everything; which gave the place a different air, a look of having been swept and garnished and set in order like a toy-town. But the people they passed were altogether unchanged, and this seemed stranger still to Beth. There they had been all the time, walking about as usual, wearing the same clothes, thinking the same thoughts; they had had no new experiences, and, what was worse, my [sic] were not only unconscious of any that she might have had, but were profoundly indifferent; and to Beth, on the threshold of life, all eager interest in everything, [...] this vision of the self-centred with shrivelled hearts was terrible; it gave her the sensation of being the one living thing that could feel in a world of automata moved by machinery (p. 229).

Imperative to Beth's experience then, is the need for a secret space or spaces, in which to develop not only one's craft, but also one's self in its entirety. Significantly, as the above passage makes clear, this space cannot be urban, wherein the march of industrialisation and automation reproduce behaviours and deaden the senses. Time spent in town provokes a suffering of 'dull irresolute feeling which comes of a want of purpose' (p. 254), whilst on the streets, Beth 'invariably lost herself; [...] the vision and the dream would be upon her as a rule, and she would walk in a world of fancy' (p. 226) oblivious to the signposts of manmade structures that are lost in her imagination. For Beth's journey is marked by moments of transition wherein the *natural* world is understood as the threshold to new ways of living for women and girls, a world of new possibilities, and originality of thought. The charm of Beth's childhood, her

days of delight [...] was due less to people than to things—to some sight or scent of nature, the smell of new mown hay from a waggon...a glimpse of a high bank on the other side of the road—a high grassy bank, covered and crowned with trees, chiefly chestnuts, on which the sun shone; hawthorn hedgerows [...] and one privet-hedge in their own garden, an impenetrable hedge, on the other side of which, as Beth imagined, all kinds of wonderful things took place (p. 47).

These earliest incidents in Beth's childhood illustrate the awakening of her awareness of self, particularly in her solitary commune with the natural world, but they also evoke the child's

intense powers of observation and imagination. Indeed, her adamant assertion that the spots of colour on a clutch of bird's eggs had appeared overnight, contrary to her nurse, Jane's assertion that they had always been there (see pp. 34-35), suggests, even at the earliest stages of her development, the strength of Beth's desire for autonomous thought and the strength of her capacity to conceive anew, a faculty to tap into new ways of seeing. When Mildred derides Beth's excitement at seeing a swan, Grand observes that 'poor Mildred! she had not seen it, and never would see it in Beth's sense of the word' (p. 116). Beth's is a vision of greater clarity, a second sight that informs the birth of her wider further faculty. Indeed, although the opening paragraph of Chapter XV describes Beth's mind as 'a mere photographic apparatus for the registration of impressions on the brain,' (p. 143) and such a description might suggest a less than positive, passive accepting stance, Grand clarifies the benefits of such receptivity. Beth's eyes are 'wide open, deeply interested' (p. 143) and in receipt of a myriad of images and impressions, not unlike a photographer's catalogue: 'Every incident stored and docketed itself somewhere in her consciousness for future use, and it was upon this hoard that she drew eventually with such astonishing effect' (p. 143). Beth does not consciously choose and filter the perceptions that her mind receives, but each *is* consciously catalogued. Beth's own mind documents, organises, and prioritises a wealth of situations that are invaluable to her future self. Whilst such an avalanche of material might threaten to overwhelm and smother a child's mind, Beth's insight is actually saved from destruction by not being exposed to a more formal education: 'theoretical knowledge would have dulled the keenness of her insight probably, confused her point of view, and brought in accepted commonplaces to spoil the originality of her conclusions' (p. 143). Framed by a natural landscape, Beth's further faculty is understood as a spiritual power that 'lies latent in the whole race, awaiting favourable conditions to develop itself, [whilst] some few rare beings have come into possession of it already' (p. 235). Imbued with this faculty from infancy, Beth's possession and realisation of this power offers her the opportunity to realise new ways of living because of its potential for imagination rather than imitation.

The elements of solitude and nature respectively provide the space and place for the development of this third imaginative element essential to the production of Beth's creative capacity; indeed, they are vital enablers for the development of the dream space, the final component fundamental to the maturation of the female genius. Solitude provides the space for reflection and contemplation whilst the natural environment stimulates emotional connections and desires that are lacking in the usual familial places. Together then, space and place create the perfect environment for the imagination to flourish, for dreams to occur, and mystical and spiritual voices to be heard like those that Bastien-Lepage's *Jeanne d'Arc* is seen to experience. As I have argued, the alignment of Beth's genius with the metaphysical creates a feminine authority that is both conciliatory and subversive. Sensory experiences, daydreaming, imaginative visions, and hereditary memories develop Beth's (un)consciousness, although to nineteenth-century medical practitioners, such behaviours were worrying premonitory signs of nervous disorders, abnormal and pathological. For if a child were allowed to continue in the practice of dreaming while awake, a habit could be established that would 'in all likelihood ultimately issue in the degeneration of some form of insanity,'<sup>346</sup> the result of some 'morbid deposit' in the brain. The hallucinations experienced in this mental state, Sir James Crichton-Brown explained during an address before the West London Medico-Chirurgical Society in 1895, consisted in 'a feeling of being somewhere else—in double consciousness—in a loss of personal identity—in supernatural joyousness or profound despair—in losing touch of the world.'<sup>347</sup> Despite the progress of almost thirty years, Crichton-Browne agreed with Henry Maudsley's earlier assessment that such aberrations of the child mind were grave pathological conditions and could prefigure insanity.<sup>348</sup> A demonstration of daydreaming in a child was understood to damage or enfeeble the mind of that child sufficiently to compromise the mental health and well-being of the adult they would become. Parents were therefore urged to be permanently alert to such signs of dreaminess in their children so that such reveries could be

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<sup>346</sup> Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1867), p. 271.

<sup>347</sup> James Crichton-Browne, 'The Cavendish Lecture on Dreamy Mental States', *The Lancet*, 146.3750 (13 July 1895), 73-75 (p. 75).

<sup>348</sup> Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 236.



systematically and rigorously repressed.<sup>349</sup> Any rumination on the self, and particularly on the staging of the self was not to be condoned or encouraged for fear of confusion between reality and illusion. That Grand encodes Beth's imaginative ventures as a reflection of the spiritual powers of an exceptional child suggests their significance to her protagonist's development, and to that of all children of the New Age of the fin de siècle. Indeed, Beth's imaginings and dreams take her to precisely the spaces and places that Crichton-Brown fears, exploring another consciousness, a different identity, and a move away from a pre-determined and constraining world. Understood in the far wider context of child psychology and gender, Beth's dreams and fantasies are the gateway to exploring and expressing the 'realist' limitations for both Beth and other fin-de-siècle girls whilst simultaneously suggesting and anticipating the potential of things to come when Modernism's advance releases the shackles of Victorianism. In authorising this imaginative space of dreams and visions, Grand assumes a continuity between fictional and 'real' worlds that she believed 'was the foundation from which actual social change could be first fantasised then initiated.'<sup>350</sup>

Beth's further faculty is then, as Heilmann and I suggest, both an intensely personal gift that helps her articulate and explore her artistic vision, as well as a social attribute.<sup>351</sup>

Significantly for this chapter, in both instances, that faculty's unconstrained expression is linked to spaces of solitude, nature, and imaginative forces. As Heilmann has observed, 'Beth's role as the harbinger of a new 'race' of seventh-wave women is signalled early on in the course of vivid dream-memories of strangely luminous, torch-bearing "ancestors [...and] distant relations."<sup>352</sup>

Beth's strange dream in Chapter III places her beneath the green, natural expanse of Dorman's Isle, wherein she encounters, in a theatre-like space, 'members of her own family, ancestors in the dresses of their day, distant relations' (p. 51) who do not speak to her, and eventually leave her alone; she is unable to follow them. The presence of a dream sequence in childhood is

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<sup>349</sup> P. C. Smith, 'The Meaning of the Term, "Neurasthenia" and the Etiology of the Disease', *The British Medical Journal*, 1.2205 (4 April 1903), 781-782 (p. 782).

<sup>350</sup> Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant*, p. 61.

<sup>351</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 101.

<sup>352</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 97. (See also Grand's explanation of the 'seventh waves of humanity' in *The Heavenly Twins*, p. 99).

significant, for despite a strong interest, from the Romantic period onwards, in the phenomena of dreams and apparitions, nineteenth-century medical texts had focused predominantly on the subject of childhood fears and night terrors. Robert Macnish's popular 1830 text *The Philosophy of Sleep* was one of the earliest, and most influential. Whilst acknowledging that children could have joyous reveries, childhood, he wrote, 'is also tortured by scenes more painful and overwhelming than almost ever fall to the share of after-life.'<sup>353</sup> Such night terrors became a standard entry in domestic medical manuals and works on child-rearing, 'firmly placed on a continuum which lead[s] directly to mental derangement, setting the agenda for the development of child psychiatry in the later decades of the [nineteenth] century.'<sup>354</sup> In *Illusions*, Sully had speculated that in the space and place of 'dream-land', a child might have 'a sort of reminiscence of prenatal, that is, ancestral experience,'<sup>355</sup> a theory that he returned to in *Studies of Childhood*, where despite being

unable to collect much evidence [...] [w]hat seems certain is that to the simple intelligence of the child these counterfeits of ordinary sense-presentations are real external things. [...] In thus materialising the dream and localising it in the actual surroundings, the child but reflects the early thought of the race which starts from the supposition that the man or animal which appears in a dream is a material reality which actually approaches the sleeper.<sup>356</sup>

*The Beth Book* celebrates the protagonist's capacity for 'materialising the dream' which simultaneously puts her in touch with her ancestors whilst also alienating her from adopting or acquiring their inheritance. I read the theatre-like space of the reverie as a stage set, a space for performance rather than inherent or fixed destinies, and Beth's inability to follow her ancestors, further evidence of the necessity for her to embark upon a new course of development.

Significantly, Beth's dream is followed by a vision of being expelled violently from an 'indescribable, hollow space' (p. 52) which seems to be a memory of the trauma of birth and

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<sup>353</sup> Robert Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, First American Edition, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1834), p. 48.

<sup>354</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 51. See for example, Charles West's, *Lectures on the Diseases of Infancy and Childhood* (1848), and James Sully's, *Illusions: A Psychological Study* (1881).

<sup>355</sup> James Sully, *Illusions: A Psychological Study*, Third Edition, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887), p. 131.

<sup>356</sup> Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, p. 103.

creatively expresses Sully's theory of the chronology of ancestral dream and subsequent nascency. Both vision and dream acknowledge Beth as a new intermediate being, conscious of her ancestral heritage through fragments of memory and lived experience, but simultaneously impelled forward through rebirth in visionary anticipation of spiritual development and a new way of being. Grand's child protagonist disrupts the feminine principle of self-sacrifice so apparent in her mother and evades a performance of escape and revenge to focus on self-development for self-worth. Beth's infancy and childhood negate the sex-role conditioning that her heredity would determine in favour of an autonomous development formed by environment and solitude. Space and place in *The Beth Book* represent a girl's search for a personal identity that begins in infancy when the centrality of traditional feminine ideals of self-sacrifice are still in the embryonic stages. In effect, Beth's evolution from a female infant and child raised by a traditional mother to the harbinger of a new female authority depends upon her refusal to become her mother and to transcend her heredity; hers is the staging of a New Girlhood aroused by a desire to control her own destiny and a challenge to the persistent cultural resistance to girls' development.

### **Reimagining Female Futures and the Death of Convention**

What then of Beth's evolution through adolescence and into womanhood towards the end of the novel? Whilst many New Woman writers concluded their novels with the defeat of their heroine, Heilmann suggests that Grand chose to posit the possibility of adult self-realisation for Beth in the spheres of both the professional and the personal.<sup>357</sup> Indeed, as Penny Boumelha observes, Beth constitutes a 'rare instance [...] of a surviving and fulfilled female genius'<sup>358</sup> among New Woman protagonists. However, it must be stressed that Beth must pass through consecutive stages of suffering in young womanhood following her marriage, precisely in order to recover the voice of her childhood, an unadulterated voice, which in Hélène Cixous's terms,

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<sup>357</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 83.

<sup>358</sup> Penny Boumelha, 'The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street: Figures of the Female Writer in British *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 40.2 (1997), 164-180 (p. 173) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/367134>> [accessed 7 November 2018].

‘sings from a time before law.’<sup>359</sup> Significantly, in adulthood, Beth’s potent feminine voice from childhood becomes muffled in marriage in proportion to both her enclosure within the domestic space of the matrimonial home and her ‘place’ therein, and her symbolic distancing from the natural environment:

Since her marriage she had given up her free, wild, wandering habits. She would go into the town to order things at the shops in the morning, and take a solitary walk out into the country in the afternoon perhaps, but without any keen enjoyment. Her natural zest for the woods and fields was suspended. She had lost touch with nature. Instead of looking about her observantly as had been her wont, she walked now, as a rule, with her eyes fixed on the ground, thinking deeply (p. 372).

Now subject to the ‘law of man’ (p. 363), Beth ‘suffered miserably from the want of proper privacy in her life’ (p. 363) and discovers that in this state of conditioning and charade, not only is autonomy found wanting, but also that she ‘was taking on something of the colour of her surroundings involuntarily, inevitably, as certain insects do, in self-defence’ (p. 425). As in childhood, Grand recreates the fundamental need of solitude for self-determination, a literal and symbolic space wherein women and girls can resist the indoctrination of the ‘chameleon’ state and move from a state of imitation and subjection to independent subject status.

The resurgence of Beth’s muted voice is therefore closely linked to her desire and quest for personal space, and within the confines of the marital home, the cornerstone of the patriarchal superstructure, such a space translates to Virginia Woolf’s ‘room of one’s own’. Heilman reads Beth’s appropriation of the attic space as significant within the context of a rich tradition in women’s writing, revising in particular, ‘Charlotte Brontë’s and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s metaphors of the room as tomb, [...] turn[ing] Beth’s secret garret into an emblem of the womb, the locus of individual and artistic rebirth.’<sup>360</sup> And whilst it is unquestionable that Beth’s voice regains its vibrancy in proportion to her reclamation of such a literal and literary breathing space, the secret chamber is, nonetheless, also a claustrophobic image, for it is only

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<sup>359</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays’, in *The Newly Born Woman*, ed. by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 63-132 (p. 93).

<sup>360</sup> Heilman, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 105.

‘by going down on her hands and knees where the sloping roof was too low for her to stoop, she [Beth] found she could creep round it. It was the kind of thing a child would have done, but what was Beth but a child?’ (p. 364). In this respect, the secret place of the attic is a symbol of the transitional space that Beth occupies in her movement between girlhood and womanhood, a ‘creeping’ movement towards emancipation and autonomy. Still constrained within the confines of a patriarchal and Victorian marriage to a doctor who practises vivisection, spends her money, and brings his mistress to live in the house, Beth’s seclusion within the attic room subverts from within. At the top of the house, in a space above where even the servants slept, Beth’s attic ensconces her as far from the image of the angel in the house as domestic space will allow, and, as she explains to Ideala, ‘so high up that I can almost hear what the wind whispers to the stars to make them twinkle’ (p. 435). It is a place of transition between the sky and the earth, between the natural world above and below. In this symbolic space, this ‘enclave of sedition’,<sup>361</sup> Beth embarks upon her initial course of study that will eventually lead to her own writing and subsequent departure from both her toxic marriage and the domestic space governed by a male authority that she is forced to inhabit. In the space of her secret chamber, Beth can articulate in her own, adult language her understanding of the impulses and desires that have propelled the girl child in directions others have found so challenging and so abhorrent: “‘Never less alone than when alone!’” And up in the quiet of her secret chamber, with the serene blue above, the green earth and the whispering trees below, [...] up there at her ease in that peaceful shrine, secure from intrusion, “‘There is no joy but calm!’” was her constant ejaculation’ (p. 440).

It is no surprise then that the close of the novel also resists the conventions of the romance plot to suggest a new way forward. Beth narrowly escapes the fate of her peers and the indoctrination of the ‘inevitable order’ (p. 462) to posit a future way of being that emerges from a developed autonomy acquired by isolation: ‘the fate she had only narrowly escaped by help of the strength that came out of the brave self-contained habits she had cultivated in her life of seclusion and thought. It was the result of this training [...] that her further faculty [...] at last

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<sup>361</sup> Heilman, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 105.

shot up a bright and steady light' (pp. 462-463). Significantly, although Grand expresses Beth's growth to autonomous maturity and creative fulfilment with metaphors that resonate with the natural world, Beth's 'self-cultivation' results not in endless reproductions of the same genus, but an 'offshoot', an adult Beth whose evolution projects beyond the boundaries of the conventional, recognised by Ideala as representing 'the genius for whom we are waiting. [...] She sees what we have never seen, and never shall in this incarnation; hers are the vision and the dream that are denied to us' (pp. 407-408). Rather than being reabsorbed into the social order, Beth demands that the social order change to accommodate her, and indeed, neither Beth nor Arthur would fit comfortably into the social order the marriage plot affirms. For he, like Beth, is characterised largely by his otherness: he is an American and an artist, and we can only assume that the couple are contemplating the adulterous, 'free-love' relationship that Alfred proposes earlier in the novel. Indeed, the subversive message of the text's conclusion, is that not only is Beth economically free to choose her career, she is also free to arrange her intimate and personal relationships on her own terms. Grand's protagonist forms an illicit relationship not so much to demonstrate the alternatives to marriage, but to offer the female lead a liberating experience that concludes with the woman's uncompromising freedom, a necessity, as I shall explore in Stephen Crane's *Maggie* in Chapter 3, even at the price of death.

Grand's reimagining of the marriage plot of the nineteenth-century novel liberates her female lead by subversion in *The Beth Book* by suggesting the potential for personal fulfilment through unorthodoxy. Grand dispenses with the hackneyed romance plot that dissolves and mythically resolves a woman's position of subservience under patriarchy through romantic reconciliation and marriage. Beth's privilege to choose her destiny relies upon a refusal to engage with the construct of marriage and its fiction of resolution, to source and secure her relationships and her future by less conventionally accepted methods. Indeed, Grand's literary conclusion subverts tradition and questions the entire value of marriage for late nineteenth-century women, a radical idea that finds its artistic expression back in the work of Thomas Cooper Gotch. As I have argued, Gotch's hopes for the future were invested in the figure of the female, in the liberated Woman whose potential, in terms of development and fulfilment, is, as I

shall demonstrate, symbolically expressed in his remarkable painting of 1895, *Death the Bride*.

Both classical mythological tradition and the Bible have played their parts in the determination of the gender of Death in art and literature, but the wealth of images that the creative impulse has produced over the centuries of imagining the unimaginable in the Western world suggest that, at any given time, related and contrary images of death naturally cluster around the dominant ones.<sup>362</sup> Such images may or may not reveal something about the ‘nature’ of death; they may or may not contribute something to the ideologies of feminism or its opponents, or to the loosening up of these ideologies. There is no doubt, however, that the history of such images in literature and art offers a variation on the cultural history of the West, giving shape to the shapeless by approximating it to the familiar, thereby endowing it with meaning. In English art and literature, death is thought of and portrayed as male ‘almost without exception,’ typically as ‘the old man with the scythe’ as the *Times Literary Supplement* reminds us.<sup>363</sup> Yet, as I have suggested, the wealth of literary and artistic images of death personified are so plentiful and manifold throughout the ages that attempting to discern the dominant images that define any particular period is fraught with the existence of contrary and related images that too demand attention. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, one cannot but be struck by the ascendancy and ubiquity of female death images, for in the course of the Victorian period, they rise to such prominence that they become the defining cachet of the imaginative

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<sup>362</sup> The Middle Ages often believed that death was the wages of sin, but whether this was Adam’s sin or Eve’s was dependent on the alchemy of imagination dominant at the time, so that death could be visualised as male or female respectively. The Renaissance and Baroque periods tended to identify Death with the devil, possibly because in the Book of Wisdom (2:24), it is the devil, rather than Adam or Eve, who brings death into the world. And as the devil may appear as male or female in folklore and art, so may Death. Death comes to be eroticised from the mid-eighteenth century, creating new tensions between the Grim Reaper figure and their victims. The Romantics tended to ‘domesticate’ Death as a friend, but also as a bridegroom or, less often, as a bride. From the fin de siècle onwards, Death also emerges in art and literature as the dangerous, yet highly desirable, sexual seductress. See Elisabeth Bronfen’s, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) and Karl S. Guthke’s, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>363</sup> Liam Hudson, ‘The age of Alzheimer’s’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4841 (12 Jan 1996), p. 7.

encounter with mortality.<sup>364</sup> This development culminates around the turn of the century, in literature as well as in the visual arts.<sup>365</sup>

However, the triumph of the Victorian female Death is preceded in the earlier nineteenth century by a number of prominent literary and visual works that personify death as a man as well as a woman, indeed, that place male and female images of death side by side. The conviction that underlay the imaginative responses in the early nineteenth century appears to have been that Death, hourglass in hand, may confront anyone of us, at any time and in any place, regardless of our position in life. Little wonder then that Death is cast in a wide variety of roles rendered realistically: as the cook, the doctor, the coachman, and, unsurprisingly, the prostitute.<sup>366</sup> Death lay in wait everywhere, especially where least expected. By the mid-nineteenth century, the well-ordered and secure world of the Victorian middle class is overshadowed by the ubiquity of death and includes a greater awareness of the danger associated with women, who are more commonly objects of reverence in the literature and images of the time.

For whereas the representations of death of the earlier and mid-nineteenth century tend to call to mind the omnipresence and multiformity of death, a very different version of death personified commands attention in the second half of the century, and especially at the fin de siècle. In that period, the representations of death that set the tone portray death as a woman, or rather as two female figures, not always neatly distinguishable from each other: the angel of death and the seductress. Death as female becomes the appropriate view from the second half of

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<sup>364</sup> Karl S. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 173.

<sup>365</sup> See for example, Arnold Böcklin's Symbolist painting, *Die Pest (The Plague)* (1898), Daniel Chester French's sculpture, *The Angel of Death and the Sculptor* from the Milmore Memorial (1889-1893), Carlos Schwabe's *The Death of the Gravedigger* (1895-1900), and Charles Baudelaire's 'Danse Macabre' in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1861).

<sup>366</sup> Ca. 1839, Jean Grandville published a series of nine lithographs entitled *Journey to Eternity: Public Transport by Express Coach, With Hourly Departures from all Points of the Globe (Voyage pour l'éternité: Service général des omnibus accélérés, Départ à toute heure et de tous les points du globe)*. The shapes that Grandville's Death takes are as different as they are inconspicuous and familiar, easily recognisable as types and whose personification of death is not immediately apparent. The original lithographs are held by The Met Museum, New York. See also, Franz Pocci's *Dance of Death in Pictures and Verse (Todtentanz in Bilden und Sprüchen)* (1862), a series of twelve woodcuts where Death is personified in such diverse roles as garden gnome, female nurse, ferryman, and wizened hag.



the nineteenth century onwards, with the decisive qualification, however, that in this period, female Death may in its turn adopt the mask of love.<sup>367</sup> This fusion of death and love, Thanatos and Eros, takes its shape in forms of multiple meanings although all have in common transposable qualities of love and death, to the point where one may be mistaken for the other.<sup>368</sup> The closer the century draws to its end, the greater, it appears, the fascination for the fusion of love and death, woman and death, in art and literature. Death and the instrument or conveyer of death are merged in a single artistic shape in these figures. As I shall explore in what follows, it is clearly Death, and not merely a messenger of death nor its victim that is symbolised in a female figure, and its prominence is timely at this particular period.

### ***The Death of the Gravedigger, 1895***

Despite various interpretations of this prominence that suggest, among others, ideas of male neurosis toward women, the reaction of a patriarchal world against an emerging feminism, or men's fundamental misogyny, such explanations are, as Karl Guthke remarks, 'as widespread as they are glib.'<sup>369</sup> Perhaps a more sophisticated understanding may be gleaned from the intimate connection of the female sex and the figure of the child, to the 'elemental', to 'nature', and to biological processes. Certainly hints of 'motherliness' and maternal nature may be associated with representations of both the angel and death, and death the seductress at the fin de siècle. In Carlos Schwarbe's 1895 painting, *The Death of the Gravedigger* (figure 2.6), the aged labourer, standing in an open grave is in the throes of his trade when he turns his face to the feminine angel of death crouched above him at the edge of the graveside. His look is certainly questioning but without fear, despite his body quite literally already deep in the ground that awaits him, returning, we understand, from whence he has come. Death envelops the old man

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<sup>367</sup> See for example, Félicien Rops's paintings *La Mort au Bal* (*Death at the Ball*) (1865-75) and *La Parodie Humaine* (*The Human Parody*) (1878) where Death is personified as an alluring and desirous woman hiding behind an elegant appearance of fashion and respectability. The interchangeability of love and death dominate these images and finds its literary form in works such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet 'Death-in-Love' (1869) where the narrator is visited by an image resembling 'Love' accompanied by a veiled woman who declares 'I and this Love are one, and I am Death'.

<sup>368</sup> See for example, Jacek Malczewski's symbolist painting *Thanatos I* (1898) whose beautiful and elegantly posed young woman is reminiscent of classical statues of Greek goddesses but whose wings, scythe, and whetstone clearly identify her as an angel of death.

<sup>369</sup> Guthke, *The Gender of Death*, p.189.



**Figure 2.6.**  
 Carlos Schwabe, *The Death of the Gravedigger* (*La Mort du Fossoyeur*) 1895-1900  
 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

with her long pointed wings, in an embrace of gentleness and protection. Her face is familiar, but her beauty is mystical, softly illuminated by the green light of a candle she balances in her right hand, whilst her left points heavenwards in a gesture that is alluring and full of promise of the redemptive life to come. And whilst her beauty may recall the image of the seductress, the gravedigger's transfigured glance upward suggests too the adoration of the Madonna, his eyes seeking the paradise that awaits on high to which Death is pointing, and the return to the Father by way of the Mother, through whom both life and death must naturally come.

The decadents or aesthetes from the second half of the nineteenth century to the *belle époque* experienced this female closeness to base biological nature as a threat.<sup>370</sup> Fear of the female sex and its consequent suppression were aspects of the ongoing project of Enlightenment which aimed to dominate biological and 'animal' nature because they were perceived as incalculable and contrary to reason, hence foreign and hostile. In *Jane Eyre*, fear of Bertha Mason's Creole heritage and inherent 'base' instincts suggests the stirrings of the kind of anxiety that threatened to overwhelm the decadents and aesthetes of the fin de siècle. The manifest subjection of woman to biological processes - birth, menstruation, childbearing, menopause - reminds man of his own identity as 'creature', of his own biological origin, and therefore of his own, no less biological death. Unsurprisingly, the image of the woman and mother, the powerful symbol of life and Eros, simultaneously becomes a powerful personification of death. As Simone de Beauvoir explains, she who gives life, gives death:

The Mother dooms her son to death in giving him life; the loved one lures her lover on to renounce life and abandon himself to the last sleep. [...] Born of the flesh, the man in love finds fulfilment as flesh, and the flesh is destined to the tomb. Here the alliance between Woman and Death is confirmed; the great harvestress is the inverse aspect of the fecundity that makes the grain thrive. But she appears, too, as the dreadful bride whose skeleton is revealed under her sweet, mendacious flesh.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Guthke, *The Gender of Death*, p. 190.

<sup>371</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. and trans. by H. M. Parshley (first published 1949: London: Vintage, 1997), p. 197.

### ***Time, Death and Judgement, 1870-1896***

Whilst the ‘motherliness’ of death sets the tone in the rendering of the angel of death in several paintings by George Frederic Watts (1817-1904),<sup>372</sup> he also confirmed the ‘alliance between Woman and Death’, like Gotch, in his portrayal of death in fleshy female bridal form. Indeed, Watts’s personification of death as a womanly figure in *Time, Death and Judgement* (figure 2.7) (1870-1896) suggests, I argue, a three-way alliance other than that of its title. The painting features colossal figures representing ‘types’, intended ‘to appeal purely to human sympathies, without reference to creed or dogma of any kind’<sup>373</sup> and the language of allegory in Watts’s painting appears overly explicit: the flying figure of Judgement (added after the original composition of just the two figures of Time and Death), in flaring crimson robes, hovers overhead in the wind. With face averted, this apparently female figure seems a terrifying force as she gestures both forwards and backwards into space, holding her scales of justice behind the head of Time, although the sharpness of their line and highly contrasting colour also suggest an uncanny instrument of decapitation. The youthful and beautiful figures of Time and Death are ‘wading hand in hand together through the waves of the stream of life’,<sup>374</sup> according to the text in the catalogue for the 1884-1885 exhibition in New York, which continues: ‘He [Time] is represented as advancing in strides, marking the recurrence of conditions – the hours, days, months and years. Death, his inevitable mate, glides silently by his side, doing her work at unexpected and uncalculated moments.’ The massive orb behind the figures is the setting sun, against which Time, with his warm, flesh tones, but blind eyes, is perceived, for time is running out, both literally and metaphorically, as he strides, hand in hand, scythe at his side, with Death. With her eyes barely open, (in ardour, in modesty, or in decline?) she, Death, is swathed in

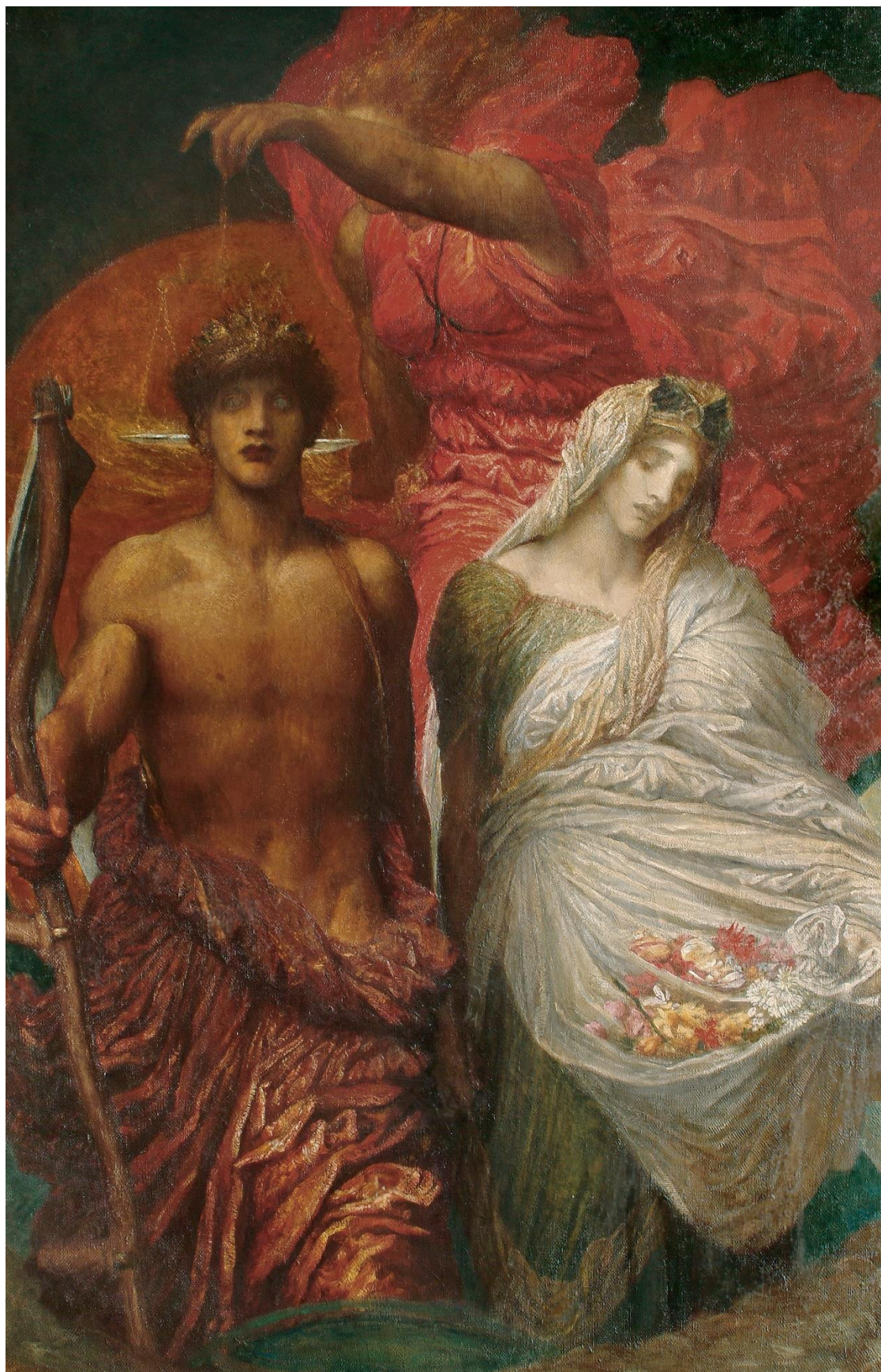
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<sup>372</sup> See for example, *The Court of Death*, a composition that Watts evolved over the entire second half of the nineteenth century with the fundamental idea remaining constant: a female angel, symbolising Death, sat on her throne above figures representing different conditions and ages of man. Death cradles a newly born or even, as Watts wrote, ‘an unborn child’ to imply ‘even the germ of life is in the lap of Death’, (Mary Seton Watts, *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist’s Life*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), vol I, p. 308. See also *Death Crowning Innocence* (1886-1887) where Death appears as a winged female angel, lovingly devoted to the small child on her lap. In this painting, Death is a Madonna-like figure, modestly dressed, enveloping the helpless infant with a solicitous gaze.

<sup>373</sup> Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, *G. F. Watts: Victorian Visionary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 248.

<sup>374</sup> Bills and Bryant, *G. F. Watts: Victorian Visionary*, p. 248.





**Figure 2.7.**  
George Frederic Watts, *Time, Death and Judgement* 1870-1896  
(Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey)

shroud-like draperies, although their white brilliance coupled with her veil-like head-covering and gathered wilting flowers, are as much bridal symbols as they are those of mortality.

Deprived of both angel wings and any suggestion of the ‘motherliness’ of death, Watts’s figure suggests then an alliance between woman (as seductive fascination and ‘other’), bride (of Christ, of man, but always as ‘addition’ or companion) and death (as anxious apprehension and biological inevitability). The imaginative portrayals of Death as woman in the art and literature of the late nineteenth century are thus manifested two-fold: as erotic fascination and anxiety neurosis, an intriguing fusion of ardour and destruction.

### ***Death the Bride, 1895***

The identification of death and woman as the agent of fatal, erotic seduction is nowhere more palpable, however, than in Gotch’s painting. An experimental piece, very different from anything Gotch painted before or after, *Death the Bride* (figure 2.8) is a painting that the artist was later to call ‘the most mature thing I’ve done.’<sup>375</sup> The first study for the painting had been a realistic portrait of Gertrude Bodinnar in a black veil. Bodinnar was a self-taught artist and fellow native of Cornwall whose own career began as an artist’s model, posing for Gotch and Newlyn artist Harold Harvey.<sup>376</sup> Although Gotch had strived, at first, for literal accuracy, *Death the Bride*’s ‘frightening naturalism [...] outweighed its improbability. Gotch’s turning to “symbolism and decoration” was interpreted as a deliberate retreat into a world of artifice.’<sup>377</sup> Not unlike the artificial ‘natural’ environment of *A Golden Dream*, the poppies and the dark wood through which the pale figure floats referred to the inner longings of the human soul, and its reception by a bemused public focused on its mystical qualities, as expressed by Hind: ‘Silent is this friend, yet she speaks. She comes gliding through the poppies, emblems of rest without tears, a film of gauze about her head, which she lifts aside to show her grave face, a whisper of invitation upon it.’<sup>378</sup> A female figure, crowned Ophelia-like with flowers, and

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<sup>375</sup> ‘Realist as Mystic’, p. 379.

<sup>376</sup> Sara Gray, *The Dictionary of British Woman Artists* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2009), p. 133.

<sup>377</sup> McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 170.

<sup>378</sup> Hind, ‘T. C. Gotch and his Pictures’, p. 279.





**Figure 2.8.**  
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *Death the Bride* 1895  
(Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering)

almost subsumed into a lush field of poppies, raises her veil with a half-inviting, half-rejecting gesture, revealing her dreamy gaze. Otherworldly and erotically seductive at the same time, the smiling, enigmatic figure beckons humanity to embark on a journey with her to new, unknown frontiers. As Alice Eden argues: ‘In the Bride’s role, bringing death as a form of new life, the image may be framed by feminist writings about woman’s spiritual potency as the redeemer of humanity.’<sup>379</sup>

In a profoundly subversive format, the Bride is Death itself, a personification of that which cannot be represented in the guise of the all-powerful female who can speak beyond, to, and of the grave. The female figure is the arbiter of the point of transition, of the boundary between life and death, of the pathway beyond the enclosure of the veil. Indeed, contrary to dominant modes of viewing and gazing, and the masculine controlled process of unveiling, Gotch’s solitary ‘Bride’ has both the strength and authority to draw back the veil herself, revealing the potency and prospect of a future world for humanity, as Gotch expresses himself in verse:

And as I move  
Through an obscure and poppied world, behold,  
a shrouded form that seems to question me!  
Is this the dread Destroyer Death? is this  
the end? Ah no! The pallid arms are raised,  
the veil divides, a faint sigh breathes my name,  
And lo! not night, but dawn; not death but life,  
Or better, Life through Death, yea Death the Bride!<sup>380</sup>

As Eden observes, Gotch uses the ‘exhilarating languages of spiritual renewal and transfiguration, such as his words “And lo! not night, but dawn; not death but life”’<sup>381</sup> to express the imagined possibilities of liberating female experience, languages that could be found in socialist and feminist writings from the fin de siècle. The 1880s and 1890s had seen the rise of the feminist protest novel, a genre intimately linked, for the first time in British history, to an

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<sup>379</sup> Eden, ‘Women, Representation and the Spiritual’, p. 112.

<sup>380</sup> Thomas Cooper Gotch, ‘Lines on Death,’ undated archive material, Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering.

<sup>381</sup> Eden, ‘Women, Representation and the Spiritual’, p. 115



organised women's movement.<sup>382</sup> Driven by concerns about inequality in marriage and professional lives, with the moral double standard and sexual violence, and with women's political disenfranchisement, New Woman fiction established a tradition of feminist political literature. Linked, from its inception, with wider social and political reform – socialism, health reform (rational dress, alternative medicine), and animal rights (vegetarianism, anti-vivisection) – the struggle for female emancipation was embedded in a larger framework of human rights and posed a challenge to the male establishment. Articulating the possibilities of a new life through the death of an old order, socialism's desire for the transformation of social relations also required the transformation of gendered and sexual relations, whilst feminism imagined the demise of forms of female oppression and of the restrictive female dichotomy of virgin/whore, as expressed by the New Woman literature produced by Grand and her contemporaries, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, and George Egerton amongst others.<sup>383</sup> Indeed, it is my contention that Gotch's painting, like the conclusion of Grand's transformative text, refers to the death of the stifling and damaging convention of marriage, a concept that would entail a consequent new pathway to live different lives, predicated on the death of the tradition of patriarchy and its inevitable order. Caird achieved notoriety for having published 'Marriage' in the *Westminster Review* of 1888, and her observation that the institution had been a 'vexatious failure' led to some 27000 published responses, well into the 1890s.<sup>384</sup> Caird then reprinted 'Marriage' in *The Morality of Marriage, and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women* in 1897, where she reiterates that the patriarchal system denies women both their equal rights as citizens and the freedom to expand upon their inherited human capacity, ultimately denying them a will of their own.<sup>385</sup> As subversive, solitary bride (the detachment from a coupling is significant), in an artificially 'natural' environment, Gotch's image exposes both the construction and social

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<sup>382</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 2.

<sup>383</sup> See for example, *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, Drama of the 1890s* ed. by Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2000), Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), and *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>384</sup> 'Editors' Notes', in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 95.

<sup>385</sup> Wardley, 'Fear of Falling', p. 262.

conventions of the ideology of marriage as an institution, and the denial of autonomy and identity that such an institution demands. Gotch's female figure, like the character of Beth, traverses the darkness of the artificiality that would consume her, embodies her sexuality, and is emboldened and triumphant in her solitary pathway beyond the veil, a triumphant icon for the daughters of patriarchy.

The foregrounding of the female child in Grand's text and the subversion of the bridal figure in Gotch's painting work in conjunction with each other to allow for an exploration of the implications of the gendered constraints which Victorian social forces imposed on the development of young females. The figure of the child can be understood as a paradigm for the condition of womanhood itself, with its energy, aspiration, and potential but relative powerlessness and vulnerability to exploitation and oppression. Grand's final novel of her loose trilogy concludes with reaching back to *The Heavenly Twins* to convey not only the struggle of challenging female convention, but also the significance of the struggle for those children, those daughters yet to come:

Women have been cramped into a small space so long that they cannot expand all at once when they *are* let out; there must be a great deal of stretching and growing, and when they are not on their guard, they will often find themselves falling into the old attitude, as newborn babies are apt to resume the ante-natal position. She will have the perception, the inclination; but the power—unless she is exceptional, the power will only be for her daughter's daughter.<sup>386</sup>

Beth's experiences have taught her behaviours that develop those loosely articulated in *The Heavenly Twins*, but which, as I have suggested, reach their fruition in *The Beth Book*. Whilst the emphasis is still on the inheritance of our daughters, the journey to self-development and, by default, to self-fulfilment, is through an exploration of a life lived in isolation wherein the shackles of convention are released. Anticipating the potential of just such a future, we discover that if she had a daughter of her own, Beth 'would bring her up in happy seclusion' (p. 518) because, she explains, 'We find our knowledge of life in individuals, not in crowds. There is no more individuality in a crowd of people than there is in a flock of sheep. [...] A solitary

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<sup>386</sup> Grand, *The Heavenly Twins*, p. 98.

experience, rightly considered in all its bearings, teaches us more than numbers of those incidents of which we see the surface only' (p. 534). Female perception and development are borne out of introspection and isolation in commune with the natural world, a forceful, subversive message which brings together passion and purpose, creativity and feminism, contemplation and action. The promise of Beth's public, political career and private, personal affairs thus projects our imaginations beyond the boundaries of the conventional novel to wander along new avenues for independent female agency, on pathways first trodden in childhood. For Grand and for Gotch, revolution lies in the potential of the female to challenge and subvert tradition, and their late Victorian girl children are Modernism's generation in the making.

### Chapter 3: Solitary Girlhood and the Cityscape

#### Introduction

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, eighty percent of the British population were rural; by 1900, eighty percent lived in the cities, and one in seven people in England and Wales lived in London.<sup>387</sup> This unprecedented demographic change and exposure to new ways of being was driven by industrialisation and urbanisation, and produced the working-class city neighbourhood, which assumed its ‘traditional’ form in and after the 1880s, most notably, in the cities of London, Paris, and New York.<sup>388</sup> Of course, for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to stress that there was nothing intrinsically isolating or unnatural about the city for either the adult or the child; the slum was not inherently alienating, although for those accustomed to a rural, or even suburban environment, it could produce extreme feelings of alienation.<sup>389</sup> However, the same may have been true for the slum dweller who moved to the country or the suburbs. What may have proved unconducive to any inhabitant, however, was the rapid transformation of their environment. For different environments actively produce their inhabitants as particular and distinctive, with specific physiologies, affective lives, and concrete behaviours that may then appear at odds or out of place as environments shift and change. Peter Fritzsche observes of the late nineteenth-century city that, ‘The streets, with the whirl of constant circulation, suggested that everything in the city was in transition – “the family, history, politics, and above all, consciousness itself.” To become part of the *fin-de-siècle* city was to take the measure of circulation and movement, of wreckage and reconstruction, “of doors

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<sup>387</sup> Peter Fritzsche, ‘The City and Urban Life’, in *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. by Michael Saler (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 29-44 (p. 31).

<sup>388</sup> See Asa Briggs’s *Victorian Cities* (first published 1963; London: Penguin, 1990) for an illuminating study of the social, political, and topographical development of six Victorian cities and their communities, including London. See Blake McKelvey’s *The Urbanization of America: 1860-1915* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963) and Charles N. Glaab’s *The American City: A Documentary History* (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1963), for an overview of American urbanisation in the nineteenth century. Supported by contemporary documentary evidence to chart economic development, histories of individual cities, urban patterns and problems, government, reform, and planning, both of these studies devote space to New York City.

<sup>389</sup> See Ruth McManus and Philip J. Ethington’s ‘Suburbs in transition: new approaches to suburban history’ in *Urban History*, 34, 2 (August 2007) 317-337 for a comprehensive analysis of the significance of the suburb as a site occupying ‘the leading edge of a metropolis’ as its historically typical form.

opening and shutting.”<sup>390</sup> For those becoming accustomed to the streets then, it appears the cityscape itself may have helped to orient sensory and perceptual information, insofar as it produced specific conceptions of spatiality, and thus contributed to the education and setting for a child’s earliest and most ongoing perceptions. The city organised and located familial, sexual, and social relations, dividing cultural life into various domains, geographically separating and defining the particular social spaces and places occupied by individuals and groups, and providing the order and organisation that then connected otherwise unrelated bodies. It linked, for example, the affluent lifestyle of the banker or professional to the squalor of the vagrant or the impoverished, without necessarily positing a conscious or intentional will-to-exploit. The working-class neighbourhoods of the 1880s and 1890s are represented in literature and visual culture as a distinctive illustration of the consequence of negotiation between the classes.

The terms ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘community’ are, of course, notoriously problematic; they are often embedded in a nostalgic sentimentality for something which now appears lost, but they are also terms that have been re-worked and re-configured in different periods of time. It is, however, practically impossible to discuss the social/cultural/spatial networks of the late nineteenth-century urban poor without referring to them. Therefore, to clarify my use of these terms, the space of ‘neighbourhood’ will refer to geographically defined areas of ‘neighbours’, including relatives who lived in close spatial and social proximity, in the same tenement building or the same street, whilst the space of ‘community’ refers to the presence of a further set of identifications – the sharing of values and beliefs – and the way in which individuals interacted to support and protect those systems. Thus, these spaces can be understood as both physical – the networks of streets, houses, apartment blocks, shops, pubs, and green spaces – and social – the networks of family, friendship, employment and neighbourly relationships. Within such spaces, the working-class came to exercise those informal social controls which redefine and re-appropriate them for the inhabitants therein: a network of rights and obligations, of intimacies and distances, embodying in its real textures and structures local loyalties and

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<sup>390</sup> Fritzsche, ‘The City and Urban Life,’ p. 31.

traditions underpinned by a sense of solidarity. These were the ‘rights’ of the working-classes, not of ownership or power, but of territorial and cultural possession. The institutions were, of course, cross-cut and infiltrated by external influences, the local workforce linked to wider economic forces and movements, to dominant institutions and cultures, but it was through these local spaces that the urban working-class neighbourhood was socially and economically bonded. Providing a continuous encounter with every variety of human being, the city’s streets were alive with people whose familiarity ensured recognition, and whose activities of buying, selling, exchanging, displaying, mending, cajoling, courting, procuring, bribing and simply meeting were conducted on the pavements to a universal backdrop of widespread poverty and deprivation.

### **Literary Urban Spaces**

The space of the street, the urban space of the fin de siècle, penetrates literature through its description, and through literature comes our perception and understanding of the city.<sup>391</sup>

Literary urban social space ‘incorporates’ social actions, the actions of both the individual and collective subjects, and from this point of view, it works as a tool for the analysis of a society.

The shape of a city especially guides its inner social workings, its structures composed of expectation and rules as much as they are of mortar and stone. Indeed, literary neighbourhoods, streets, buildings, and other described urban spaces, are never a replica of something else, but a way of attempting to build and convey meaning and establish a classification of high and low, beautiful and ugly, old and new and so on. The traditional world of the nineteenth century was rooted in conventions that dictated how an individual should experience his or her own self, other peoples, and objects and environment in the world. It was hierarchically ordered: nobles were superior to bourgeoisie, and the middle to the working-classes, and everyone was expected

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<sup>391</sup> See for example, George Gissing’s *The Nether World* (first published 1889; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Clarence Rook’s *The Hooligan Nights* (first published 1899; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (first published 1896; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and *Tales of Mean Streets* (first published 1895; Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1997). See also, Margaret McMillan’s short stories, ‘Gutterella: A Woman of the Age of Gold’, *Weekly Times and Echo* (28th December 1895) and ‘Lola’ and ‘Lola: Conclusion’, *The Clarion* (21<sup>st</sup> February and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1897).

to know his or her social station and fulfil its duties. But the mass migration movement changed the experience of space and place, and contradicted the understanding that convention and custom could automatically dictate privileged points of view, places, or forms. Exposure to new habits and environments could challenge habitual assumptions and provoke searches for more integrative modes of understanding, whilst reform movements in both the United States and the United Kingdom bore witness to the desire for societal change concerning women's suffrage, child labour, poverty, and working conditions in factories and coal mines. Everything had to be retested in the processes of life, selected by the eye of the artist or the words of the writer, and then reconstructed in accord with current values and needs.

Class, above anything else, separated New York's Manhattan during the postbellum period. The neighbourhoods of the wealthiest inhabitants produced a corridor down the middle of the island, while the poorest neighbourhoods, including those of the tenements, straddled the riverbanks. But rather than emphasising class distinctions, middle-class reformers of the 1880s insisted that the tenement slum was an inevitable consequence of deviant lifestyles as opposed to group identity or even collective class consciousness.<sup>392</sup> The less privileged, therefore, became predominantly associated with both their geographic space and the interactions of the individual within that space. Despite this, even in the most deprived neighbourhoods, the different strata of the working-class population and community had won space for their own ways of life. As Robert Dowling observes, 'Mid-nineteenth-century writing about New York's cultural landscape is often disjointed, confused, and frustratingly lacking in detail. But as the century moved forward, writers singled out marginal districts, [...] definable areas that the larger society imagines are characterized by deviant social behavior. These areas [...] attract "eccentric and exceptional people" who are bravely determined to "emancipate themselves from the dominant moral order."'”<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Robert M. Dowling, *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>393</sup> Dowling, *Slumming in New York*, p. 10.

Indeed, through the 1880s and 1890s, more and more writers began investigating marginalised neighbourhoods in uniquely introspective and realistic modes, including Stephen Crane and Henry James, friends and both expatriate novelists, who descriptively revealed the extent to which outside middle-class influences had affected insiders from immigrant and working-class backgrounds into the Victorian ‘cult of respectability’. Whilst each writer explored slumming in Manhattan’s Bowery district at different times – Crane in the early 1890s, and James as late as 1904<sup>394</sup> – both found there a milieu in the process of being stripped of its cultural identity. With the construction of the Great Bowery Theatre in 1826, the Bowery area had become New York’s theatrical centre, an urban boulevard to rival the already famous Broadway in the west of Manhattan. But the Bowery was the epicentre of working-class culture, and although its representation showcased the melodramatic spectacle of its Bowery inhabitants, its ‘insiders’, it was obliged to adopt, in a bogus and distorted way, a public face of Victorian gentility. Although Victorian culture in New York was in its infancy when Bowery insiders began promoting their cultural distinctiveness, once it was firmly established, middle-class New Yorkers became obsessed with protecting the status of Victorian respectability, signified by, amongst other markers, certain clothes, levels of education, and speech patterns, as well as infinite social graces, all at the expense of the indecorous rabble.<sup>395</sup> As Dowling notes, by the 1890s, Victorianism became so entrenched in New York’s social consciousness that the notion of its respectability would have a sizeable impact on the actions and value structure of the very working-class culture that openly despised it.<sup>396</sup> By 1893, the year Crane published the vanity edition of his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*,<sup>397</sup> the Bowery, Crane’s setting for the novel, was already the infamous Bowery, once again conspicuous in the outsider imagination, but now for intoxication, poverty, homelessness, and crime. Stifled by codes of behaviour conceived of by outsiders and prostrated by the psychocultural contradictions that ensued,

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<sup>394</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene* (first published 1907; London: Penguin, 1994).

<sup>395</sup> Dowling, *Slumming in New York*, p. 51.

<sup>396</sup> Dowling, *Slumming in New York*, p. 51.

<sup>397</sup> Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*, ed. by Thomas A. Gullason (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1893). All subsequent quotations from the novel are from this edition.



‘Bowery insiders were inveigled into accepting an oppositional system of social behaviour, [...] caught in a vicious cycle of cultural prostration seemingly indefinite in origin.’<sup>398</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the literary image of the city streets became as ambiguous as the portrayal of fin-de-siècle civilisation in general. To the nineteenth-century popular imagination, the city was as much a symbol of moral evil as economic good. Distrust of urban dishonesty and greed, based on both fear of the unfamiliar and resentment at the city’s economic dominance, created a hostile fascination with urban life, which as early as the 1840s was heightened by the newly-emerging slum and vice districts in both New York and London. At one end of the spectrum then, the city was portrayed as a hellish counterpoint to rural purity, the originator of a new phenomenon of urban alienation despite the often crowded squalor of city living, and a place where loneliness and isolation were the flip sides of urban gaiety. Without a shared world view to generate values and meaning, it was thought that city dwellers of the late nineteenth century were bound to fall into disappointment, unhappiness, and depression, bemoaning the loss of a more stable, traditional society.<sup>399</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, contemporary views took a more positive approach, and suggested the city streets represented temptation, fascination, or simply ideal spaces for socialisation.<sup>400</sup> Specifically, for the purposes of this thesis, the streets occasioned childhood and adolescent conversations and the opportunity for engagement with a space outside the familial place of ‘home’.

### **Ambivalent Urban Childhoods**

This chapter discusses the presence of children in particular city environments, notably New

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<sup>398</sup> Dowling, *Slumming in New York*, p. 49.

<sup>399</sup> See for example Émile Durkheim’s *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (first published in Paris, 1897; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2002), a landmark study in modern sociology that read the worship of individuality and independence in the city as detrimental and destructive to older bonds of family, parish, or village, and any sense of belonging to a larger community.

<sup>400</sup> As early as 1873 in *Studies in the History of Renaissance*, Walter Pater had described London as ‘the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite[d] in their purest energy.’ Gustave Le Bon’s ‘The Mind of Crowds’ (1895) responds to a perceived ‘massification’ of cultural life in the London metropolis that he understands as detrimental and inferior to the isolated individual although he also acknowledges the crowd may be ‘better or worse than the individual’ for a crowd is often heroic, prepared ‘to run the risk of death to secure the triumph of a creed or an idea’. For Georg Simmel, the sheer volume of experiences and sensations produced in the city environment ‘places emphasis on striving for the most individual forms of personal existence’. His 1903 essay, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ characterises the qualities of the intellectual metropolitan mind as borne from a constant need to sift and process a swiftly changing kaleidoscope of events.

York and London, with an emphasis on the tensions inherent in linking solitary children and embodied urban experience, for there can be little doubt that the image of the child alone within the urban environment produced ambivalent and lingering impressions. The second half of the nineteenth century had seen a marked decline in juvenile crime – changes in attitude, growing reluctance to prosecute, and improvements in behaviour were obvious factors – so that mid-late Victorian children were afforded greater protection and security against the worst brutalities of the law and the arbitrary prejudices of the magistrate. Traditionally, the children in turn-of-the-century fiction rarely encounter the adult urban underworld and the urban vice that continuously lurks behind Dickens's boys and girls, for it is the *children* who seem to dominate the pavements, alleys, and courtyards in the bigger towns and cities of late nineteenth-century fiction. As James Walvin observes, parents in crowded homes would propel their offspring out of the home and onto the street,<sup>401</sup> whilst those children who found themselves orphaned, deserted, neglected, or simply left to fend for themselves by working parents, contributed to the endless supply of independent children that appeared to overrun and control the urban environment.

And yet, anxieties around the image of the child within the cityscape continued to linger, and were often expressed through ideas of sensual experience, as I shall examine in the work of Arthur Symonds's *London Nights* (1895; revised 1897) and its exploration of the dance in the metropolis. Either a lack of connection to 'natural' objects is understood as damaging to a child's moral or physical well-being, or the city is understood to 'touch' them in threatening ways. As Jenny Bavidge argues, 'The very inclusion of children in any given urban image changes its meaning and reception. [...] [S]uch images are so ubiquitous and intertextual that they are not only necessarily interdisciplinary but they demonstrate quite clearly how the construction of childhood or child experiences underpins our accounts of urban life.'<sup>402</sup> This

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<sup>401</sup> James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1982), p. 94.

<sup>402</sup> Jenny Bavidge, 'Vital Victims: Senses of Children in the Urban', in *Children in Culture, Revisited: Further Approaches to Childhood*, ed. by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 208-222 (p. 208).

chapter will discuss both literary and visual representations of urbanised childhood with reference to texts that attempt to place the child in the city through a variety of generic and discursive strategies. Looking to both visual and literary representations of the city child sharpens questions of how, where, and why children appear in urban representations. As Bavidge also observes: ‘The image of the child in the urban highlights ideas around visibility and occupation; children’s geographers have consistently noted how children’s presence in place is marked by discourses of belonging and not-belonging, presence and absence.’<sup>403</sup> Perhaps one reason why children are routinely depicted as ‘out of place’ in an urban setting is because, despite their close association with a freedom of movement and intercourse with their material world, playing and exploring indiscriminately, ‘the city is commonly depicted (and has a long history of being so) as an environment that operates to entrap and endanger children.’<sup>404</sup> Indeed, there are any number of texts, both literary and visual, that draw on the rhetoric of urban threat and danger, particularly in relation to purity, through representations of endangered childhoods.<sup>405</sup>

The mushroom period of population growth in British and American cities began in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated at the fin de siècle as London and New York claimed the titles of the largest cities in the world by population in 1900. Unsurprisingly then, the impression emerges that the working-class urban child of these densely populated places always had something to do, something to engage him or her in the experience of city living. Often, it is easy to see that he or she had too much to do, that he or she had to consider themselves lucky to work for intolerable hours at some dreary labour which earned a pittance, often engaged in a desperate struggle to get food for themselves and their family. Many scholars are now, of course, united in their view that the ‘child’ is an identity which is created and constructed

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<sup>403</sup> Bavidge, ‘Vital Victims’, p. 209.

<sup>404</sup> Bavidge, ‘Vital Victims’, p. 211.

<sup>405</sup> In a number of his novels, Charles Dickens responds to the threats posed by industrialised and urban child labour; see for example, *Oliver Twist* (1838), *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Bleak House* (1853). Visual representations of the urban threat to childhood include, *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward* (1874) by Luke Fildes, *Uncared For* (1871) by Augustus Edwin Mulready, and *Dudley Street, Seven Dials from London: A Pilgrimage* (1872) by Gustave Doré.

differently within various cultures, historical periods, and political ideologies.<sup>406</sup> As Julia Thomas observes in her study of Victorian narrative painting, ‘The very construction of “the child” has an ideological function: to propagate those family values that were central to the Victorians’ idea of themselves. In this sense, the youngster has an adult role to play. Children are always in training to take up the social and gendered position that they will be allotted in later life.’<sup>407</sup> And Kimberley Reynolds recognises that the idea that childhood is characterised by its difference from maturity in being a uniquely ‘innocent’ phase which must be preserved, prolonged, and protected, is very much a product of the earlier Victorian period, a time when Victorian children of all classes had been encouraged to regard their parents as omnipotent and ideal, and when the bourgeois household had elevated the idea of childhood to unprecedented heights.<sup>408</sup> For those children living in poverty, however, childhood leisure was a luxury and not a birthright, and the economically desperate situation of the poor often denied them the privilege of experiencing the category of childhood at all. Little wonder then that arguably one of the aims of nineteenth-century reformists such as Richard Oastler (1789-1861), Anthony Ashley Cooper (The Earl of Shaftesbury) (1801-1885), and Octavia Hill (1838-1912) was to make available what we understand as childhood as far down the social ladder as possible and for such reforms to improve the lives of rural and urban children across the class divide.

This chapter, in tandem with Chapter 2, considers the question of relative isolation and privacy all along the rural-urban continuum. We often assume that by mere geography the country child is more isolated than the urban child, but as I have argued in the previous chapter, the rural child can be part of a more homogeneous community. We may also assume that bucolic demography would suggest that country children would have more privacy, but if city children walk around a corner, away from the familiarity of their lived environment, there is a high probability they will not be known. Certainly the parents of children from both

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<sup>406</sup> See Karin Lesnik-Oberstein’s edited collection of essays *Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood* (1998) for a variety of scholarly approaches to a constructivist framework of childhood theory, including contributions by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Margarida Morgado.

<sup>407</sup> Thomas, *Victorian Narrative Painting*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>408</sup> Kimberley Reynolds, *Children’s Literature: from the fin de siècle to the new millennium* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2012), p. 4.

environments, at some stage of their child's development, often become aware that their child *needs* a place of their own, a space of privacy, isolation, and retreat. At various ages children appear to create these separate places for themselves, places into which the intrusion of an adult is almost a profanity. The development from the den made from a box or blanket under a table by the youngest of children, to that made from branches by the child in a woodland, garden space, or park, to the 'private' room of the adolescent, to the study, library, or retreat of the adult, suggests similarities in these different uses of space but also differences in the way in which these places take on their form and meaning at various stages of development.

There can be no doubt that living in a crowded environment, where play took place on the streets, and was unsupervised by adults, the urban child of the Victorian fin de siècle was often denied a personal place of their own, and as this chapter will illustrate, through a close reading of Crane's *Maggie*, the quest for personal privacy and the sense of social isolation were not opposites in the experience of the fictional urban child. Indeed, as I demonstrate, the same child who was most in need of a private space was the child who was most isolated socially. Seldom alone or uninterrupted, he or she was unable to have secrets or to differentiate in the disclosure of withholding of information, with little or no access to a private space.

### **Documenting and Formatting Childhood Deprivation**

#### **'Family in room in tenement house', c. 1910**

In his 1890 pioneering work of photojournalism, *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis explores 'The Problem of the Children' through the anatomy of New York City's slums in the 1880s. The explosive mixture of grinding poverty, sweatshops, and mass immigration, and the persistence of life-threatening public health conditions, the increase in child labour and juvenile crime, all contribute to Riis's description of the tenements of New York as 'the murder of the home'.<sup>409</sup> Observing that three quarters of the city's population live in these slum tenements,

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<sup>409</sup> Bonnie Yochelson and Danial Czitrom, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis: Exposure Journalism and Photography in Turn-of-the Century New York*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), p. xv.

Riis remarks that it is the sheer number of children that ‘make one stand aghast.’<sup>410</sup> The child who has never had a physical space or place of his or her own learns not to define privacy as a bodily separation from others, but instead, may develop techniques of psychological withdrawal that only serve to isolate them from familial and societal bonds, a sensibility of tenement-life storytelling that I read in Crane’s *Maggie*. Riis’s written case against the tenements was substantiated with photographs that duplicated the conditions he described,<sup>411</sup> and which graphically conveyed the ensuing sense of alienation and degradation within the suffocating atmosphere of familial incarceration (figure 3.1).

Kate Flint’s recently published *Flash!*<sup>412</sup> reads Riis’s images specifically through the lens of flash photography. Documentary flash photography, Flint tells us, has a somewhat contradictory nature. For on the one hand is ‘its impetus towards revelation and its capacity to render visible that which would otherwise remain in darkness, and, on the other, its associations with unwelcome intrusion.’<sup>413</sup> Whilst the highly flammable nature of the flash equipment created a precarious environment for the photographer, its nature could also be sudden, startling, intrusive, and abrupt for the photographed subjects. Riis’s photograph of the tenement house family in figure 3.1 is especially poignant when read through the medium of flash which has captured and simultaneously lost details of the tenement house room and its inhabitants. Whilst the glare of the flash has lit up and made startlingly visible the construction and interior of the closet in the centre of the frame, and the contents of the plate cupboard and stove area to the left, it has paradoxically bleached out most of the facial features of the family whose belongings these are; they are distinguishable only by their hair and any darker clothing they wear. Indeed,

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<sup>410</sup> Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (first published 1890; New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 137.

<sup>411</sup> When *How the Other Half Lives* was first published in 1890, printers had not yet perfected the halftone process of reproducing photographs, and Riis’s series of pictures had to be redrawn. Only thirty-eight drawings were shown, and they barely conveyed the sense of degradation found in the original photographs. Details were suppressed and backgrounds changed to ‘soften’ the impact of the images. The Dover edition of the book I reference includes a full complement of one hundred photographs, including some taken for other Riis books including *The Children of the Poor* (1892) and *The Battle with the Slum* (1902).

<sup>412</sup> Kate Flint, *Flash!: Photography, Writing, & Surprising Illumination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>413</sup> Flint, *Flash!*, p. 100.



**Figure 3.1.**

Jacob A. Riis, 'Family in room in tenement house', c.1910, photograph  
(Jacob A. Riis collection, the Museum of the City of New York)

the figure of the babe in arms, the youngest child, is especially unsettling. The flash has obliterated any semblance of individuality, gender, or detail, and the small child acquires a ghost-like presence, that in the mire of such poverty and with four older siblings, appears uncomfortably prophetic. Held in its mother's arms, the infant's somewhat awkward stance of neither sitting nor standing contributes to a feeling of rigidity, of stiffness, associated with a cadaver, whilst their facial details are indistinguishable from the smooth, sleep-like faces of babies seen in Victorian post-mortem photographs. The bleached, startled faces of the other family members look straight out at the camera as a homogenised group, but any suggestion of familial familiarity or affection is lost in an isolating composition. Whether arbitrary or composed,<sup>414</sup> the subjects are pushed back into their material environment that not only detaches

<sup>414</sup> Flint acknowledges that in some of his documentary photographs, Riis appears to have positioned his subjects 'so as to mimic the sentimental postures of genre painting' (p. 50) by careful framing and staging and with the addition of props. In others though, the subjects appear caught unawares. For Flint, the

each individual from the next, but also directs the focus on to their relationship to their possessions, the bed, the stove, the chair and the crib, which the father clutches protectively, its ornate metalwork at odds with the deprivation of the rest of the room.

### **‘Gotham Court’, c. 1890**

Represented against the familiar background of late nineteenth-century poverty, the deprived child becomes then more and more isolated from the world of the successful and self-confident as the century draws to a close. Achieving qualities of invisibility as the older bonds of any larger community - family, the parish, the village or region - appear to disintegrate amidst a worship of adult individuality and independence, the experience of the urban child has long been excluded from empowered discourse, their role too often understood as mere tourist in the city of adulthood. Uprooted from a safe familial location that insulated childhood from societal demands, the fictional children of the city I explore in this chapter are thrust forward into their own psychological space and place to experience threats from both the outside and from within their peer group that challenge their selfhood and autonomy in ways very different from the victimised child discourse usually produced in Victorian literature. The child of the urban poor, Riis argues, ‘is a creature of environment, of opportunity, as children are everywhere. [...] The tenement and the saloon, with the street that does not always divide them, form the environment that is to make or unmake the child. The influence of each of the three is bad. Together they have power to overcome the strongest resistance.’<sup>415</sup> Cherry Street’s huge Gotham Court tenement (figure 3.2), built in 1850, consisted of two rows of six tenements built back-to-back along two narrow alleyways. According to Riis, this ‘cradle of the tenement’<sup>416</sup> was said to house a thousand people, despite being designed to accommodate only 120 families, and became a tourist attraction for those seeking a brief tour of the congested, filthy, disease-ridden world of the city’s poor. Framed by the alley’s narrow corridor, ‘Gotham Court’ captures the

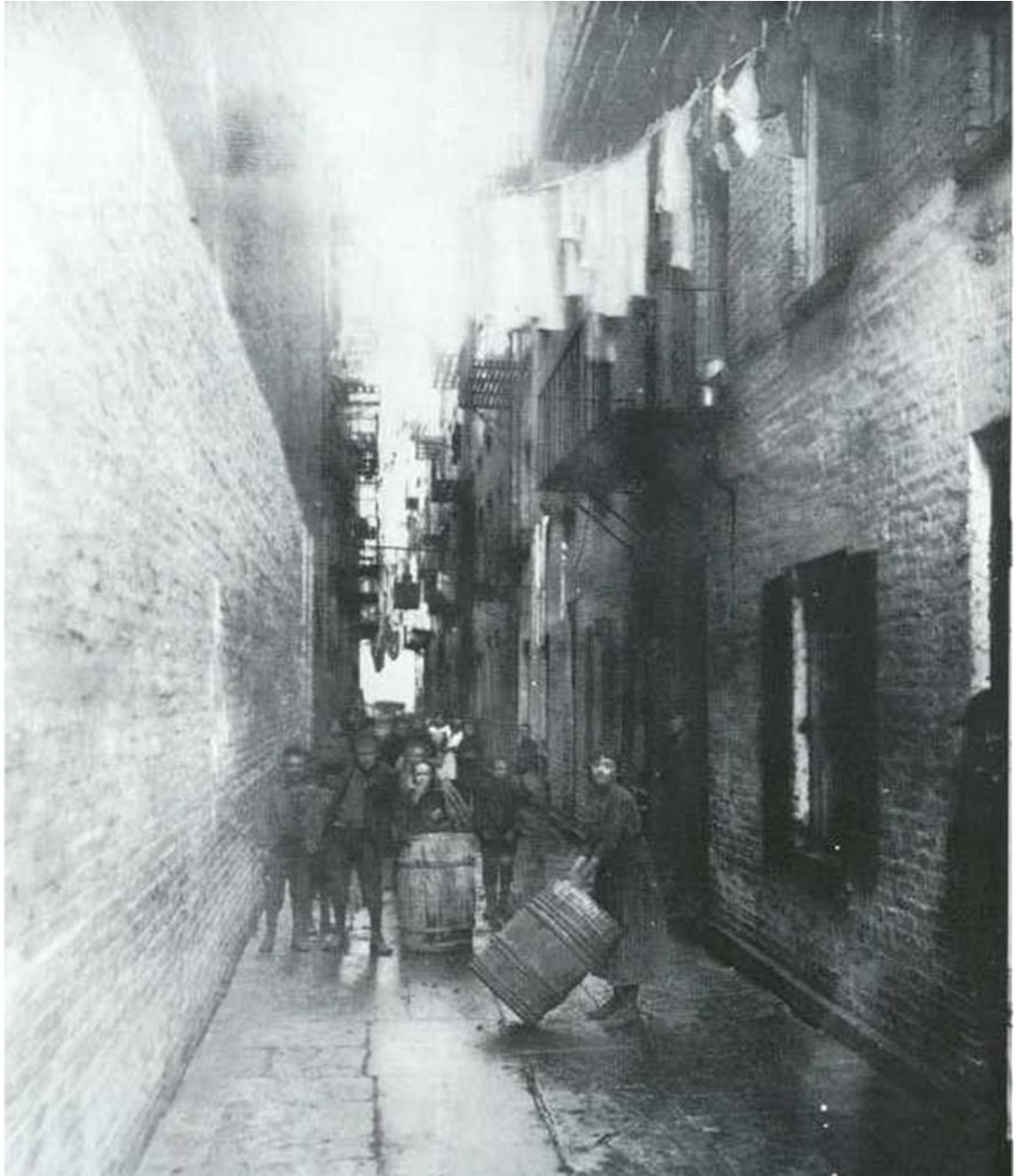
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significance is the details revealed by the flash that would otherwise never be seen, intentionally or otherwise. See also Peter Bacon Hales’s *Silver Cities: Photographing American Urbanization, 1839-1939* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

<sup>415</sup> Jacob A. Riis, *The Children of the Poor* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892), pp. 4-7.

<sup>416</sup> Yochelson and Czitrom, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis*, p. 89.





**Figure 3.2.**

Jacob A. Riis, Richard Hoe Lawrence, and Henry G. Piffard, 'Gotham Court', c. 1890, lantern slide (Jacob A. Riis collection, the Museum of the City of New York)

pervasive and oppressive environment of tenement and street that 'make' or 'unmake' the child's formation. Indeed, in his illustrated lecture of 1891 delivered in Washington, DC, Riis appeared to anticipate Crane's infamous metaphor of Maggie's 'blossoming in a mud puddle' that I examine later in this chapter: 'It is the surroundings that make the difference,' Riis comments, stressing the environmental perspective on childhood development; 'You do not

expect a rose to grow out of a swamp.<sup>417</sup> Unable to overcome the overwhelming influence of both peer group and environment to determine maturation, Riis understood the tenement as the destroyer of childhood individuality and character.

**“I Scrubs.” Katie, who keeps house in West 49th Street’, c. 1890**

And yet, no longer cut off from the rest of society in some imagined safe, bucolic, and Romantic realm, the *solitary*, urban child of fin-de-siècle fiction is however, granted interiority, emerging as an independent, thinking subject that is, paradoxically, dangerously open to influences that their solitude both negates and embraces. As Dennis Denisoff observes from a reading of Sully’s *Studies of Childhood*, the Romantic child, swaddled in an image of *passive* innocence, had, by the end of the century, ‘begun quite ungracefully kicking the blankets off the less-than-altruistic aspirations covered by the ideal.’<sup>418</sup> This recognition of the child’s developing awareness of their subjectivity echoes the role that the city streets also play in reassessing the place of the child as Romantic innocent. The traditional association of childhood with dependence and openness to parental influence was further negated by the urban child’s lived experience on the streets, which diminished the relevance of biological age on their identity, ‘shifting the individual more readily into a more ambiguous status that disallows fragility or naivete.’ Riis photographed and interviewed several children for his 1892 sequel *Children of the Poor*, integrating photography and conversation to produce individual portraits that suggest just this ambiguity (figure 3.3). When Riis met nine-year-old Katie at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Street Industrial School, he asked what kind of work she did, and she replied, ‘I scrubs.’ Katie and her three older siblings had taken their own apartment after their mother had died and their father remarried; the older children worked in a hammock factory, and Katie ‘kept house.’<sup>419</sup>

Whilst the city streets of the fin de siècle may have represented liberty for some children, the relative freedom from adult supervision or coercion did not make the streets a

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<sup>417</sup> Yochelson and Czitrom, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis*, p. 97.

<sup>418</sup> Dennis Denisoff, ‘Introduction: Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. by Dennis Denisoff (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-26 (p. 8).

<sup>419</sup> Yochelson and Czitrom, *Rediscovering Jacob Riis*, pp. 140-141.



**Figure 3.3.**

Jacob A. Riis, “‘I Scrubs.’ Katie, who keeps house in West 49th Street’, c. 1890, negative (photographic)  
(Jacob A. Riis collection, the Museum of the City of New York)

haven for all urban children and adolescents. As James Huntington remarks in his 1887 text

‘Tenement-House Morality’:

Wherever they [the children] play they are without any real oversight. The fathers are at their work, or in the saloon; the mothers are working wearily at the sewing-machine or the wash-tub, too driven to stop and watch their children, even if they can see them from the window. Think of what possibilities of moral contagion lie in such associations, amid such surroundings. Think how horribly ruinous the presence of one older bad child can be.<sup>420</sup>

Precisely because adult authority was barely visible on the streets, the loners, the isolated

<sup>420</sup> James O. S. Huntington, ‘Tenement-House Morality’, *Forum*, 3 (1887) 513-522 in Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*, ed. by Kevin J. Hayes (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999), pp. 120-128 (p. 125).

children of the cityscape, underwent traumatic clashes with other children and adolescents, whose size and strength often represented classes and forces outside the established order. Not unlike today's discussions of street children who 'grow up too early' in which pre-teens' clothing, sexual precocity, a taste for violence in entertainment and so on are said to signal excessive exposure to the less salubrious aspects of adult culture, fin-de-siècle representations of working-class children often hint at an adult's inability to contain the complications of a changing world. Childhood social problems that emerge at the end of the nineteenth century are those that afflict adults as well and may suggest adult culpability in not providing the child with an upbringing that protects him or her from the contradictions and difficulties of the world. But they may also suggest the adults' own helplessness in the face of the same problems: relationships, work and family, social identity, and understanding of the inner self. Indeed, the relationship between fin-de-siècle adult culture and fin-de-siècle childhood appears to be exemplified by those very traits of childhood, blurring of identity, rapid role changing, and the shifting position of the individual and the group, represented by fin-de-siècle narratives. It would not be wrong to suggest that when the age of the Victorian fin de siècle focused on childhoods of isolation and solitude it was because it found therein 'a mirror of its own uneasiness with its heritage, its crisis of identity'<sup>421</sup> and its groping for new forms of self-expression and autonomy.

### **Saving the Children**

As an age conscious of itself as an era of new beginnings, prominently of New Journalism, New Woman, and New Drama, the movements of the age of the fin de siècle were defined by the extent to which their new beginnings developed away from the repressive, hierarchical social regimes of an earlier era.<sup>422</sup> In their apparent falling away from the high moral tone of the mid-Victorian period and 'the aggressive reject[ion] [of] the prescribed sacred function of angelic

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<sup>421</sup> John Neubauer, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p.10.

<sup>422</sup> Gail Marshall, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-12 (pp. 3-5).

wife and bearer of children'<sup>423</sup> there can be little doubt that at the turn-of-the-century it was primarily the relationships between the sexes that were in crisis. To understand the gendered role of the late nineteenth-century parent, it is necessary to understand Victorian ideas of femininity and parenthood that dominated contemporary thought.<sup>424</sup> Women were generally construed as unselfish by nature, while motherhood was supposed to foster altruism and compassion. It is no surprise then, that a woman's brutality toward or neglect of her children was considered especially monstrous because it directly contradicted the nurturing and caring role considered 'normal' and 'natural' in motherhood. It is, however, inadequate to leave the analysis at that, for in both middle-class and radical working-class circles, fatherhood too, was associated with the moral supervision and 'training' of children. And yet, the gender politics of the late nineteenth century were characterised by distrust both of excessive domestic authority on the part of men, and of 'unwomanly' attempts to usurp male prerogative. The first was manifested, among other phenomena, in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's desire to challenge paternal rights and by anxiety about adult men's sexual comportment toward young girls on the city's streets, expressed in documents such as W. T. Stead's sensational 1885 exposé, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*.<sup>425</sup> The second was often represented through fiction by the unsympathetic mother figure whose aggression may stand in for other types of unacceptable female self-assertion and unpalatable extremes, often associated with the figure of the New Woman whose work I have explored in the previous chapter.

Whilst governments and philanthropists had for centuries formulated and operated policies towards children, Hugh Cunningham argues that the second half of the nineteenth century saw 'a concern to save children for the enjoyment of childhood' rather than concern for

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<sup>423</sup> Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 129.

<sup>424</sup> The influence of conduct books written for women in the nineteenth century was important in establishing a notion of an ideal domestic woman and mother through advice and information on all forms of domesticity, from recipes to sanitation, child-rearing to exercise. See for example, Isabella Beeton's *The Book of Household Management* (1861) and *The Management of Children in Health and Sickness* (1873), and Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Daughters of England* (1842), *The Mothers of England* (1843), and *The Wives of England* (1843).

<sup>425</sup> William T. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of our Secret Commission as Published in The Pall Mall Gazette of July 1885*, (Reprinted by Lowood Press, 2011).

the child's soul or for the future manpower needs of the state, and philanthropists, like Shaftesbury, urged that the neglect of children be ended.<sup>426</sup> A more ambitious and wider-reaching child-saving period emerged in the final decades of the century, and from the 1880s onwards, in tandem with the emergence of child psychology and study as a science, there was a more significant role for state and professional experts to play in saving the children.<sup>427</sup> And whilst state action had a variety of motivations for intervention, notwithstanding concern for the child, one of the major concerns for the reformation was the abandonment of the child to their own devices; isolated from their family and unsupervised by either parent, the fear was for a child left wandering nomadically through the corrupting environment of the urban streets. In her study of children and state institutions, Florence Hill observed that in the massing of children together, 'no account is made of the child's natural desire for home life, for affection, and above all for parental love. Deprived of these it feels like an outcast and is only too likely some day or other to retaliate on that society which has wronged it.'<sup>428</sup> The fear was that this independence from familial ties and adult supervision that thrust boys and girls onto the city streets of delinquency, violence, and deprivation, rapidly removed any mark of childhood. This anxiety had been observed earlier in the mid-century in Henry Mayhew's extensive *London Labour and the London Poor*<sup>429</sup> of 1861, in such figures as the 'Watercress Girl', but the sheer volume of street children in the final decades was unparalleled, compounding the concerns. London and New York both bore witness to increasing numbers of 'vagrant, idle and vicious children' and

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<sup>426</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), p. 137.

<sup>427</sup> Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 140.

<sup>428</sup> Florence Davenport Hill, *Children of the State* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), p. 73.

<sup>429</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor, Volume 1* (London: Griffin, Bohn, and Company, 1861). Versions of Mayhew's massive social survey appeared in several publishing formats, including newspaper column, weekly serial, live stage show, and bound volume. For a succinct but comprehensive account of its complex publishing history see Janice Schroeder, 'The Publishing History of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*', (May 2019) *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. by Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. <[https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=janice-schroeder-the-publishing-history-of-henry-mayhews-london-labour-and-the-london-poor](https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=janice-schroeder-the-publishing-history-of-henry-mayhews-london-labour-and-the-london-poor)> [accessed 27 November 2020].

appeared to vie with each other in articulating the threats posed by an unsupervised lawless and nomadic generation.<sup>430</sup>

### **The Gendered Child of the City**

The gender politics of the fin de siècle found influence in all familial relationships, in all environments, and as I shall explore, at all stages of development. Significantly, many nineteenth-century studies understood the environmental influence and subsequent dangers to boy children and girl children of the city as quite separate.<sup>431</sup> Stead's crusade was a component of a wider social purity movement whose stated intention was to change social attitudes about sex. Female sexuality, including the sexuality of young girls, was viewed, Carolyn Steedman notes, 'as both more meaningful and more dangerous than that of little boys,'<sup>432</sup> whilst delinquency in boys tended to be associated with the criminal activity of thieving. The influences on boys appear to have focussed on the tenement, the saloons, and street life, whilst accepting that, despite his ragged clothes, the urban boy 'often has a rather good time of it, and enjoys many of the delicious pleasures of a child's roving life, and that a fortunate turn of events may at any time make an honest, industrious fellow of him. At heart we cannot say that he is much corrupted.'<sup>433</sup> With a girl vagrant, it was different. Delinquency in girls was associated with sexual precocity, and confusion was extreme over the question of where working-class girls were to be placed on the dividing line between childhood and adulthood. The work of the impoverished girl was approved of as part of her class status, but at the same time, her labour, 'and the movement in the public world that it necessitated, defined [her] as

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<sup>430</sup> Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 147.

<sup>431</sup> In 1890, the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth published *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. Its pull-out picture imagines a city colony where numerous institutions have been built to help children in need of rescue which include a Boy's Industrial Home and a Preventative Home for Girls (to prevent them from becoming prostitutes). See also, for example, William T. Stead's *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of our Secret Commission as Published in The Pall Mall Gazette of July 1885* and Charles Loring Brace's, *The Dangerous Classes of New York; and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (1872),

<sup>432</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931* (London: Virago Press, 1990), p. 24.

<sup>433</sup> Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York; and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872) < <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/33431/pg33431-images.html> > [accessed 23 September 2020], p. 114.

knowing and sexual in comparison with the purity of the little angel in the middle- or upper-class household.<sup>434</sup> Wandering the streets, and living in ‘immoral surroundings’ as Charles Brace observes, the girl ‘street-rover’ is understood to be ‘the most painful figure in all the unfortunate crowd of a large city.’<sup>435</sup> Whilst reading all those who live in the cities as ‘unfortunates’, Brace draws particular attention to the sorry state of isolation and solitude that accompanies girlhood on the streets:

She feels homelessness and friendlessness more; she has more of the feminine dependence on affection [...] and the return at night to some lonely cellar or tenement-room, crowded with dirty people of all ages and sexes, is more dreary. She develops body and mind earlier than the boy, and the habits of vagabondism stamped on her in childhood are more difficult to wear off.<sup>436</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis, it is significant that Brace not only remarks upon the lack of a secure domestic space as detrimental to the future of the city girl, but also upon the fact that the ‘degrading’ influences of the street overwhelm her and propel her towards a career of sexual vice: ‘there is no reality in the sentimental assertion that the sexual sins of the lad are as degrading as those of the girl. The instinct of the female is more toward the preservation of purity, and therefore her fall is deeper.’<sup>437</sup>

There can be little doubt then, that the city child was, and still is the gendered child. Whilst the child in the city is often absent from written, historical records, when the silence *is* broken, it is usually the boys’ discourse that we hear; the girls, it would seem, are often only brought to our attention when they encounter trouble. Indeed, there appears to be a marked neglect in the literature on girls and the adolescence of young women at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>438</sup> The culture of adolescence is held to be synonymous with male youth culture, so that girls – when they do appear – often appear only as peripheral figures that boys

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<sup>434</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 24.

<sup>435</sup> Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, p. 114.

<sup>436</sup> Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, p. 115.

<sup>437</sup> Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>438</sup> Pamela Thurschwell’s ‘Bringing Nanda forward, or acting your age in *The Awkward Age*’ (2016), Sarah Bilston’s *The Awkward Age in Women’s Popular Fiction, 1850-1900* (2004), and Beth Rodgers’s *Adolescent Girlhood and Literary Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (2016) are recent contributions to the study of a specifically female adolescence in this period.



fight over, or merely as objects in the gaze of men. This relative invisibility of the girl figure in the city scene is often attributed to a so-called ‘innate’ difference between the genders that suggests greater visuo-spatial ability in boys, predetermined by a sex-linked recessive gene.<sup>439</sup> But this is merely social conditioning. In the traditional nineteenth-century upbringing of the two sexes in western culture, everything about the experience of childhood was likely to depress spatial ability for the girl and to develop it for the boy. The kind of play and playthings thought appropriate for boys tended to enhance the exploration and manipulation of their urban environment, and whilst those considered suitable for girls probably did the same, the differences arose through environmental experience. In their use of the city streets, girls have always been constrained by being entrusted with the care of younger children and siblings (figure 3.4). It was (and still is), assumed that boys are more capable of ‘looking after themselves’ and parents fear for their girls: the unaccompanied girl on the street is too often still regarded as fair game for molestation. But the problem of the girl in the city was, and still is, a male problem. If she is deprived of her fair share of environmental contact because she has responsibilities which her brothers can evade, the answer is a more equitable sharing of those responsibilities in a family. If it is because of the tradition of patriarchy, the patriarchs must change. If it’s for fear of sexual exploitation, then clearly, it’s the exploiters rather than the girls who should address their behaviour.<sup>440</sup> Significantly, the girls of this chapter challenge the gendered victim status of nineteenth-century womanhood and through their relationship with the

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<sup>439</sup> Colin Ward, *The Child in the City* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1990), p. 131. Ward argues that whenever we discuss the part the city environment plays in the life of children, we are really talking about boys. Girls, he believes, are far less visible on the city streets, and it is customary to relate this relative invisibility to ‘tests’ that indicate (incorrectly he says) to girls’ inability to manipulate the city. Rather, Ward continues, it is the quantity of environmental experience rather than innate skill that differentiates the genders.

<sup>440</sup> The Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed in August 1885, just over a month after Stead’s *Maiden Tribute* articles had been published. ‘Carnal knowledge’ of girls under the age of 13 became a serious crime, with five years imprisonment the maximum penalty. Sex with a girl between 13 and 16 became a misdemeanour, with two years in prison the maximum penalty. Stead’s exposé openly called upon politicians to consider their careers when voting on the bill: ‘we do not believe’, he wrote, ‘that members on the eve of a general election will refuse to consider the bill protecting the daughters of the poor.’ However, despite his self-styled representation as the democratising voice of the needy, there can be little doubt that his was a journalistic and salacious retelling of the seduction of poor girls by aristocratic men that diverted attention away from the social and economic issues relating to prostitution. See Judith R. Walkowitz’s *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992) for an insightful reading that connects the *Maiden Tribute* with late Victorian pornography, melodrama, and Stead’s extraordinary rage against women and girls.



**Figure 3.4.**

Jacob A. Riis, 'Organized Charity. Minding the Baby, "A little mother"', c. 1890, photograph (Jacob A. Riis collection, the Museum of the City of New York)

city streets express the tentative first steps away from both childhood and family to a detached but self-constructed identity.

Fin-de-siècle daughters were an important part of the working-class, female labour economy, and their ability to perform household tasks, care for younger siblings, and so on, often made it possible for their mothers to take on paid labour or for their fathers to function when the mother's absence was permanent.<sup>441</sup> Thrust prematurely into the world of adult responsibilities, as 'little mothers and wives', the working-class daughter had little shelter from the hard edge of 'real life'. And even beyond the home, as Claudia Nelson remarks, 'even in 1900 after decades of legislation designed to curb child labor, "most young people were in full-time employment by the age of thirteen or fourteen," and those under age twelve could legally work part time "in agriculture, retail trades, and domestic service."' <sup>442</sup> Nelson terms this female child of industry, 'the economically precocious child-woman.'<sup>443</sup> This girl typically belongs to

<sup>441</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 104.

<sup>442</sup> Nelson, *Precocious Children*, p. 104.

<sup>443</sup> Nelson, *Precocious Children*, p. 105.

the proletariat, and although she may be symptomatic of societal problems, she is not usually presented as the problem itself, but as a heroine, as a further exemplar of family values that the adults around her may be failing to uphold, and thus a figure who either claims or is assigned adult power. 'The Lucifer Match Girl' (figure 3.5) (1861) is an early example of the girl child street trader that Nelson describes. This figure, engraved from a daguerreotype by Richard Beard, also comes from Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*,<sup>444</sup> emblematic of a child figure who had never before been elevated to the dignity of print. Beard's isolating compositional strategies were employed to reinforce the truth claims of the journalistic accounts of Mayhew, and were, most often, of a single subject, posed with the tools and wares of his or her trade, the sketched-in street backdrop empty.<sup>445</sup> The young match seller is shown clutching a box of lucifer matches in one hand and a tattered sack in the other. As Caroline Arscott observes, she is dwarfed by the street bollard, and has the unmodulated shape and tottering stance of a very small child.<sup>446</sup> Mayhew describes her thus:

It is not uncommon, in the quieter roads of the suburbs especially, to see a young woman extend her bare red arm from beneath a scanty ragged shawl and with an imploring look, a low curtesy, and a piteous tone, proffer a box of matches for sale; while a child in her arms, perhaps of two or three years old, extends in its little hand another box.<sup>447</sup>

The child shown in Beard's image is older than the infant described as precociously echoing the gesture of the mother from the mother's arms, but it is hard to imagine that she is much older. The selection of subjects underlined Mayhew's physiognomic characterisations of the poor's difference to the middle and upper classes, and therefore suggested the difference of street people as a whole. Nelson's own focus is on the fascination of the Victorian public for the

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<sup>444</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 432.

<sup>445</sup> See Owen Clayton's illuminating chapter 'Hybrid Photographies in *London Labour and the London Poor*' for an account of the distinctive nature of Mayhew's images as hybrid daguerreotype-engravings, and the significance of this hybridity for our understanding of the images as both individual and accurate in combining the verisimilitude of photography with picturesque illustration: Owen Clayton, *Literature and Photography in Transition, 1850-1915* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 24-60.

<sup>446</sup> Caroline Arscott, 'Childhood in Victorian Art', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9.1 (2004), 96-107 (p. 97).

<sup>447</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 425.



THE LUCIFER MATCH GIRL.

**Figure 3.5.**

‘The Lucifer Match Girl’, engraved illustration after a daguerreotype by Richard Beard 1861 (Museum of London)

‘Watercress Girl’ who became a source for a number of similar figures in fiction, ballads, and theatrical melodramas.<sup>448</sup> Mayhew encounters the young watercress seller at Farringdon watercress market, who, he observes, had ‘entirely lost all childish ways, and was, indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman’,<sup>449</sup> a child functioning as an adult, because, it transpires, the ‘real’ adults cannot fulfil their responsibilities owing to either absence or incapacity, or a combination of both. Whilst these figures deviate from Victorian understandings of

<sup>448</sup> Nelson, *Precocious Children*, p. 107.

<sup>449</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 151.

developmental norms, their *sympathetically* represented economic precocity could, Nelson suggests, readily be used to elicit pity and indignation from the reader at their enforced position on the streets, traceable perhaps to the similarity that Victorians perceived between women and children.<sup>450</sup> Despite being thrust into the city, the child-woman's pragmatic coveting of aspects of the adult condition can be sentimentalised or lamented, and as surrogate homemaker and maternal provider, the precocious child-woman seemed less unnatural than her precocious brother, her pragmatic appropriation of adulthood to keep the family afloat merely a premature anticipation of her adult role to come.

### **‘Gutterella—A Woman of the Age of Gold’, 1895**

Investigated, written about, photographed and painted, surveyed and measured, the poor girls of the final decades of the nineteenth century were under intense scrutiny by scientists, social theorists, journalists, and authors on both sides of the Atlantic, and there can be little doubt that their representation in fiction and in fact was one of the means by which scientific and social thought mapped out the psychology of childhood.<sup>451</sup> Acquiring a new significance at the end of the century, working-class children, boys as well as girls, became symbols of hope, of a better and healthier future, of individuality and selfhood. In Britain, Margaret McMillan (1860-1931), a charismatic member of the Independent Labour Party and socialist propagandist, was a significant contributor to these developments through her writing, her political activism, and her work for the children of Bradford and Deptford. Indeed, in her authoritative account of McMillan's devotion to child causes, Carolyn Steedman places McMillan firmly in the transformations that were taking place in the lives of British children at the fin de siècle,<sup>452</sup> although it is not until 1895 that we see McMillan turn her written attention to childhood fiction for the first time. Published in the *Weekly Times and Echo* in December 1895, McMillan's short

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<sup>450</sup> Nelson, *Precocious Children*, p. 105.

<sup>451</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 66.

<sup>452</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p.3.

story, ‘Gutterella—A Woman of the Age of Gold’<sup>453</sup> tells of the corruption of childhood, specifically girlhood, through the evocation of ‘beauty in sordid surroundings’ and ‘the *meaning* of the child [...] as an already thwarted possibility.’<sup>454</sup> The childhood of the ‘ugly’ working-class heroine, ‘with her mouth like a slit, and a pair of wicked, twinkling eyes’, her desperate love for her father, her only parent, and her place in the slums of the city, prefigure her fate. Despite ‘blooming out’ at sixteen ‘into a pretty maiden’, Gutterella’s apparently inevitable course of working-class deterioration in an urban environment takes her through the match factory, phossy jaw, and casual sexual relationships to an inevitable early death.

In many respects, McMillan’s story, as Steedman tells us, follows in a tradition of literary, aesthetic, and cultural criticism of working-class childhood that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>455</sup> Mayhew’s depictions of child street traders and the engravings from Beard’s accompanying images are probably the best-known of the journalistic enquiries into labouring children in England, whilst Riis’s contributions dominate American understanding. Both are, of course, connected to the emergence of photography as a means of illustration from the 1860s onwards and contribute to a new evocation of childhood through artistic and literary representation. When McMillan began to publish her own depictions of working-class children from the mid-1890s onwards, she was engaging with an audience that was then already familiar with the conceived dangers of the city and its apparently inherent harm to its most vulnerable inhabitants. McMillan herself, Steedman tells us, used the existing markers of literature and art to articulate a nineteenth-century invention of childhood,<sup>456</sup> and is likely to have drawn upon John Ruskin’s 1883 lecture entitled ‘Fairy land’ from *The Art of England* in which he describes ‘the merciless manufacturing fury, which today grinds children to dust between millstones and tears them to pieces on engine wheels.’<sup>457</sup> In ‘Gutterella’,

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<sup>453</sup> Margaret McMillan, ‘Gutterella—A Woman of the Age of Gold’, *Weekly Times and Echo*, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1895. (A copy of this story is held at Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre, catalogue reference A94/16/A4/8). All subsequent quotations from this story are taken from here.

<sup>454</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 66.

<sup>455</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 66.

<sup>456</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 65.

<sup>457</sup> John Ruskin, ‘Fairy land: Mrs Allingham and Kate Greenaway’, lecture 4 in *The Art of England: Lectures Given in Oxford* (Orpington, Kent: George Allen, 1883).

McMillan's protest against the misery foisted upon the poor children of the city is represented by a protagonist that can be understood as straddling the gap, the space, between invention and reality, a fictional image of impoverished girlhood, but representative of actual children living in particular social and urban circumstances in the 1890s.

The fictional Gutterella, a working-class girl living in 'a dirty garret in a dirty slum' with 'no kin, save her father', allows McMillan to explore three central themes of the story: the influence of childhood environment on development; the corruption of childhood under industrial capitalism; and the notion of dreams and the unconscious mind. Although McMillan places Gutterella firmly in a slum environment – she lives in 'Roaring-alley', on 'ugly squalid streets' – the specific place name is withheld, and the story becomes representative of all the misery and depravity associated with the 'great city': the 'Blue Bear' public house, the mud of the streets, the 'slum dwellings on the hill', the 'dirty' dance halls, and of course, the 'match factory'. Gutterella's father is a drunkard, loved by his daughter, but whose reciprocal love and concern are uncertain:

Gutterella had one weak point. She loved her father. The policeman knew it. They had seen her dozens of times leading him home, and striving vainly to steady his steps, and support him with her own fragile little person. They knew that her cleverest strokes of business were performed for his advantage. Being fathers themselves they were occasionally guilty of closing their eyes, that they might not see the rather questionable deeds to which her filial affections prompted her.

In her childish dreams, Gutterella imagines her father as her redeemer and her means to journey to a different life. As she watches the gutter children dancing to the tune of the barrel organ grinder (the analogy of dance with liberation is repeated in Symons's work later in this chapter), Gutterella feels:

a sudden thrill of joy. Her father had come back. He was not drunk yet. Perhaps he would be glad to see her! Perhaps (the music became gayer and the children danced faster) he would take her hand, and they would go together to some fairer place than Roaring-alley. Far away—Gutterella knew—there were beautiful places where the earth wore a green carpet. Gutterella was dreaming you see—weaving a golden future in the air.

In her adolescence though, as she blooms into the anomaly of one of the ‘pretty girls in the slums’, Gutterella ‘began to desire earnestly a pure and honest way of life’, a ‘strange desire’ as McMillan terms it, that not only sets her further apart from her peers, but also derives from an entirely new perception of selfhood. In her cracked mirror, Gutterella’s notion of personal identity is reimagined in her own reflection, for the mirror says ‘quite plainly, “Lo! Here is the new. Look at it.” Other mirrors may be demoralising. Gutterella’s mirror was as good, and better, than a sermon.’

Fleetinglly envisioned then as part of the ‘new’ dynamic of the *fin de siècle*, Gutterella’s desires and dreams afford the working-class girl and the reader, an insight into the psyche of the heroine, whilst also compounding the psychological and physiological effects of the depraved environment to which she is confined. For thwarted in her ambition and development – she has no testimonials and little fancy speech to find a ‘position’ - Gutterella’s ‘place’ becomes the match factory, where the use of cheap white phosphorous drives down the market prices but exposes the workers to ‘phossy jaw’ and where Gutterella’s individual strength of purity and determination is subsumed by the collective diseased, animalistic, and perverted energy of her female peers. As her beauty and youth ebb away, Gutterella’s hopes languish and she puts away her mirror, the emblem of change, although poignantly, McMillan does not allow her heroine or her reader to forget the repressed and unfulfilled desires of her protagonist, whose ‘solitary groping from cradle to grave’<sup>458</sup> epitomises her fate. For despite her destitution and despair, Gutterella ‘retraced with bitter remorse her steps, and became once more gentle and industrious’ for her lover, ‘a man of thirty-four, intelligent, handsome, and of brutal temperament,’ perhaps the embodiment of the father she once broke away from. McMillan’s depiction of her protagonist’s powerlessness – and her *awareness* of her powerlessness – is conveyed through McMillan’s portrayal of the influence of environmental circumstance and the impossibility of change. As Steedman argues, ‘McMillan’s fictional depiction of working-class childhood, from the mid 1890s onwards moved between the idea of possibility – that things might be made

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<sup>458</sup> Margaret McMillan, ‘In Holy Isle’, *Highway* [the journal of the Workers’ Educational Association] (October 1911).



better, that a regenerated child might regenerate a class, regenerate a nation – and her presentation of the process by which *this did not happen*.<sup>459</sup> The ravaged premature dying of the child-woman Gutterella, sat up in her hospital bed, shows what might have been, and what did not come to pass, both at the same time. The bleak trajectory of Gutterella's life is then a figurative device, one that establishes the city as a symbolic wasteland of despair, and Gutterella's place in it as salvation and potential denied. Despite its brevity and apparent simplicity, the fictional Gutterella – her dreams and desires – allowed McMillan to explore the psychological effects of material and mental deprivation, and to express quite complex ideas about physiology and psychology.

### **Maggie Johnson**

#### **The Evolution of *Maggie***

Across the Atlantic, in the wake of Riis's exposé of impoverished New Yorkers, and in the fin-de-siècle era of burgeoning urbanisation and industrialisation, shifting identities, and the redefining of hitherto prescribed gender roles, Stephen Crane wrote his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*. Crane was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1871, the fourteenth and last child of the Methodist minister, Dr. Jonathan Townley Crane and Mary Helen Peck Crane, daughter of the well-known Methodist minister, George Peck. Both parents were vehement temperance advocates and prolific writers. In 1870, Dr. Crane published *The Arts of Intoxication: The Aim, and the Results*, a staunch condemnation of alcohol. Mary Crane was president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Port Jervis, New York, and frequently lectured against the evils of drink. She became such a vocal advocate of temperance during her youngest son's childhood, that one local observer remarked that 'she ought to stay at home and take care of her large family, instead of making so many speeches.'<sup>460</sup> Given his parents' views on temperance, it is no surprise that Stephen Crane recognised the demoralising effects of alcohol when he began to study the conditions of tenement life. Observing that

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<sup>459</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 75.

<sup>460</sup> Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino, *The Crane Log: A Documentary Life of Stephen Crane, 1871-1900* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), p.22.

mothers, fathers, and the children of the slums had access to alcohol, Crane recognised that whilst it provided a temporary respite from a life of poverty, it also created a hostile and caustic environment of violence and dependence.

Following a move to a New York City rooming house that overlooked the East River in 1892, Crane worked as a reporter for several large newspapers and reported on Jacob A. Riis's lectures in the *New-York Tribune* in July of that year. Following an extensive tour of the West and Mexico in 1895, Crane left New York for Jacksonville, Florida in 1896 where he met Cora Taylor, the estranged wife of an English aristocrat, Captain Donald William Stewart. Cora was the madam of a Jacksonville brothel known as the Hotel de Dream. In 1897, Crane and Cora travelled to Europe, and settled in Ravensbrook, a small villa in Oxted, Surrey, where their neighbours included Joseph Conrad and Henry James. There is no record that Crane and Cora ever married, although Cora called herself Mrs Stephen Crane. Crane continued to work as a reporter, often as a war correspondent, and travelled extensively to North and South America. In April 1900, Crane suffered two massive tubercular haemorrhages, and despite travelling to seek a cure in Badenweiler, Germany, died there in a sanatorium on June 5<sup>th</sup> aged twenty eight. Notwithstanding his brief life, Crane produced six novels, more than a hundred short stories and sketches, two volumes of poetry, plays, news reports, and war dispatches.

Beneath his somewhat bohemian exterior and unconventional lifestyle, Crane appears to have had the crusading instincts of his parents and many of their values, and his writing often expresses his humanistic approach to the terror and waste of slum life. Penned under the pseudonym Johnston Smith, his first novel, *Maggie*, was published privately by a small print shop on New York's Sixth Avenue in early 1893 for the enormous sum of \$869, presumably because no commercial publisher would touch it. Of the eleven hundred copies printed, Crane gave away a hundred and sold only a handful. *Maggie*, it would appear, was stillborn. Early reviewers seized on the novel's brevity to suggest that Crane's work could not tell a full story with Hamlin Garland declaring the book 'only a fragment,' and lacking in 'rounded

completeness.<sup>461</sup> As a narrative, *Maggie* was accused of going nowhere, merely following its characters around from one squalid intercourse to another, in a 'series of loosely cohering incidents.'<sup>462</sup> Although never regarded as a great American novel, *Maggie* certainly presents the essence of Crane's art and vision, where he develops a radically new lifestyle in writing and seeing and feeling. As Luc Sante stresses in his new introduction to *Maggie*, Crane was a 'kid, [...] a strange, impulsive, prodigious adolescent, half-silent and half-wild,'<sup>463</sup> and it is important to keep this in mind, since being a 'kid' gave him several positional advantages. He could circumvent the demands of the established publishing elite to write about repressed sexuality, hangovers, and jobless indolence with an ambiguousness that appears to have appalled genteel critics and fellow authors alike. Overlooking decorum, or maybe ignorant of it altogether, *Maggie*, Crane's outsider heroine, I argue, symbolises the floundering foundations of girls and young women breaking away from childhood and experiencing life and its personal dissociations in order to arrive at new semblances of meaning.

Young writers, like Crane, were attracted by the literary modes named 'realism', 'naturalism', and 'impressionism', fashionable in the late nineteenth-century period, endeavouring to identify and comprehend various international tendencies which appeared to differ: naturalistic writers sought to emphasise the power of heredity and environment to mould individual character; impressionists were interested in subjective viewpoints and vivid, personal glimpses of events; whilst expressionists offered a view of the world which was disturbingly distorted, as though seen from an abnormal viewpoint, perhaps that of an individual who is deranged or depressed. Like Henry James, Crane was expanding the province of fiction and the life of the novel by drawing on dramatic conventions (besides drawing on these painterly devices of realism, naturalism, and expressionism) and thereby moving beyond simple and traditional narrative forms. Yet it is also my contention that each of these 'isms' leaves

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<sup>461</sup> Hamlin Garland, 'Review', *Arena* (June 1893) in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, ed. by Adrian Hunter (Plymouth: Broadview Editions, 2006), pp. 188-189 (p. 188).

<sup>462</sup> H. D. Traill, 'Review', *Fortnightly Review* (1 January 1897) in *Maggie*, ed. by Adrian Hunter, pp. 193-195 (p. 195).

<sup>463</sup> Luc Sante, 'Introduction', in Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets and Other New York Writings* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. xi-xvi (p. xii).

uncaptured an irreducible quality in *Maggie* which is Crane's own, a quality that signals the spirit of Modernism in a highly individualised and highly stylised work of art. Crane's quality is a distinctly uncompromising combination of awkwardness and perception, sometimes oddly clumsy, and sometimes uncannily vivid, but nevertheless, I argue, a radical departure from orthodox nineteenth-century traditions. His lifelong predisposition to resist popular trends, both stylistic, and more significantly, moral, rather than to play to 'the traditional basic tune,'<sup>464</sup> is imperative to understanding how, like Gotch, he adopts a new approach that no longer covers conventional topics in a conventional way. Indeed, his use of the isolated female child figure, like that of Gotch, was, I suggest, remarkably prescient, whilst his study of city space, 'with its slum dwellers and social problems [became] a fit subject for serious literary study, when the novel of the 1890s was still generally regarded as escapist fare, as mere entertainment.'<sup>465</sup> Exploiting the conventional symbol of the girl child as the epitome of innocent virtue, Crane uncovers her alternative role as the epitome of disruptive force within the very environment in which she is presumed to be under the greatest threat. As I shall explore, Crane captures the sense of the city as a site of crowds and thus of anonymity, of callousness and yet of succour. The city's sheer quantitative difference from other human sites, a place, as I have illustrated, where thousands upon thousands move past one another with streams converging into crowds, results in a qualitative difference, where life is conducted differently. Crane's work becomes not a novel of social protest in the usual sense of the phrase, but a study of the urban environment and the patterns of behaviour destined to replace those that had been nurtured for centuries in the countryside from which those who were now massed in the cities were drawn. *Maggie* is a study of child isolation within that amassed crowd, and the development of a sense of self and autonomy for the girl child who displays a standard of conduct distinctly different from any previous models.

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<sup>464</sup> Robert M. Dowling and Donald Pizer, 'A Cold Case File Reopened: Was Crane's *Maggie* Murdered or a Suicide?', *American Literary Realism*, 42.1 (Fall 2009), 36-53 (p. 40)  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerlitereal.42.1.0036>> [accessed 12 May 2017].

<sup>465</sup> Thomas A. Gullason, 'Preface' to *Maggie*, pp. xi-xiii (p. xi).

The evolution of *Maggie* suggests that Crane's approach to his novel writing was itself novel. Frequenting the night police courts, talking with the street people of New York city, and spending social hours in music halls where daringly-clad girls danced and sang, Crane, like Gotch, came from the place of the girl subject as 'idea'. While he never limited his studies of human isolation to the female pariahs of red-light New York, he wrote a number of sketches between 1892 and 1896 based on his study of these girls,<sup>466</sup> although, as Larzer Ziff notes in his introduction to the novel, Crane had already envisaged *Maggie* and had begun accumulating the material for it before he had ever visited the streets of New York.<sup>467</sup> Typically he made his forays into life – conducted his research as it were – in order to find details that would support what he already envisioned rather than to gather experiences upon which he could then exercise his imagination. As Ziff eloquently observes, *Maggie* bears the mark of 'a fiction projected upon the screen of life by an incandescent imagination rather than a narrative of experienced life passed through its lens.'<sup>468</sup> Certainly the novel has inserted itself in the American tradition in a distinctly peculiar fashion, for it appears to have little to connect it with any native fiction that preceded it, whilst any influence it may have had on works that came after it is neither certain, nor, in any case, very direct. Like the heroine of its title, *Maggie* is an anomaly, and, as I explore, its very peculiarity marks both a break with tradition and heredity, and the anticipation of the momentous changes that distinguish the Victorian fin de siècle.

Certainly, despite the wealth of scholarly work on *Maggie*, characteristic responses try to attribute the text, to explain it away, rather than actually examine it.<sup>469</sup> There appears to be a reluctance to come to grips with the novel on its own terms, and as David Fitelson acknowledges, perhaps 'the most arresting critical problem posed by Stephen Crane's first novel

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<sup>466</sup> Laura Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction 1885-1917* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), p. 45.

<sup>467</sup> Larzer Ziff, 'Introduction: Stephen Crane's New York', in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Tales of New York*, ed. by Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin, 2000), pp. vii-xxv.

<sup>468</sup> Ziff, 'Introduction', p. ix.

<sup>469</sup> See for example, Marcus Cunliffe's 'Stephen Crane and the American Background of *Maggie*' (1955) which despite its promise to 'discuss[ing] *Maggie* in some detail', does not; Robert M. Dowling and Donald Pizer's 'A Cold Case Reopened: Was Crane's *Maggie* Murdered or a Suicide?' (2009) which is an interesting account of the critics' opposing views of *Maggie*'s final fate, but too readily accepts this fate as the 'key' to unlocking the novel; and Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins's 'Maggie's "Last Night": Authorial Design and Editorial Patching' (1978) which is also overly preoccupied with *Maggie*'s demise.

is that of the disposition of the mind that lies behind and shapes it—the ideology, so to speak, that it communicates. The problem is especially arresting because this ideology has never been closely defined.<sup>470</sup> Rather, Maggie, as ‘A Girl of the Streets,’ the late nineteenth-century euphemism for a prostitute, is often understood as fully cast in the conventions of this role by Crane, the subtitle informing potential audiences that this was a story about the lowest form of prostitution, the streetwalker. The three-part title of the 1893 *Maggie* appears to focus on the social problem from individual to general to universal terms. The initial title is *Maggie* and the reference is, of course, to one person. The second title, *A Girl of the Streets*, reflects the occupation, prostitution, that appears to inevitably await the girl, now a representative figure, an ‘idea’. The final bracketed subtitle, *A Story of New York*, generalises even further, placing the narrative within the framework of the large city, really any city. It is worth pointing out at this stage that although *Maggie*’s second subtitle may have blatantly informed Crane’s potential audience that this was a story about the lowest form of prostitution, when the novel was republished in England some years later, the second title was changed to *A Child of the Streets*, to soften the initial response of British readers, whilst acknowledging the young age of the novel’s title character. Fixing on one girl child within one family, the Johnsons, Crane personalises in small a larger tragedy which affects and reflects on Western society as a whole, not simply on the urban environment of New York city as an isolated case. Citing her familial background, her seduction, and subsequent abandonment as possibly the ‘type’ of case history of most lower East Side prostitutes, and certainly the common archetype expressed in the writing of the day on both sides of the Atlantic, Maggie is inevitably cast in the mould of the heroine-as-victim. Yet it is my understanding from the narrative that Crane both affirms and challenges the prevailing trope of the street girl. A close reading of the scant details that Crane provides suggest that the orthodox story of descent to the street is not only over-simplistic, but also that Crane made the life of the girl child poignant, sympathetic, and memorable, narrating an isolation from whence elements of inclination and autonomous motivation spring.

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<sup>470</sup> David Fitelson, ‘Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* and Darwinism’, in *Maggie*, pp. 108-112 (p. 108).

### Environment and Mechanised Identity

Encompassing links to heredity, Darwinism, and degeneration, *Maggie* explores fin-de-siècle concerns that do not appear at first to be addressed to the female child; indeed, because they form part of a wider societal picture, such concerns are more generally applied to the male populace, to the boys, to ‘society’ (construed as male). And yet, as both Riis and Crane himself expressed, environment – custom and habit as well as physical surroundings – governs the development of character traits for both genders. Indeed, the idea that environment significantly shaped human behaviour was increasingly accepted during Crane’s lifetime. As Kevin Hayes points out:

The prevailing attitudes toward the influence of environment were mostly derived from the British philosopher Herbert Spencer. [...] Spencer argued that people adapted themselves to their environment by *submitting to the will of the social organism or community* to which they belonged <sup>471</sup> (my italics).

Particularly in the place of the home, Lydia Murdoch argues, ‘Numerous scholars have examined how popular representations of the urban poor contributed to the idea that their very environment precluded all domestic life. Without proper, bourgeois domestic spaces, the poor lacked the physical boundaries linked to middle-class notions of individuality.’<sup>472</sup> The working-class home, the tenement block, the slum, could not satisfy the high degree of spatial segregation and the number of specialised rooms that had become so important to bourgeois concepts of both domesticity and individualism. ‘What, then,’ asked Huntington, ‘must be the lot of the children? They must not only hear all that older people hear, and see all that they see, at an age when every such sight and sound leaves its impression, but they are practically forced into acquaintanceship with the other dwellers in the tenement.’<sup>473</sup> If children and adults, males and females, and even the occasional lodger mixed freely in the homes of the poor, it was

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<sup>471</sup> Kevin J. Hayes, ‘Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background’, in Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*, ed. by Kevin J. Hayes (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999), pp. 3-23 (p. 6).

<sup>472</sup> Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 46.

<sup>473</sup> Huntington, ‘Tenement-House Morality’, p. 124.

believed that such homes failed to offer a private haven distinct from the newly-developed urban and industrial disorder. Indeed, working-class homes appeared to contradict the late nineteenth-century distinction of public and private space as separate spheres with clearly defined boundaries and, as I have suggested, working-class children were obliged to venture unsupervised into the streets for recreation.

Crane acknowledges the impact of environment in his famous inscription to Hamlin Garland's copy of the novel, writing 'that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people.'<sup>474</sup> No wonder then that Crane's fictional text dramatizes and inflects a maxim of late nineteenth-century social reform and sociology that expressed a model of culture and identity which understood children in particular as 'natural' products of environment, who do not adapt during growth, but instead reflect and reproduce their immediate surroundings which are 'the prolific parents of corresponding habits and morals.'<sup>475</sup> The domestic places of the tenements were seen by Riis especially as 'nurseries of pauperism and crime' that 'touch the family life with deadly moral contagion.'<sup>476</sup> In this way, any particularity is resolved into typicality, a process that mechanised identity and therefore denied human agency. Significantly, Howard Horwitz notes that in *Maggie*, 'environment does not determine action, but neither do individuals; instead bodies act or respond ritualistically.'<sup>477</sup> Within a given environmental structure then, heredity and habitual performance within that framework reproduce ritual behaviours that determine outcomes, and yet, as I explore, Crane's *Maggie* ushers in the metropolis as a unique environment that, in its girl protagonist, shapes a new kind of person.

### **Distorted Domesticity**

In the first instance, it is worth noting that *Maggie* defies the Victorian culture of domesticity.

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<sup>474</sup> Thomas Gullason usefully reprints this inscription in his Norton Critical Edition of *Maggie*, p. 132.

<sup>475</sup> Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, p. 2.

<sup>476</sup> Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, p. 2.

<sup>477</sup> Howard Horwitz, 'Maggie and the Sociological Paradigm', *American Literary History*, 10.4 (Winter, 1998), 606-638 (p. 610) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/490138>> [accessed 9 May 2017].



The novel's first three chapters describe an evening and a night in the domestic life of the Johnson family during Maggie's early childhood. The life of this family is that of fierce battle and violence, amongst those around them but also among themselves. The novel opens with Jimmie, Maggie's brother, fighting the children of a neighbouring gang, Devil's Row. He then fights one of his own gang members, and the narrative embarks upon a relentless and remorseless exchange of violence and cruelty. The family's actions mirror the actions of others so that they appear engaged in a perpetual cycle of abuse, violence, and self-damnation. Mr Johnson, Maggie's father, upbraids Jimmie with a blow; Maggie mistreats the baby, Tommie; Jimmie hits Maggie; Mrs Mary Johnson, Maggie's mother, beats Jimmie for fighting; Mr and Mrs Johnson argue; Mrs Johnson beats Maggie for breaking a plate; Mr Johnson strikes Jimmie with an empty beer bucket, and finally, a drunk Mr Johnson returns home, and he and Mrs Johnson fight – all these brutal exchanges in three, rather short chapters. Crane does not condemn this behaviour, but withholds authorial judgement, preferring irony to expose the chronic pattern of adult life: "Eh, Gawd, child, what is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fader?" (p. 10). Unmediated by Crane's moralising, Maggie, alone, confronts scenes of violent disorder and hysterical landscapes that place her in the role of witness: 'When Maggie came home [...] her mother lay asleep amidst the wreck of chairs and a table. [...] The remnants of a meal, ghastly, like dead flesh, lay in a corner. Maggie's red mother, stretched on the floor, blasphemed and gave her daughter a bad name' (p. 21). Crane's fundamental point in these early episodes is that home is *not* a sanctuary from the struggles and chaos of the outside world, but rather a place where conflict is even more intense: the home is not only a battleground, but also its warfare takes place in an enclosed arena. Maggie's tenement is in 'a dark region' (p. 6) and her apartment, 'up dark stairways and along cold, gloomy halls' (p. 7) is cave-like. Indeed, Crane's description of the Johnson children eating combines both the battlefield and the cave images into one primary metaphor of primitive competition for food between warring, but solitary, individuals: 'The babe sat with his feet dangling high from a precarious infant chair and gorged his small stomach. Jimmie forced, with

feverish rapidity, the grease-enveloped pieces between his wounded lips. Maggie, with side glances of fear of interruption, ate like a small pursued tigress' (p. 9).

And yet, paradoxically, the moral values held by the Johnsons are drawn almost entirely from a middle-class ethic which stresses the home as the centre of virtue and goodness, and familial respectability as the primary moral goal. Joseph Brennan, in his astute reading of the symbolic structure in *Maggie*, argues that the lambrequin and blue ribbons with which Maggie rather pathetically attempts to improve the appearance of her home are worthy of attention. As he observes:

When we study the several passages in which these items appear, it becomes clear that they are intended as symbols of Maggie herself, of her essentially feminine but somewhat romantically distorted sensibility. [...] Shortly thereafter we read that the mother "had vented some phase of drunken fury upon the lambrequin. It lay in a bedraggled heap in the corner .... the knots of blue ribbons appeared like violated flowers." This passage corroborates symbolically [...] that it is the mother who is really culpable for Maggie's seduction and ruin, for it is the mother who has most ruthlessly outraged Maggie, who has violated her soul repeatedly and trampled her sensibilities.<sup>478</sup>

The repeat use of these symbols, as shallow façades that attempt to belie the chaotic violence that reigns within the domestic space, are certainly suggestive of the role of respectability that the Johnson family believe their daughter should play, but ultimately, they are symbols of the failure of Maggie to adopt such a pose, for they, like her, are repeatedly abused and trampled upon. They, like Maggie, fail to thrive in the caustic domestic environment of the tenement building, because as anomalous objects they are perpetually 'out of place'. Significantly, Maggie's repeated efforts to pick up and restore these symbols is fundamentally about her attempts to restore *appearances*, the bedrock upon which the middle-class Victorian family was built. Indeed, Maggie is the only character in the novel who labours to modify her environment and in the final use of these symbols in Chapter X, there is an interesting implication concerning Maggie herself. The night before, at the height of her drunken rage, Mrs Johnson had driven her

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<sup>478</sup> Joseph X. Brennan, 'Irony and Symbolic Structure in Crane's *Maggie*', in *Maggie*, pp.173-184 (p. 182).

daughter from the tenement, and into the waiting arms of her seducer, Pete. Before leaving her home the following day to live with him however, Maggie has attempted some element of restoration: 'The rooms showed that attempts had been made at tidying them. [...] The blue ribbons had been restored to the curtains, and the lambrequin, with its immense sheaves of yellow wheat and red roses of equal size, had been returned, in a worn and sorry state, to its position at the mantel. Maggie's jacket and hat were gone from the nail behind the door' (pp. 31-32). The missing clothes are particularly poignant; although the decorations have been restored, albeit not to their original 'splendour', the vacant nail suggests Maggie's rejection of the domestic space and its accompanying superficial appearances and duplicitous values of her parents, is complete.

For the Johnsons' moral vision is dominated by traditional Victorian middle-class roles which they believe are expected of them and their attitudes and responses, particularly, as I shall explore at the circumstances of Maggie's death, are the blindness and hypocrisy of a Victorian society built upon the absurdity of moral pretention. Whilst these assumed roles bring social approbation, they are especially satisfying because the playing of them before an audience encourages a gratifying emotionalism or self-justification, a trend that occurs throughout the novel. The familial reaction to Maggie's 'fall' is basically of this nature. Cast out by her mother and brother for desecrating the 'Home', the moral poses adopted by the Johnson family have no relation to reality since the home is a setting of warfare and violence rather than virtue. The role-play and pretence that the family adopts within the specific setting of the Victorian home is not only concerned with physically ostracising a daughter who does not adopt her prescribed role but also with creating a psychological isolation through a refusal to project oneself into a virtuous role that is expected of you. Each crisis in the Johnson family is viewed by neighbours who comprise an audience which encourages the family to adopt moral poses. In the scene in which Maggie is cast out, both Jimmie and Mrs Johnson are conscious of their need to play the roles of the outraged mother and brother in response to the expectations of their audience: 'The loud, tremendous sneering of the mother brought the denizens of the Rum Alley tenement to their doors. Women came in the hallways. Children scurried to and fro' (p 47). As I shall

explore later in this chapter, the elements of theatre and performance are especially significant for understanding the self-imposed isolation of Maggie, but for now it is sufficient to acknowledge that the Johnsons' value system is orientated toward approval by others, toward an audience, and is therefore inherently both stifling and prescriptive.

### **Eschewing Hereditary Codes and Behaviours**

Despite the novel's strongly-evoked sense of environmental determinism, Maggie extricates herself from the sordidly impoverished home of her childhood, for it is within the domestic environment that we discover that neither it nor the females therein are available for Maggie to use as a mirror for her identity. Maggie's need for a female role model cannot be satisfied in Rum Alley; there are no affirming female communities for Maggie to turn to, and with neither confidante nor protector, Maggie is cast adrift. Brennan, as I have mentioned, reads Mrs Mary Johnson as culpable for Maggie's 'fall', but I'd like to suggest a more nuanced reading of Maggie's isolation from the female roles that surround her. Rejecting the binary ideology of angel/whore child, Maggie is instead framed by those whose depictions she does not mirror – all others suggest what she is not. As Marsha Orgeron has observed, 'The narrator does not excuse Mary's appalling behavior, yet there is the suggestion that Mary, like many of the characters in this novel, lacks the capacity to see a way out of her dismal lot in life.'<sup>479</sup> The domestic space of the tenement block, with its inherited codes and rituals of female behaviour, mark the limit of Mary Johnson's social universe. This is the difference between the women that Crane looks to explore. Mrs Johnson's inability to act is not replicated in her daughter's behaviour and therefore, within the domestic space of the tenement, Maggie's interiority, her 'personal' isolation and dissociation is especially significant. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the lack of female community is, potentially, Maggie's salvation. Her aspirations are 'dim thoughts [...] often searching for far away lands where, as God says, the little hills sing together in the morning. Under the trees of her dream-gardens there had always walked a lover' (p. 19).

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<sup>479</sup> Marsha Orgeron, 'The Road to Nowhere: Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (A Story of New York) (1893)', in *Women in Literature: Reading Through the Lens of Gender*, ed. by Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), pp.185-187 (p. 186).

The Biblical and Edenic <sup>480</sup> echoes of this interiority set Maggie apart from her familial role as daughter of her impoverished and violent environment and automatic inheritor of her mother's place, despite her mother's assertion that Maggie is "her mudder's purty darlin' yit" (p. 47). Faced with the historically limited life choices that Crane displays to us as those available to the female poor, Maggie's obligation is to act autonomously.

In *Maggie*, therefore, Crane violently shatters the literary convention of the Victorian happy family, and the formulaic roles of parental or brotherly love are undermined and become a travesty of the mother and son. Crane makes it clear that even as a small girl, Maggie cannot fight the blows of her brother, who, as the world will, 'advanced dealing her cuffs' (p. 7). When, in the opening chapters, as I have explored, both Jimmie, and Maggie's drunken mother strike her, Maggie's response is one of bewilderment and retreat, mute, and frightened of reprisal. Indeed, as Hapke observes, 'in her very passivity [Maggie is] one of the few Bowery denizens not engaged in vilification as self-defense.'<sup>481</sup> Jimmie says of his sister, that even if he fetched her home, "I didn't say we'd make 'er inteh a little tin angel, ner nottin" (p. 41) and the idea of Maggie as 'angel in the house' becomes beyond comprehension. The societal double standards that lead Maggie to prostitution and death, while leaving her sexually permissive brother in a position of false moral superiority, suggest Crane's desire to draw attention to the conventional Victorian moralities that were beginning to be eschewed at the fin de siècle.

Critics often note that Maggie is idealised, and that despite her living in the slum sections of the city, she alone is unsullied by her impoverished urban environment. In this respect, she stands isolated in marked contrast not only to the surrounding familial female figures who fail to shape her, but also to her brother Jimmie, who, in the pattern of heredity behaviour, follows in the footsteps of his father and becomes a violent drunkard himself. Although, as I have suggested, Crane's own concerns were primarily with the influence of environment on the outcome of character, his treatment of Jimmie suggests that Crane was also deeply interested in the question of heredity, and for the purposes of this thesis, the notion of

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<sup>480</sup> Portions of this sentence are suggestive biblical echoes from Psalms 98:8, 96:12, and 65:12.

<sup>481</sup> Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong*, p. 53.

heredity and isolation for Maggie are key. Whilst there is no reference to the word 'heredity' in the novel, Crane does show how Jimmie acquires the characteristics of both his inebriate parents. Jimmie is rarely out of sync with the Rum Alley world. He respects only brute force, and inherits his father's ways, so that he is, in many respects, a measure of the difference between Rum Alley and Maggie. He is the bridge between her isolation, and the chaos and brutality of the tenement environment. Though both son and daughter are of the emerging, end-of-century generation, and spend their formative years in the same domestic environment, only Maggie remains a flower 'in a mud puddle' (p. 16) because Jimmie inherits and adapts. But it is contamination that Jimmie inherits. The Johnson family traditions are contaminated in the blood line that passes the habits of the father onto the son. This is why an understanding of Maggie and heredity and isolation is so important, for 'None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins' (p. 16). Despite Crane's preoccupation with dirt and cleanliness in this novel, Maggie's isolation ensures that she alone remains uncontaminated, and in arresting the infection of the blood line, it is not unreasonable to read Crane's novel as a feminist text. For despite the limited alternatives that Maggie has to the kinds of life of her contemporaries and her parents, she never accepts the limitations of their existence as her own, nor does she succumb to the self-pity of her mother.

### **The Spectacle of the Absent Heroine**

Yet, significantly, as Crane presents her, Maggie is destitute of depth, described by Adrian Hunter as 'an entirely performative figure.'<sup>482</sup> The question arises then of what she performs and for whom? (This is a question that I shall argue later in this chapter also preoccupies Arthur Symonds's poem, 'Nora on the Pavement'). Even for the contemporary reader, it is still disconcerting to encounter the central character of a novel at such impersonal distance, for so little access to Maggie does Crane permit, that in the final chapter in which she appears, she is not even referred to by name, but instead becomes 'A girl of the painted cohorts of the city' (p. 52). Indeed, as Thomas Gullason argues, 'Maggie may be one of the most absent heroines in

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<sup>482</sup> Adrian Hunter, 'Introduction' to *Maggie*, ed. by Adrian Hunter, pp. 8-22 (p. 9).

American literature.<sup>483</sup> Her inner life becomes a determining absence in her story, and despite her narrative centrality – the book itself bears her name after all – the reader is left wanting, knowing almost nothing about what she feels or what she thinks about. A barely-sketched heroine, Maggie appears to have only the faintest of emotions, in contrast to the hackneyed heroine's catalogue of fading charms and hysterical passages. Her mother acknowledges her psychological isolation and absence within the family: "We lived in deh same house wid her an' I brought her up an' we never knowed how bad she was" (p. 40). The point is not that Mary Johnson did not know how *bad* her daughter was, but that in interpreting her as such, Mary Johnson did not know her daughter at all. Indeed, Maggie appears to be of so little consequence as to be practically invisible, an unknown and unknowable quantity. For the enigma of Maggie, as of *Maggie*, is largely due to Crane's punishing economy of expression. Indeed, the relentless compression of Crane's language means that the few words he does provide in this short text are, I suggest, exercised to breaking point.

Certainly then, one of the most arresting features of the novel is its brevity, its reticence, its bold willingness to stop short. Although the plot advances chronologically from chapter to chapter, the narrative unfolds in distinct, curt scenes, none of which necessarily follow from the preceding. As Gullason observes, 'Structurally, each chapter in the novel is like an impressionistic vignette, etched in broad and grotesque strokes.'<sup>484</sup> The chapters are episodic, and there are none of the smooth transitions common to the traditional nineteenth-century novel. Each chapter has 'blunt and jagged edges'<sup>485</sup> that operates as a separate island, adrift within the text, and the lines too, are disjointed and stunted. Yet, the volatility of a stripped-down language, paradoxically, makes for all sorts of creative adventure. Indeed, it is this pared-down language that not only suggests the transience and ambiguity that comes with the fin-de-siècle, end-of-days anticipation of tradition in rapid decline, but also the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations that shake themselves free of High Victorian shackles to announce their

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<sup>483</sup> Thomas Gullason, 'Tragedy and Melodrama in Stephen Crane's *Maggie*', in *Maggie*, pp. 245-253 (p. 248).

<sup>484</sup> Gullason, 'Tragedy and Melodrama', p. 252.

<sup>485</sup> Gullason, 'Tragedy and Melodrama', p. 252.

symbolic falsity and to demand a novel approach. Crane introduces a certain singularity of perception to this city story, whereby the angle of perception, like the text itself, and not unlike the isolated heroine, seems familiar but rather dislocated, as though something in the experience, or the observer, or one acting on the other had displaced a 'normal' perspective. As one contemporary reviewer, who reads Maggie's childhood as 'a terror' and 'her girlhood a tragedy'<sup>486</sup> also remarks, 'Mr Crane [...] has absorbed and reproduced [...] much of the overlargeness of thought which seems to fill up his curt sentences and overflow them with a half-latent strength of meaning, which never ceases to increase.'<sup>487</sup> Hunter echoes this understanding when he observes that the language of the text, for all its compactness, 'leaks adversative contrary meanings from every pore; [...] [o]ne often feels that Crane's writing contains much more than it is prepared to say.'<sup>488</sup> Certainly Crane neglects – that is, he refuses – to make explicit a judgement on this isolated child of the city, for whilst his words are few, they are fit. The text's silences and ambiguities, words, actions, reasonings, left out or unresolved, make a significant contribution to the hiding place of the novel's power, and its indomitable interest to readers and scholars alike.

I would suggest, however, that Maggie's own absences and silences are also as much a part of her lack of engagement, of 'breaking the line' as they are Crane's avoidance of her own language. Condemned by her mother and brother as 'fallen,' Maggie gets literally nothing to say for herself as her life appears to come apart. She neither defends herself or registers guilt and faced with their accusations and abuse we are told, on more than one occasion, that she merely 'turned and went' (p. 48) without uttering a sound. Whilst a composite din is produced by the wailing of abused children (note that Maggie does not wail), and the brawls of home and familial relations, the noise expresses the rage and frustrations of those boxed in by their tenement world. Maggie's silence is then particularly telling, for her silence is itself isolated by the cacophony that surrounds her. Everyone else screams, from the 'howling urchins from

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<sup>486</sup> 'Unsigned review', *Nashville Banner* (15 August 1896) in *Maggie*, ed. by Adrian Hunter, pp. 191-193 (p. 191).

<sup>487</sup> 'Unsigned review', pp. 192-3.

<sup>488</sup> Hunter, 'Introduction' to *Maggie*, p. 10.



Devil's Row' (p. 3) to their mothers, 'Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress' who engage in 'frantic quarrels' (p. 6); there is never any tenement quiet. Contemporary reviewers of the novel read Maggie's solitary silence as detrimental to her position in the text; the 1896 *Literary Digest* argued that Maggie was 'far less important to the canvas than her brother Jimmie, or her sottish mother, or the coarse and tawdry Bowery bartender who [...] is her destroyer.'<sup>489</sup> Modern critics, as I have suggested, have concurred, finding her both mute and absent. But, I argue, it is this very minimised Maggie, who is silent and withdrawn even well before her 'fall', that Crane can effectively defend by contrasting her in scene after scene with the stunted and repellent adversaries and accusers who reveal *their* contradictory and performative immorality through *their* language and behaviours rather than her own. The inhabitants of the Bowery tenement seem to swirl around her in continuous motion, whilst she is passively dragged in their currents, until her exile from their suffocating and formulaic abusive behaviours and standards. Indeed, despite her absence of language, her presence is nonetheless felt in the autonomous way she responds to the 'earth of [...] hardships and insults' (p. 20) through an extraordinary self-imposed isolation, and her determined authorial agency to break a cycle of violence and abuse.

Maggie's retreat from the domestic space of the home does not, however, immediately negate any sense of being 'out of place' that her departure might reasonably anticipate or envisage. For Maggie 'retreats' throughout the text from spaces and places into which she does not 'fit': from violent domesticity in Chapter II, '[t]he ragged girl retreated' (p. 8); from prescribed femininity in Chapter V, she 'leaned back in the shadow' (p. 18) and in Chapter VII 'retreated nervously' (p. 25); whilst away from 'interested spectators' she finds no solace, no space, within the confines of the Rum Alley tenement house, as she 'shrieked and ran into the other room' (p. 30). Out of place with the destructive, albeit cohesive environment of the tenement space, 'Maggie, standing in the middle of the room, gazed about her' (p. 30). As spectacle, looked at, gazed upon, 'She edged about as if unable to find a place on the floor to put

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<sup>489</sup> 'Stephen Crane's "Maggie"', *The Literary Digest: A Weekly Compendium of the Contemporaneous Thought of the World*, Vol. XIII, No. 15 (August 8, 1896), pp. 459-460 (p. 459).

her feet' (p. 47). In from the street, and in the company and confines of the familial home, Maggie is disturbed – she is, in Jimmie's words, 'different'. Indeed, to differentiate Maggie from the other characters in the novel, and to negate her inheritance of the indifference, hopelessness, sterility, and cynicism of her parents' world, Crane gradually withdraws her from participation in the events of the narrative. Her character is not revealed in action, but in withdrawal into isolation, and she seldom speaks directly as others do.

Maggie's mistaken conception of Pete as her saviour from the brutality and ugliness of her home and work, Donald Pizer argues, 'results from her enclosed world, a world which has given her romantic illusions just as it has supplied others with moral poses.'<sup>490</sup> Indeed, there may be considerable irony that in running to Pete, Maggie appears to flee into the very same world she wished to escape. Like the Johnsons, Pete desires to maintain the respectability of his 'home', the bar in which he works, although his environment of choice for his liaisons with Maggie is the theatrical scene of the Bowery. Clearly Maggie is concerned that she will not fit in either to Pete's place of entertainment, 'afraid she might appear small and mouse-colored' (p. 21). However, it is also highly significant that this line comes immediately before that describing the drinking and destruction of her mother, as if to highlight not only the difference between the two, and Maggie as heredity anomaly, but also her lack of attachment to *any* space or place at this juncture of the text. The man-made, enclosed urban settings are out of harmony with Crane's protagonist and are instrumental in determining her destiny onto the streets. The Bowery theatre, a place associated with distraction and vicarious experience, appears to give Maggie moments of pleasure, as she takes in the emollient scenes on stage: 'No thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar and cuff factory came to her' (p. 24). Yet even the theatre and the dance halls, with their wealth of imagined possibilities, provide no satisfaction as independent spaces, for Maggie is obliged to lean 'with a dependent air toward her companion [Pete]. She was timid, as if fearing his anger or displeasure' (p. 38). Away from the unsatisfactory and alien familial space of home, ensconced within 'a hall of irregular shape, [...] [f]rom her [Maggie's]

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<sup>490</sup> Donald Pizer, 'Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and American Naturalism', in *Maggie*, pp. 186-193 (p. 191).

eyes had been plucked all look of self-reliance' (p. 38). Although Maggie can escape the immediate confines of her home and her place of work in the factory to a place of apparent emancipation, she cannot escape being enclosed by the combination of amoral warfare (now sexual) and moral poses which is the pervasive force in the places of her childhood and adolescence, as she is momentarily caught once more in the Victorian snare of prescribed femininity.

Little wonder then, that as 'a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl' (p. 16), a puzzling child, despite the dirt of the streets and her peer associations, Maggie is a spectacle, stared at by 'Grey-headed men' and 'Smoothed-cheeked boys' (p. 39). Dislocated in the world of the Bowery, Maggie is a figure under the gaze of tenement 'philosophers', characters Crane assigns to deliberate over the nature of her condition. The young Maggie's early deferment of Bowery behaviour confuses them, for, as I have argued, there is no dirt from Rum Alley in her veins. How is it, the tenement philosophers ask themselves, that a girl born and raised in the Bowery can have escaped the then perceived stigma of Bowery existence? As Horwitz argues, Maggie 'is the exemplary figure of aesthetic interest in the text and in her neighborhood. Her family and friends continually comment on her as a heroine in a play. [...] *Maggie* emphasizes that going to the theater, watching imitations, induces in the spectator [...] the illusion that we are not reenacting absorbed ideals.'<sup>491</sup> Indeed, Maggie's tenement neighbours act as a naturalistic Greek chorus, representing the community and the embodiment of a cohesion that Maggie rejects:

Through the open doors curious eyes stared in at Maggie. Children ventured into the room and ogled her, as if they formed the front row at a theatre. Women, without, bended toward each other and whispered, nodding their heads with airs of profound philosophy. A baby, overcome with curiosity concerning this object at which all were looking, sidled forward and touched her dress, cautiously, as if investigating a red-hot stove (p. 48).

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<sup>491</sup> Horwitz, 'Maggie and the Sociological Paradigm', p. 624.

As chorus, the tenement community also interprets the action, pities, consoles, takes sides, criticises, and moralises. But it is a belligerent chorus, that damns and ostracises despite its own hypocrisy. For like a newly-discovered species, Maggie is on display as an anomalous exhibit to an audience, who, as I have argued, determine her value by an entrenched set of Victorian middle-class moral codes and poses. Indeed, the orchestrated way that the other inhabitants of the Rum Alley tenement engage in a waxing and waning of movement is so prescribed as to be almost melodic, and in the numerous occupations of Crane's Bowery characters there is a certain harmony that orchestrates this group of otherwise disparate individuals within a very specific space, wherein each fulfils their assigned role. Indeed, metaphors of theatre and performance seem most appropriate to Crane's characters of the Bowery, and, as David Weimer argues, the same holds for the frenetic tempo he sets for their *forced* lives <sup>492</sup> (my italics). The sheer numbers that accompany the opening scene in Chapter II attest to the overwhelming prescribed experiences of the inhabitants of Crane's Bowery that are doomed to repeat from birth until death, and is worth quoting in full:

Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and hurled it against a hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels (p. 6).

The experience of Crane's Bowery inhabitants suggests a feeling of fatality, the sense that the city environment closes so tightly around them as to allow no exit of any kind. Their environment is a stage set for a script already written, whereby each actor plays their assigned part without deviation, to a condemnatory audience with entrenched Victorian ideas of

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<sup>492</sup> David R. Weimer, *The City as Metaphor* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 53.

acceptable behaviour. If, however, rules or communal conceptions are not accepted, Crane appears to suggest, then there is no way out except through isolation and death.

### **The City as Metaphor**

But Crane's obliqueness and indirection, his distortion of the expected through the isolation and subsequent display of the central character, shocks readers and critics alike into a recognition that a conventional belief or an obvious 'truth' may be false and harmful. While the city imagined by Crane has both historical and representative elements, it is also, Weimer observes, 'to some degree autonomous and unique.'<sup>493</sup> Crane's New York has a life beyond that of the mere literal record, giving the reader cause to wonder if the city is 'solid', that is to say, prosaic, identifiable, or unambiguous. Coming at the literary city in this way, through the fabric of symbol and the nuances of tone, the city is a metaphor for Maggie's own shifting position, an extension of her psyche, for significantly, 'Maggie considered she was not what they thought her' (p. 39); but then Maggie is never what anyone ever thinks she is. At home and at leisure, she wears a borrowed cloak of identity that she is obliged to perpetually shrug off because she cannot adopt the prescribed poses it determines for her. At work, in the collar and cuff factory, the air 'strangled her' and,

She knew she was gradually and surely shrivelling in the hot, stuffy room. She regarded some of the grizzled women in the room, mere mechanical contrivances sewing seams and grinding out, with heads bended over their work, tales of imagined or real girlhood happiness, past drunks, the baby at home, and unpaid wages. She speculated how long her youth would endure. [...] She imagined herself, in an exasperating future, as a scrawny woman with an eternal grievance (p. 25).

Maggie is not, herself, mere observer, but a potential part of that which is observed, and without question, Crane sees as tortured what others accept as 'normal', detecting the extraordinary in the accustomed. Maggie's interiority, her solitude and isolation, are precisely the mark of her superiority, made evident by her autonomy and agency, and consist of a belief that she is not a product of habituation, nor an imitation of an ideal social type. Maggie does not

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<sup>493</sup> Weimer, *The City as Metaphor*, p. 2.

form part of the tenement chorus but is set apart, and her relationship with the city streets is the relationship of one observed, like the city, through the lens of the remarkably unfamiliar.

There is an underlying coherence and continuum in the text that suggests the pervading relationship between the internal musings of the solitary heroine and her exterior environment, and places of home, of work, and of leisure are ostensibly the backdrop, the environments by which identification is achieved and enforced. However, I would argue that as Crane understands the philosophy, it is the streets and their very mutability that offer the means by which Maggie can reinvent herself, for in these spaces she will refuse to reproduce her unwelcome inheritance. Although the thrust of Crane's social concern is sharpened by his setting the massiveness of towering business buildings and the glitter of theatre and restaurants against the drab tenements overflowing with work-weary or drunken women, sadly neglected but knowing children, and men frustrated and brawling or waiting in a bread-line, the focus is centred upon Maggie as an individual in these urban scenes, as a soul isolated. Taking possession of the city streets, Maggie can enact the traditional prerogatives of the privileged urban spectator, to act, in Baudelaire's phrase, as *flâneur*, characterised by a 'freedom to move about in the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others.'<sup>494</sup> Indeed, it is worth considering the extent to which Maggie could be construed as a *flâneuse*. As Sally Ledger observes, the gendering of public space in the second half of the nineteenth century has too readily been accepted as a further embodiment of the public/private, masculine/feminine binary opposition.<sup>495</sup> But these divisions were not as fixed as they may have appeared, and the ideology of separate spheres was challenged by the movement of both working- and middle-class females into mass production and active labour, and consumer activities respectively. In the late nineteenth century, feminists and social reformers too emerged into the public spaces of the city, threatening the patriarchal construction of the nineteenth-century metropolis as a masculine public space. Far from being imprisoned by the private sphere of the tenement slum or suburban domesticity, girls and women from all classes at the fin de siècle were visible in the

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<sup>494</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, p. 151.

<sup>495</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, p. 151.

public spaces of the city in ever-increasing numbers, transforming the cityscape into a contested sociocultural terrain. As an active player in the urban scene, Maggie can stroll across the divided space of the fin-de-siècle metropolis, be it imagined in London or New York, recovering and reconstructing her identity in relation to both the diversity she encounters and the emancipation that the streets provide. As Judith Walkowitz understands the various juxtapositions:

Middle-class men were not the sole explorers and interpreters of the city in the volatile decade of the 1880s. On the contrary, as the end of the century approached, this “dreadfully delightful city” became a contested terrain, where new commercial spaces, new journalistic practices, and a range of public spectacles and reform activities inspired a different set of social actors to assert their own claims to self-creation in the public domain. Thanks to the material changes and cultural contests of the late-Victorian city, protesting workers and “gents” of marginal class position, female philanthropists and “platform women,” Salvation Army lasses and match girls, as well as glamorized “girls in business,” made their public appearances and established places and viewpoints in relation to the urban panorama.<sup>496</sup>

The paradox of Maggie, as *flâneuse*, but also as child prostitute, is that her engagement with the streets is both symbolically central and socially peripheral. Having established a stark contrast to domesticated feminine virtue, but also, as I shall demonstrate, to the disorderly behaviour of the groups of prostitutes operating in the music halls, who are dangerous in their collectivity, the isolated activity of Maggie, as lone streetwalker, is emblematic of both urban alienation and female emancipation. As a stage set with expectation for particular role-playing, the claustrophobic urban places suffocate opportunities for autonomous behaviours. It is only away from the places of prescriptive poses that agency can emerge, whereby unexpected behaviours can develop. By adopting the streets as her own, Maggie is liberated from the collective and unbending performances demanded by a position of domesticated daughter or music-hall prostitute, and her desires and behaviours are hers alone to choose; she is no longer obliged to fulfil a role determined and demanded by others. Indeed, Crane’s desire was to stress

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<sup>496</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), p. 18.

that the vicious deterministic force in the tenement slums was not its poor housing or inadequate diet, but its adopted morality. Crane's focus in *Maggie* then is less on the inherent evil of slum life than on the damage done by a false moral environment imposed on that life and perpetually replicated, attacking the sanctimonious self-deception and sentimental gratification of moral poses which, I argue, lose their authority in a cityscape of streets of isolation and anonymity. The space of the street environment enables multiplicities of performance, particularly when that behaviour is enabled by isolation, where the absence of behavioural markers of familial, peer, and societal conformity predominates. Maggie's is a symbiotic relationship with the streets, whereby she is disenfranchised from society's constraints as she becomes more subsumed by the anonymity of the thoroughfares she walks. Thus, when she is rejected by Pete, Maggie 'wandered aimlessly for several blocks. She stopped once and asked aloud a question *of herself*: "Who?"' (p. 50, my italics). Her autonomous questioning is made possible as she passes '*between* rows of houses with sternness and stolidity stamped upon their features', (p. 51, my italics), and her alienation from the buildings of foundation and permanence is precisely the emancipation required to reconsider her identity. Her engagement with the street itself, as a place of movement, of freedom and autonomy, is enabled both by and because of its space as a landscape of possibilities, practised outside and not in.

Yet despite her newly-acquired emancipation on the streets, 'the tall black factories *shut in the street*' (p. 53, my italics), and the places of the cityscape that Maggie has sought to escape represent the dramatic and symbolic facades of appearances that determine the inevitable fate of the nineteenth-century girl of the street. Concomitant with this is a steady shift in the symbolic light, from the brilliant and gaudy main avenues to the deadly black hue of the river. Her street journey, 'Crossing glittering avenues [...] in her handsome cloak, daintily lifting her skirts and picking for her well-shod feet the dryer spots upon the pavements' (p. 52), takes her through the city into darker blocks as her potential punters become progressively less appealing. Significantly, 'The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips [and] the structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things' (p. 53). Indeed, it appears that the physical places of the cityscape that constrained individuality as they framed the



preceding scenes, here finally annihilate it, as Maggie loses her name to become anonymous, 'the girl' (pp. 52-53). As either the subject of the intense scrutiny of 'the gaze', or as an anonymous, unseen object, Crane's Maggie calls to mind the impossible demands of a pervasive and influential nineteenth-century femininity. Passed over or scrutinised, Maggie's final walk culminates in a succession of judgements and mistaken identities from the men that she encounters, for whom her curious and yet multiplicitous appearance creates a state of confusion.

For although Maggie exhibits an element of vulnerability on the streets, she does not exhibit a 'need for a male rescuer'<sup>497</sup> as Hapke contends. Indeed, I would argue that her lack of success in her trade, and the litany of male subjects that she encounters as she moves towards her death, suggests instead the uselessness of each of these male tropes that girls encounter and should indulge in accordance with nineteenth-century ideology. Her rejection of each – rather than the other way around – suggests *her* resolution and refusal to conform, an act of autonomous agency that can only take place in the space of the street. Crane's Maggie, is, therefore not a casualty of city life, and does not lose her wits as well as her 'virtue'. Crane's narrative is not the formulaic plot of the seduced innocent driven mad by city villainy, but an elevation of the slum novel, and with it, the child prostitute, to art, through a self-imposed isolation that enables liberation and agency. Certainly, as Dowling argues, 'Crane offers no compelling evidence [...] to suggest that Maggie ever felt remorse or self-loathing for her entry into prostitution,'<sup>498</sup> and his distortion of her role as the girl who went wrong overthrows socially accepted norms of 'evil' and 'virtue'. His depiction of Maggie presents us, instead, with an assessment of the prostitute's response to seduction, betrayal, and isolation that offers a portrait of a 'girl of the streets' with an emerging mind and will of her own. Undoubtedly, the cyclical nature of the destructive familial trope that Maggie rejects contrasts sharply with the intense relationship that she fosters with the streets that embrace and contain her, whilst also allowing her the freedom to grow, much as a sympathetic parent might do. Her relationship with

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<sup>497</sup> Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong*, p. 48.

<sup>498</sup> Dowling and Pizer, 'A Cold Case File Reopened', p. 48.

the city streets and her isolation within, differentiate her from Crane's portrayal of other prostitutes, offering a new reading of the street child that does not buy into the traditional trajectory of the 'fallen girl'. Indeed, because Maggie's initial 'fall' occurs at the novel's midpoint, *between* Chapters IX and X, rather than within any chapter, Crane emphasises that what is at issue is not the alleged sinfulness of the act, but its cause and societal consequence, and that environment and moral judgement determine Maggie's demise, not a sense of personal moral failure. Indeed, the concerns of the child prostitute that Crane expresses are neither sensational, as in the Gothic thrillers of the mid-nineteenth century, nor pornographic, as in the underground fiction of the same period. Instead, he makes the child prostitute the subject of serious literary attention, although, as I have suggested, her occupation does not provide the focus of the text, which is concerned more with her relationship with the city space and its inhabitants therein. To a certain extent, her complexity as a child prostitute, for clearly the presence of her youth cannot be called into question, is resolved by removing her from the knowledge and the wider consequences of carnal experience. She becomes, in effect, both isolated and desexualised, her apparent lack of sexual desire empowering her with a certain moral superiority over both the carnal male and the sexually voracious female of her peers.

Indeed, by a series of pairings with other females involved in sexual relationships, Crane develops the idea of Maggie as 'out of place'. As Hapke observes, 'In a proleptic dance hall scene which takes place after Maggie has fled her family, she draws back frightened, in horror of contamination from prostitutes seated with customers.'<sup>499</sup> Contrasted with the hardened professional prostitutes, exemplified by Nell, Maggie, as child-woman, is an isolated and solitary witness to social injustice rather than a carnally knowing participant in commercialised vice. Her lack of qualification for her trade is contrasted with Nell's experience, who as an unrepentant and toughened professional has a seemingly endless adaptability of performance that strengthens Crane's defence of Maggie who refuses to adapt. Crane isolates Maggie by not only contrasting her lack of experience with Nell's expertise, but also by

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<sup>499</sup> Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong*, p. 54.

minimising her own hired sexuality; in her ‘robotic soliciting’<sup>500</sup> Maggie acts out a trancelike response, not as Hapke suggests, to her abandonment, but as a cloak, a new guise of self-protection as she adopts the pose of the street girl. She reacts to Pete’s rebuff by adopting ‘a demeanour of intentness as if going somewhere’ (p. 51), and after selling sex, she hurries forward, ‘as if intent upon reaching a distant home’ (p. 52) rather than expressing the need to solicit new clients. The home she seeks, however, is not the home of her early childhood, nor one that can be found within the prescriptive city sites of her youth. For Crane’s language, as Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins argue, ‘is clear, stressing as it does the discrepancy between what seems and what is, between acting from a given motive and acting “as if” one had that motive. Indeed, Crane’s saying that Maggie walks “as if” intent on reaching a distant home pretty much amounts to saying that she is not in fact on her way to such a place, literally or metaphorically, and serves as an ironic reminder of the violence and squalor of her own Bowery “home.”’<sup>501</sup> For although, in essentials, Maggie Johnson follows the pattern of Hogarth’s ‘A Harlot’s Progress’, representing the ‘fallen’ girl’s characteristic journey from innocence to death, Crane’s retelling of the story lifts it above earlier stories of prostitution; Maggie’s acute awareness and rejection of home as a place of refuge, and Crane’s emphasis on her solitude and engagement with both city space and place, makes her apparent downward spiral original and open to further interrogation. Indeed, he restricts his account of her prostitution and death to a single chapter, Chapter XVII, which, as I shall argue, is quite remarkable in itself.

Chapter XVII is one of the most skilfully and economically constructed in the text and has been the subject of contentious debate since the novel’s publication. For many critics, Chapter XVII telescopes Maggie’s path of degradation along a linear journey, from the higher-class places of entertainment through to the squalid reaches of the city. Her final venture is understood as ‘a drastic foreshortening or symbolic telescoping of the inevitable decline and

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<sup>500</sup> Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong*, p. 56.

<sup>501</sup> Hershel Parker and Brian Higgins, ‘Maggie’s “Last Night”: Authorial Design and Editorial Patching’, *Studies in the Novel*, 10.1, Stephen Crane (Spring 1978), 65-75 (pp. 70-71) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29531902>> [accessed 10 October 2016].

ruination to which Maggie and all the women of her order must come' as Brennan argues.<sup>502</sup> Yet it would seem unlikely that Crane's ambitious and alternative portrayal of the girl prostitute would culminate in a death that follows such a prescriptive and traditional trajectory, that suggests that she is merely another 'of her order.' Just how, then, does Maggie meet her death? Is it by suicide, foul play, or accident? The very ambiguity surrounding the circumstances of Maggie's death attests more to the multiplicity of meanings and associations that each type of demise carries with it as its burden. And because of the paradox of language, Crane's deployment of so few words to describe Maggie's death produces a greater range of possible meanings. There is no literal reference to Maggie's death by drowning, (although it was a commonplace of reformist literature that prostitutes came to their end by committing suicide in the river); this must instead be inferred by the reader. And as her family and her lover have failed to recognise her identity, it would appear that Maggie is doomed to unwillingly assume the only role available, the traditional role of fallen girl in which *they* have cast her. But her autonomous action suggests many things, not least of all that Crane constructs a wholly ambiguous death for his heroine precisely because of the end-of-century ambivalent attitude toward the nature of the female child and his own objections to the visceral hatred that prostitution so often inspired.

Biographically speaking, Crane had an unorthodox relationship to prostitution. As I have suggested, he had the distinction of knowing the brothels, bars, and dance halls of the Bowery district better than any other well-known writer of his day, but also 'an obsessive notion about the blamelessness of prostitutes'<sup>503</sup> whom he always treated with deference and respect. Such biographical details suggest that he would be inclined to design the demise of his heroine in his original 1893 text as a radical departure from the Victorian norm, simultaneously affirming yet challenging the prevailing trope of the street girl, whose descent, he believed, was over-simplistic. For although an ordinary rather than an extraordinary girl, Maggie has a conscience, agency, and personal dignity, refusing to accept her inevitable fate and her 'material

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<sup>502</sup> Brennan, 'Irony and Symbolic Structure', p. 178.

<sup>503</sup> Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong*, p. 48.

success' as a prostitute. Maggie's relief from the suffocating confinement within which she has lived is then, the river, her final baptism, and she '*chooses* biological extinction'<sup>504</sup> (my italics). Her escape comes from a determined agency that propels her towards deliverance, and she disengages as a means of self-preservation. Maggie has been pressed out of life, but there are no tear-jerking scenes of sunlight or starlight and river, and hopes of spiritual redemption. Her self-murder is then, both her most courageous act and her ultimate capitulation. To have allowed her to remain 'pure' and escaped poverty would have bought into the dime/penny novels and tenement fictions of the nineteenth century. At the core, I suggest Crane protects Maggie from the loathsomeness of her life rather than protecting the world from the moral threat she posed. Her death therefore provides a more satisfying swansong for its release rather than the misery its absence would impose. Protection becomes death itself, and Maggie withdraws from the urban stage proffered as her way out of futility and chaos. In her death, she effectively rises above her Rum Alley environment and her social order. Crane presents this scene in an unorthodox and compelling way, like a dramatic mime, aimed directly at the audience, the reader, in the 'front row of the theatre' who makes a final assessment of Maggie's treatment and departure. Although others in Rum Alley remain physically alive, he suggests, spiritually they are dead, part of the chaotic cityscape beyond which they have little or no dimension, destitute of agency and governed, instead, by inexorable laws and the demands of moral posing. Jimmie's 'survival' is a 'death-in-life' capitulation to the exterior landscape and environment, whereby his defence for surviving the destruction from outer sources of urban misery is to take on the attributes of, to become, the exterior world, and to relinquish self-assertion, becoming, through mimicry, what he perceives.

It is no surprise then that the novel does not conclude with Maggie's death, but with the cyclical perpetuation of the family by which each adopts the imprint of the previous generation. Even though Maggie's life is played out, the final chapter of the novel serves as an obituary for her, as Maggie is again passively made into a figure to justify the society that has both ignored

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<sup>504</sup> Robert J. Begiebing, 'Stephen Crane's "Maggie": The Death of the Self', *The American Imago: a psychoanalytic journal for the arts and sciences*, 34.1 (1977), 50-71 (p. 66).

and failed her, as all action and consciousnesses are again scripted, reiterated familiar or typical. The half-witted Mrs Johnson wishing hysterically to possess Maggie's corpse so that she might put her baby shoes on her adolescent feet symbolises the foolish hope for miracles in the conventional theme. For Maggie there is *no* redemption, and her betrayed girlhood can never be renewed. As Jimmie says to his mother, "Dey [the shoes] won't fit her now, yeh damn fool" (p. 58) and Eric Solomon observes, 'The faked sentimentality of the mother's subsequent hysterical sobbing and her maudlin emphasis on the memory of Maggie's wearing worsted boots is an obscene—if pitiful—parody of mother love; [...] this version of mourning is grotesque.'<sup>505</sup> Societal constraints and great, impersonal forces doom the free and spontaneous individual in Crane's cityscape, but for Maggie, death symbolises emancipation from such familiar and familial suffocation, the ultimate isolation as a means of transcendence.

### Arthur Symons's Poetry of Cities

As a 'revolt from ready-made impressions and conclusions' and the 'bondage of traditional form',<sup>506</sup> the unique and special way of reinterpreting contemporary relationships with the city that I have explored in Crane's *Maggie* found its poetic expression in the work of his contemporary, Arthur Symons. In an age when the pressure of an increasingly scientific, materialistic, and notably urban culture was changing the nature of contemporary experience, Symons understood that 'To be modern in poetry, to represent really oneself and one's surroundings, the world as it is to-day, to be modern and yet poetical, is, perhaps, the most difficult, as it is certainly the most interesting, of all artistic achievements.'<sup>507</sup> Yet, significantly, it was the 'poetry of cities' Symons concluded, that held the key to this achievement, and 'its capacity for dealing with London, with what one sees or might see there, indoors and out.'<sup>508</sup> As I have suggested with Crane, and as I shall explore with Symons, the poets and novelists of the 1890s stopped regarding the metropolis as a 'noxious drain or force of devastation (the phrases

<sup>505</sup> Eric Solomon, 'Maggie as a Three-Act Drama', in *Maggie*, pp. 203-209 (pp. 208-209).

<sup>506</sup> Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 87.522 (November 1893), pp. 858-867 (p. 859).

<sup>507</sup> Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1897), pp. 188-189.

<sup>508</sup> Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures*, p. 188.

are Ruskin's)<sup>509</sup> and consequently their work embodied a new use of urban material.<sup>510</sup> As

Holbrook Jackson observed:

during the Eighteen Nineties, as in one or two other periods in history, art threw a glamour over the town, and all the artificial things conjured up by that word. Poets, it is true, did not abandon the pastoral mood, but they added to it an enthusiasm for what was urban. Where, in the past, they found romance only in wild and remote places, among what are called natural things, they now found romance in streets and theatres, in taverns and restaurants, in bricks and mortar.<sup>511</sup>

Writers of the nineties achieved a new kind of liberation that had often appeared repressed in their predecessors,<sup>512</sup> and, unleashed into a new poetic landscape, the isolated figure of the child found in the city a convincing milieu of spiritual adventures, which were modified or even created by the ambient space of the urban.

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<sup>509</sup> G. Robert Stange, 'The Frightened Poets', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities Volume 2*, ed. by H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 475-494 (p. 489).

<sup>510</sup> The juxtaposition of New York and London in this chapter is reflective of a number of similarities that necessarily align these two cities at the fin de siècle. Notwithstanding their claim to be the two largest cities in the world by 1900, from the 1880s onwards both the UK and the USA, as I have demonstrated, were at the forefront of developing the science of child study. There was also much in common between British and American writings about cities, with significant and revealing differences. The fear of the city in the mid-century was nourished from similar sources both in England and the United States. Writers like Thoreau and Emerson employed stock romantic arguments, contrasting Nature with man-made civilisation, and lamenting the equation of Civilisation with New York streets. Very similar arguments about the detrimental effects of city life on religion were advanced in both England and the United States; London's Toynbee Hall was founded in 1884 by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, a Church of England vicar and his teacher wife, as a place for future leaders to live and work as volunteers in London's East End, bringing them face-to-face with poverty. It was visited by a number of Americans during the 1880s and 1890s, including Stanton Coit, the founder of New York's Neighbourhood Guild, as a source of inspiration for social reform. However, the fear of city crime in the United States, particularly of highly organised crime, was greater than that in Britain, and Conservative British writers, in particular, argued that it was in America that the 'dangers' of the city were most apparent. Even Oscar Wilde, arriving in New York in 1882, commented on the city's high pressure living, saying that all the inhabitants seemed to be 'in a hurry to catch a train'. Fundamentally, however, the urban revolution in the United States, in terms of population numbers, evoked the same ambivalence as the British response, detailed above in the words of Ruskin and Pater among others. During the last years of the century, there was increasing recognition that both cities, New York and London, were posing similar problems and providing similar opportunities, dominated by what were often similar trends. See Asa Briggs's *Victorian Cities*, especially Chapters 2, 8, and 9 for a detailed discussion that compares and contrasts both Victorian London and New York.

<sup>511</sup> Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, p. 105.

<sup>512</sup> Stange reads the work of many English nineteenth-century poets and writers as 'anti-urban' and understands the transformation in the 1890s to an appreciation of the city as 'one of the clearest signs of the break between the writers of the nineties and their High Victorian predecessors' (p. 489). He contrasts the work of De Quincey, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Whitman, Morris, and Symonds amongst others to support his argument.

Vividly conscious that his was ‘an age without convictions’<sup>513</sup> and inspired, like Crane and Gotch, by a greatly increased receptivity to previously unexplored sources of inspiration, Symons’s imagistic exercises are genuinely innovative. Looking to organise his vision of the world and experimenting originally with ways of expressing it, Symons’s notion was that art, literary and visual, was free to treat any subject it found congenial. Art was therefore essentially independent of any wider moral function and the role of the artist was of observer and recorder of a new kind of art and literature that had the qualities that mark the end of great periods: ‘an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity.’<sup>514</sup> Often presenting the reader simply with an ‘image’ or a series of fleeting subjective impressions, Symons could deftly sketch a scene and evoke a mood without seeking, explicitly at least, any social or moral interpretation, as I have argued, Crane attempts and successfully achieves with *Maggie*. Indeed, Symons’s poetic style, in its lucidity and direct, colloquial tone, reflects the prose of *Maggie*, as well as his personal desire ‘to be modern in poetry.’<sup>515</sup> He understood a simplicity of style to be indispensable, rejecting artifice and embracing, like Crane, the rhythms of ‘ordinary’ speech. Generally avoiding the effects of strangeness and mysticism associated with much Symbolist verse, Symons preferred simplicity and directness. As I shall explore in his poem ‘Nora on the Pavement’, Symons, like Crane, presents the reader with a traditional trope, but his ability to focus sharply on the telling detail, to capture the essential flavour of a scene with rapid, deft strokes, enables him to create a sense that this briefly glimpsed scene is part of a wider, unseen context. Symons’s poem offers a new way of seeing a familiar trope, drawing on an artistic history but reshaping and redefining that history to express the ambivalence of the idea of the urban child at the fin de siècle. As Carolyn Steedman argues, ‘A new kind of time came into being “in the nineties”, a form of time that was born both of recastings and rewritings of the historical past, and also of a long nineteenth-century development, of an interior space or place

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<sup>513</sup> Roger Holdsworth, ‘Introduction’ to Arthur Symons’s *Selected Writings*, ed. by Roger Holdsworth (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2003), pp. 9-24 (p. 11).

<sup>514</sup> Symons, ‘The Decadent Movement’, pp. 858-859.

<sup>515</sup> Holdsworth, ‘Introduction’, p. 14.



within human beings, expressed most clearly in the shape of the child.<sup>516</sup> Thus the child became, paradoxically perhaps, the most potent symbol of the waning age, whereby childhood itself became a process of living towards the future, the symbol of discovery not of decline, a new area of change, of growth and healthy disturbance in the unlikeliest of places. The girl child in the cityscape who was neither understood nor judged by who she was and how she behaved, but precisely by her relationship with her immediate urban space, articulated a new, yet symbiotic relationship between child solitude and the ‘unnatural’ place of the city.

Despite Holdsworth’s suggestion that Symons, ‘hanker[ed] sentimentally after a never-never land of pastoral innocence and tranquillity’,<sup>517</sup> I would argue that Symons appears indifferent to an imagined rural ‘innocence’, finding appeal instead, as I have suggested, in the urban, in any ‘smoke-polluted place, / Where bird or flower might never be.’<sup>518</sup> For the imagery in Symons’s verse is not drawn from nature, nor was he attracted by ‘natural’ or customarily expected conduct. The settings for his poems are the music halls, the bars, the London streets, and the rooms of prostitutes, and the titles of his poems are explicitly informative on this point. ‘Nora on the Pavement’ is included in his collection *London Nights*, and suggests, like Crane’s title, the move from individual to universal terms. The poem’s title refers to one person, whose place, ‘on the pavement’ suggests her position as either ‘outcast’ or perhaps, like Maggie’s, the occupation of prostitution. The collection title, *London Nights*, places the poem within the framework of another large city, (as Crane used *A Story of New York*), as a trope to place the text within an urban framework. But Symons’s reference to the night hones the collection to the hours of darkness, when threat and menace in the city, any city, are deemed to be greatest. Indeed, in *London Nights*, despite rejecting the artifice of style of speech as I have suggested, Symons evokes a landscape that is new to English poetry, where the ‘shocking and consciously “modern” features are accounts of erotic passages with girls from the street and the stage [...]

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<sup>516</sup> Carolyn Steedman, ‘New Time: Mignon and her Meanings’, in *Fin de Siècle/Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth-Century*, ed. by John Stokes (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), pp. 102-116 (pp. 102-103).

<sup>517</sup> Holdsworth, ‘Introduction’, p. 14.

<sup>518</sup> Symons, ‘The Primrose Dance: Tivoli’, in *Selected Writings*, pp. 40-41 (p. 41).

[and] the episodes which link the poems [...] take their origins from the conditions of metropolitan life.<sup>519</sup> But more than mere backdrop to setting or subject, Symons's cityscape projects a sense of the fragility, beauty, and the impermanence of the images cast up by the London night, whereby the poetry of 'Nora' is communicated by the relationship of the subject to the quality of immediate space and place. For Symons's subject belongs uniquely to the echoing city streets, for whom the medium of dance does not demand reciprocity or communication, but instead embraces an unselfconscious autonomy.

Indeed, *London Nights* is vividly unified by the theme of involvement in the dance, a theme which unites the art of so many fin-de-siècle poets. Because of its emblematic suggestion of artistic autonomy, the ubiquitous image of the dancer in late nineteenth-century French and British art and literature was a persistent Symbolist preoccupation.<sup>520</sup> Thus, the many depictions of Salomé, most notably as decadent child in Oscar Wilde's play of that title first published in 1893, convey the nineties fascination with the dance, which, as Symons understands it, is a means of transcending and transgressing societal conventions as well as expressing an act of autonomy for the dancer who achieves liberation for the self. Indeed, in the 1890s, a most eloquent statement concerning the dance occurs in Symons's own essay 'The World as Ballet':

The dance, then, is art because it is doubly nature: and if nature, as we are told, is sinful, it is doubly sinful. A waltz, in a drawing-room, takes us suddenly out of all that convention, away from those guardians of our order who sit around the walls, approvingly, unconsciously; in its winding motion it raises an invisible wall about us, shutting us off from the whole world, in with ourselves.<sup>521</sup>

One of Symons's most notable lyrics in the *London Nights* collection is 'La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge' (written in 1892), which explores both Symbolist technique with suggestions of a decadent sensibility in the image of the dream-like dancer. But as I have suggested, and as Karl Beckson notes, the poem does not employ 'arcane diction or an impenetrable surface that

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<sup>519</sup> Stange, 'The Frightened Poets', p. 492.

<sup>520</sup> Beckson, *London in the 1890s*, p. 332.

<sup>521</sup> Arthur Symons, 'The World as Ballet', in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1906), pp. 387-391 (p. 388).

mystifies the reader.<sup>522</sup> Rather, the rhythms of the text, the run-on lines that distinguish both this poem and 'Nora', approximate the movement of the dancer in her self-absorbed transcendence, a movement that creates a mirrored image of the isolated self and the suggestion of artistic autonomy:

Alone, apart, one dancer watches  
Her mirrored, morbid grace;  
Before the mirror, face to face,  
Alone she watches  
Her morbid, vague, ambiguous grace.

And, enigmatically smiling,  
In the mysterious night,  
She dances for her own delight,  
A shadow smiling  
Back to a shadow in the night.<sup>523</sup>

Significantly, Marah Gubar remarks that child dancers and performers on the Victorian stage are often understood through an adult desire to 'freeze' the child in place as the personification of youthful innocence, 'thrust on the stage for adults' viewing pleasure; child performers were valued not for their skills, but for the opportunity they gave adults to ogle their bodies while simultaneously enthusing about their innocence.<sup>524</sup> Yet, in *London Nights*, the poetry discovers the moment which allows the individual to transcend mundane and prescribed existence through a variety of avenues, or for the child performer, for Nora, through her place on the urban pavement.

### **'Nora on the Pavement'**

When the audience is separated from the performance, the performance becomes autonomous, and so in removing Nora from the confines of a theatrical spectatorship, from the boundaries of the music hall, Nora may be understood as Symons's portrayal of the one authentic 'natural' dancer in the midst of the highly structured artificial ballet. Indeed, he suggests that she has

<sup>522</sup> Beckson, *London in the 1890s*, p. 332.

<sup>523</sup> Symons, 'La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge', in *Selected Writings*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>524</sup> Marah Gubar, 'The Drama of Precocity: Child Performers on the Victorian Stage', in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, pp. 63-78 (p. 63).

been somehow ‘held back’ by the choreographed steps of the ballet chorus, even whilst the pavement spectators echo the tension in the ballet troupe; for they at once desire her but are bemused by her solitary deviation from the standard form, an echo of the tenement dwellers who enact the role of naturalistic Greek chorus in *Maggie*:

Petulant and bewildered,  
Thronging desires and longing looks recur,  
And memorably re-incarnate her,  
As I remember that old longing,  
A footlight fancy, petulant and bewildered;

There where the ballet circles,  
See her, but ah! not free her from the race  
Of glittering lines that link and interlace;  
This colour now, now that, may be her,  
In the bright web of those harmonious circles.<sup>525</sup>

In these stanzas, as Heather Marcovitch argues, ‘Symons not only laments the aestheticization of natural body movements and performance but looks to Nora as an image of freedom from the set patterns of everyday life.’<sup>526</sup> As she becomes increasingly liberated from the confines of the gaze of those who would reinstate her in her prescribed role, Nora instead regresses towards the posture of the perpetual child, for whom ‘dance is life, animal life, having *its own way* passionately’<sup>527</sup> (my italics), dancing for her own delight:

But what are these dance-measures,  
Leaping and joyous, keeping time alone  
With Life’s capricious rhythm, and all her own,  
Life’s rhythm and hers, long sleeping,  
That wakes, and knows not why, in these dance measures.

Nora’s own power is emphatically self-centred, its portrayal through the child dancer solipsistic and instinctive rather than wilfully delinquent, exhibiting an air of autonomous authority that is simultaneously exclusive in its physical manifestation, and inclusive, allowing an element of

<sup>525</sup> Symons, ‘Nora on the Pavement’, in *Selected Writings*, pp. 38-39 (p. 39). All subsequent quotations from the poem are from this edition.

<sup>526</sup> Heather Marcovitch, ‘Dance, Ritual, and Arthur Symons’s London Nights’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 56.4 (2013), 462-482 (p. 470) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/510830>> [accessed 20 September 2016].

<sup>527</sup> Symons, ‘The World as Ballet’, p. 387.

intrusion from the reader to infiltrate the symbol of liberation. Nora is not a ‘self-consciously naughty child[ren], taking delight in being implicated in the forbidden,’<sup>528</sup> but an image of life and potential, ‘Child, and most blithe, and wild as any elf, / And innocently spendthrift of herself, / And guileless and most unbeguiled, Herself at last, leaps free the very Nora.’

For Symons, this connection between isolation from the prescriptive confines of the troupe, and a detachment from the normative existence and expectations of the street audience, appears to have made his child street dancer an especially receptive vehicle for exploring female child liberation through autonomous behaviour. Freed from the music hall onto the streets of the city, Nora’s isolation marks her ability to transgress space and place, exploring the pleasure of the solitary child for whom the dance is the mode to individual transcendence. Indeed, *London Nights*, and ‘Nora’ in particular, offer a recurring argument that within dance is the return to a more conscious connection to the universe. Dance is the creation through which an individual can fashion an escape, not into the rare ether of some spiritual realm, but into a personal vision. As such, Nora’s dance is transformative for the child subject. The dancing girl creates a relationship with her surroundings that refutes ‘modern’ isolation, and instead, enters a space where traditional Victorian culture and society are challenged and understood as temporal trappings that thinly conceal a more essential truth: the means to transcend the banalities of everyday modern existence:

It is the soul of Nora,  
Living at last, and giving forth to the night,  
Bird-like, the burden of its own delight,  
All its desires, and all the joy of living,  
In that blithe madness of the soul of Nora.

For Symons, as for Crane, the streets of the city provide the enabling space for the execution of freedoms by way of detachment. That is, the anonymity of the cityscapes of London and New York, despite their geographical separation, is the catalyst for liberated and

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<sup>528</sup> R. van Bronswijk, ‘The Brilliance of Gas-Lit Eyes: Arthur Symons’ Erotic Auto-Voyeurism Observed’, in *“And Never Know the Joy”: Sex and the Erotic in English Poetry*, ed. by C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 287-302 (p. 297).

autonomous action that, itself, is a result of freedoms acquired through isolation. In Crane's novel and Symons's poem, urban solitude produces young women who are paradigms of incendiary girlhood. Maggie and Nora are represented as girls with willpower, looking askance at the timidity that forces other girls to merely reflect and repeat traditional ideologies. Maggie creates domestic discord and unrest. She refuses to simply dwindle away to a 'death-in-life' capitulation as represented by all those around her, and is a quiet image of defiance in the face of overwhelming adversity. She extricates herself from the incessant, cacophonous roar of the Rum Alley tenement and the sexual warfare and moral poses of its inhabitants. Even when she appears to choose to self-destruct, she threatens the very foundation of patriarchy, for she *chooses for herself*, and it is her isolation on the city streets that enables her way into, not out of, that self-destruction. Similarly, Nora's 'bird-like' soul signifies elevation, a raising of the girl in terms of status and in terms of significance. For she too demonstrates a spring of defiance. Her female energy is bristling with will that denotes the autonomous choosing of a course of self-projection and signifies both her determination and her liberation. 'Living at last', Nora experiences the same transcendence that frees Maggie from the constraints and banalities of a prescribed and enforced life, and both achieve their desire for autonomy by way of an isolated urban commune and a detachment from the herd.

## Conclusion

In her persuasive reading of nineteenth-century women's poetry, Isobel Armstrong reminds us that if 'a middle-class women's tradition is constructed by reference to the Victorian notion of what was specifically feminine [in poetry], it is likely to be formed not only out of what were predominantly male categories of the female but also out of categories which were regarded as self-evident and unproblematical.'<sup>529</sup> The plight of the girl child in Victorian images and texts involved assumptions about both gender *and* age, as well, of course, as any number of cultural and societal assumed categories into which her 'place' in society would have her neatly and unceremoniously drop. The fin-de-siècle childhood subjects of this thesis were placed in fixed locations and environments in an attempt to immobilise and contain them by ritual or vigil. Each fictional environment demonstrates the pervasive power of performative space and place to try to arrest and quash autonomy. In their search for new experiences and ways of being, the texts and images of this thesis alternate enclosed environments with open landscapes, move from home to country to city, from class to class and culture to culture, and recognise and draw our attention to the limitations of choice imposed by the cultural prescriptions to which Armstrong refers.

However, by making problematical the affective conventions and feelings associated with a feminine and childish modality of experience, the writers and artists of this thesis were able to revolutionise their representations of girlhood from within, exploring the ways that a female subject comes into being by disrupting and thus challenging that process from childhood to adulthood. The artists' and writers' insistent figuring of movement and appropriation of environment and cultural and literal boundaries can be understood as the girl child's search for an escape from the restrictions that would contain her, 'an attempt to discover ways of testing out the account of the feminine experienced in western culture by going outside its prescriptions.'<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 323.

<sup>530</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p. 325.

For the literary texts of James, Grand and Crane, and the paintings of Gotch all define their protagonists or subjects as shut out, outside, and at the margin. Each child is construed ‘as a being [...] standing on the boundary between “here” and “elsewhere”’,<sup>531</sup> caught in a space between Victorianism and Modernism, but at the same time linking, as I have demonstrated, the present with the past and the future. These images and texts turn the lens on the ways in which girlhood can move beyond the boundary, and are preoccupied with escape, with the girl’s ‘place’ or displacement in her culture and society. *What Maisie Knew* is a novel about a young girl not being at home in that most female of nineteenth-century places, and the significance of her movement across and beyond the thresholds of domesticity as lines are crossed, partitions established, and barriers broken to configure space anew. The figure of Beth Caldwell encapsulates the ways in which childhood was simultaneously understood as a crucially problematic social category and as a state of inner consciousness at the end of the nineteenth century, and her autonomous journey to liberated adulthood is made possible by both a physical and mental exploration of her singular relationship with the natural world. In Crane’s novel, Maggie questions her own sense of self, in demanding ‘Who?’, as in, ‘who am I? What am I?’, and Crane presents his autonomous female subject as unable to find representation in a culture and society of tightly-bounded and ultimately unfulfilling, prescriptive behaviours.

In 1930, the year before his death, Thomas Cooper Gotch had two paintings submitted to the Royal Academy. One of these was a portrait showing a girl of indeterminate age, with a pensive expression, positioned against a striking red background which works in harmony with the extraordinary colours in her ornate tunic. *The Exile: ‘Heavy is the Price I Paid for Love’* (figure 4.1) is the lyrical and evocative title of this work, one of Gotch’s final paintings before his death in 1931 at the age of seventy six. The portrait, we are led to understand, commanded a great deal of attention on the afternoon of its selection. It was remarked that ‘though Mr Gotch is a member of the old school, *The Exile* was painted with the vigour of a young artist.’<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Bourne Taylor, ‘Between Atavism and Altruism’, p. 90.

<sup>532</sup> Katie Boyce, *Alfred East Art Gallery: The Permanent Collection Guide* (Kettering, Northants: Alfred East Art Gallery, 2013), p. 50.





**Figure 4.1**

Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Exile: 'Heavy is the Price I Paid for Love'*, 1930  
(Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering)

Classed as 'a brilliant, sympathetic painting, with a freshness in its colour that was equal to any modern work',<sup>533</sup> *The Exile* was as elusive as it was intriguing. The identity of the sitter remains

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<sup>533</sup> Lomax, *The Golden Dream*, p. 163.

unknown, whilst the emotive and ambiguous title continues to command speculation. Curious in its shift from defined object to reflecting subject, the full title demonstrates a movement within its text to a female self-awareness that, I argue, is repeated in the image itself. For like Gotch's girl paintings of the 1890s, what might have been understood as merely an accomplished portrait is overwritten with symbolic suggestion, and both title and image convey a sense of alienation, detachment, and autonomous introspection. Indeed, despite the contemporary 'flapper' hairstyle, the highly decorative and oversized tunic transposes the figure away from Western culture, and her assured but pensive gaze looks far beyond the reaches of the canvas and the viewer. As 'Exile', this young girl may be suffering the isolating consequences of love gone bad, but her penetrating stare and the firm set of her lips, the strong line of her jaw and emphatic poise, suggest instead that Gotch continued to present alternative, feminist approaches to female representations up until his death. His projection of the girl child as an exiled, solitary individual, gives dramatic substance to the theme of alienation which permeates modernist and modern fiction, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that such alienation is the purveyor of innovation and progress. Solitary, unanchored, and thus unburdened, *The Exile* prods us into an awareness of a more significant truth than can be projected through the faithful reproduction and representation of hackneyed female tropes. *The Exile* continues then to wrestle with the complicated and complex experiences of girlhood that permeate the literature and images of this thesis and forces us to consider the deeper truth of our precarious existence in environments not bound by temporal or geographic considerations and traditions, and the significance of that precarity on the inner life.

For whilst each of the girl children of the texts I have considered stands on the threshold of the boundaries between different conceptions of childhood at the fin de siècle, each also suggests the significance of the awareness of a child's growing consciousness. Whilst many nineteenth-century texts may look optimistically to the child as a vehicle for imagined hope, inspiration, or renewal, the works of this thesis have proved to be far more concerned with developing a pragmatic consciousness about, and for, the children themselves. It is a consciousness that is varied and sufficiently autonomous to survive the realities of abandonment

and alienation and, paradoxically, to flourish in the resulting environments of isolation and solitude. The image of the small female figure traversing space and place, isolated and alone, is a remarkable one, and appears to reflect late Victorian psychological and social theory about the child as a social being, but also the relationship between girlhood, the nature of unconscious thought, and the social significance of environment. For the fictional texts and images I have considered, recognise, portray, and enhance the girls' world view, their ways of expression, and their means of relating to others and their environments through a liberation from the presumed preserve of the adults around them and their potential adult selves. From a host of received systems of social propriety, the concepts of childhood independence, liberation, and agency emerge inside the narratives and are channelled through these texts and images of the Victorian *fin de siècle*. This independence can only be won, these texts demonstrate, with the unmasking (and unmaking), of certain kinds of adult authority, behaviours, and expectations, in a framework of narrative isolation. Absorbed in the child's perspective, these visual and literary representations of girlhood engage in startlingly new and provocative ways with both the girl figure and her environment. Convention and propriety and the apparatus of social regulation and expectation become external to the narrative and the dynamic of narrative development is displaced onto the individual subject and her subjective interpretation of space and place.

These fictional representations of girlhood also anticipate the kinds of critical questions we still raise over society's over-infatuation with an 'idea' of childhood, which may not be as virtuous, sustainable, or even as 'real' as many have presupposed. The texts and images I have brought together recognise the danger inherent in claiming and projecting any image of the girl child figure as universal, for each text and image is moulded in the imprint of their culture. Each representation troubles the conscience and the eyes of their observers, for each contradicts culture's noblest thoughts of what a 'true' girl child should be. The novelists, poets, and artists of this thesis are, I conclude, the forerunners of modern and contemporary critical scholarship that seeks to unveil the socially-constructed (and therefore unattainable) myth of a universal girlhood. Indeed, in recent years, the study of childhood and youth has taken on fresh momentum across the humanities and social sciences. Centres for the study of childhood and

youth have been established in numerous universities across the United Kingdom – including the ‘Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth’ at Sussex – which offer the space and opportunity to conduct cross disciplinary conversations about this distinct life phase.<sup>534</sup>

My own examination of the paintings of Thomas Cooper Gotch, and the literary works of Henry James, Sarah Grand, and Stephen Crane, has revealed how an eclectic group of writers and a ‘forgotten’ artist, understood, responded to, and celebrated the possibilities for the girl child at the turn-of-the-century, and into the future. The texts and images I have brought together are animated by an isolating experience and defined through the negotiation and transcendence of types, roles, and expectations. Each demonstrates how both the male or female writer or painter of the fin de siècle could imagine and realise the possibilities of female emancipation through the figure of the girl child. For the girl children of this thesis are emblematic of intellectual, psychological, and emotional development. Through their positive engagement with experiences of isolation and solitude that uncover suggestions of hope and possibility, familial emancipation and new-found autonomy, these fictional girls collude with feminist aspirations that were imagined through the visual and literary forms of contradiction, fluidity, and instability. This thesis has observed how young girls of the 1890s looked toward and claimed the future as their own. The willingness of the writers and artists to privilege young female modes of representation and experience could not but enable and encourage contemporary girls in their ambitious and profound efforts to adopt the mantle as the proponents of positive, feminist change. In this way, the images and texts of the 1890s could function as the emancipatory force and the embryonic catalysts of a new framework of consciousness for twentieth-century girlhood and beyond. For a fully-developed female sensibility, established and matured in isolation, assures not just psychological survival, but suggests the attitudes that we have come to associate with child minds of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These

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<sup>534</sup> See for example, ‘The Centre for Applied Childhood, Youth and Family Research’ at the University of Huddersfield, the ‘Centre for Childhood, Youth and Family Research’ at the University of York, the ‘Centre for Anthropological Research on Childhood, Youth and Education’ at Brunel University, London, and the ‘Childhood and Youth Studies Research Group’ at The University of Edinburgh.

minds are both more aware and responsive to their environments, whilst the moral separation of the child from the iniquitous world of the adults in these texts, sounds the note of isolation that has also defined and shaped the framework of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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