The Child and The Adult in Contemporary Children’s Literature: Roald Dahl; Anne Fine; Diana Wynne Jones; J.K. Rowling

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

Elizabeth O’Reilly, BA, MA (Hull)

September 2005
The thesis explores the work of the above four contemporary children’s writers, in relation to post-1960s Western society. I concentrate primarily on depictions of children, adults and relationships between the two, and the way in which these depictions engage with changing social attitudes. I also place the novels in their literary-historical context, examining whether or not they continue the literary traditions of their predecessors in children’s literature, or whether their central focus is on contemporary social engagement. I also consider whether literary traditions (particularly fairytale discourse) are re-worked and reinvented in accordance with contemporary social issues.

In Western society, the post-1960s era has brought widespread social changes, which include the democratisation of childhood – ‘children’s rights’ is now a well-used term, both legally and in everyday life. Despite this, however, today’s society seems to be experiencing unprecedented confusion and uncertainty in its attitudes towards children, particularly with regard to child-liberation and various reactions against it. Nonetheless, the post-1960s era has witnessed an intense interest in childhood – the many debates and disagreements are evidence of this.

Throughout the thesis, I examine the way in which Dahl, Fine, Jones and Rowling engage with (or react against) these contemporary childhood issues. Chapter one outlines the social context and provides information on the most prominent issues: children’s rights; parenting advice and educational issues (both of which focus
predominantly on liberalism versus strict control); children as a burden or a pleasure; freedom versus guidance; the death of childhood versus the prolonging of dependency; children as innocent angels or destructive demons. Chapters two to six go on to explore these issues in the literary texts: chapter two concentrates on family relationships; chapter three examines individual adult characters, while chapters four and five focus in detail on the portrayal of child characters, including their relationships with adults and the development of their potential. Chapter six investigates the depiction of magic, and the way in which it can be viewed as a form of psychological power for children (and so can feature in realist as well as fantasy texts). The thesis as a whole, therefore, examines the novels’ relationship with both literary and social discourse, predominantly with regard to the adult-child relationship.
CONTENTS

Author's referencing note ........................................................................ ii

Introduction .......................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Childhood in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries ............... 22

Chapter 2: Family & Parenting .................................................................. 64

Chapter 3: Fallible Adults ....................................................................... 108

Chapter 4: Perceptions of Childhood I: Angels & Devils ............................ 155

Chapter 5: Perceptions of Childhood II: Developing Potential ....................... 201

Chapter 6: Magical Empowerment ............................................................ 240

Conclusion ........................................................................................ 279

Bibliography ...................................................................................... 287
AUTHOR'S REFERENCING NOTE

PRIMARY MATERIAL

- In Rowling’s novels, the title phrase ‘Harry Potter and the..’ has been omitted throughout the main text of the thesis. The Bibliography lists full titles.

- For all the novels discussed, wherever a title begins with ‘The’, this has usually been omitted, unless it creates awkward phrasing.

- The following abbreviations have been used:

Dahl: Charlie & the Chocolate Factory = C & CF or C & C Factory
James & the Giant Peach = J & GP or James & GP
Charlie & the Great Glass Elevator = GGE or Great Glass Elevator
Danny the Champion of the World = Danny
George’s Marvellous Medicine = GMM

I have used an American edition of Fine’s Madame Doubtfire (1987). The text of the novel is identical to the British edition, but the title is Alias Madame Doubtfire. However, throughout the thesis I have referred to it by its more well known and succinct title, Madame Doubtfire.

SECONDARY MATERIAL

Where editions other than first editions have been used, I have first included the original year of publication, followed by the year of the edition used, as follows: (original year / year of edition used). This appears in both the main text of the thesis and the bibliography, as I feel it is important to give both dates clearly, without the reader having to look them up.

Newspaper articles: Some newspaper articles were accessed online and some were hard copies. In both cases, in the main text of the thesis I have given the author’s surname or, if the article is anonymous, the newspaper title, followed by the exact date of publication (day, month, year). All further information can be found in the bibliography, under the author’s name or newspaper title, followed by the year.

Websites: Except in the case of newspaper titles, discussed above, website addresses are included in both the main text and the bibliography. However, in the case of excessively long addresses, the main text gives a shortened version (usually the home page), while the bibliography includes the full website address.
INTRODUCTION

Children's books are among the most revealing of cultural artifacts. Quite aside from whatever qualities they may have as literature, and wholly apart from whatever effect they may have on their intended audience, books for the young...are rich repositories of cultural information....Like popular literature (which they resemble in several ways), children's books tend to convey conventional views more often than individual idiosyncrasy, thus offering insight into the common assumptions, the accepted ideas, and the widely shared opinions of a culture. Above all, of course, children's literature reflects the attitudes toward children and childhood of the society that produces it....[Social] Changes that began in the latter sixties and continued through the seventies¹ have transformed children's books in fundamental ways, altering content, style, and, above all, the image of children and childhood (and, I would add, of adults and adult society as well) as these are presented in fiction for the young.

(Anne Scott McLeod 1985: 100 - 101)

The main aim of this thesis is to analyse a selection of contemporary children’s writers, focusing on their relationship with society in the post-1960s era in the Western world, particularly with regard to attitudes to children and childhood. The work of Roald Dahl, J.K. Rowling, Diana Wynne Jones and Anne Fine spans, collectively, from the 1960s to the present day, an era which has witnessed the ever-increasing democratisation of childhood. Thus my purpose is to explore how these changing attitudes may have affected the way in which these writers portray children, adults and the relationships between the two.

A conscious decision has been taken not to include gender issues; thus, any mention of 'the child' or 'children' or, for that matter, 'the adult' includes both sexes, unless otherwise stated. This is not in any way a criticism of gender analysis, but it is felt that this topic would require a separate thesis in itself, and there is not space to do it justice here. Moreover, the majority of the social information used to gauge an understanding of the post-1960s cultural climate (discussed primarily in chapter one) is not gender-specific. The central focus in this thesis is therefore the general cultural climate with

¹ McLeod was writing in the mid-1980s. These changes have continued in the intervening time.
regard to ‘the child’ and the way in which various children’s books engage with this (all four writers include both male and female characters).

I should add that, although I am examining these four writers as individuals, they also in many ways correspond with general trends in children’s literature in this era. For this reason I sometimes make comments about post-1960s children’s literature in general, as part of my analysis of these four individuals. I am not, however, undertaking an extensive survey of children’s literature in this period - the emphasis is always on Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine.

It is widely acknowledged that the 1960s saw huge social changes in the Western world.2 These changes were primarily focused on democracy, and the rights and liberation of the individual, particularly the oppressed. Central to this was a strong sense of anti-authoritarianism - authorities were now expected to earn the right to their position, and to respect, rather than having any automatic entitlement. Individuals now felt free to express their views, and fight for their rights, if authorities were not thought to be acting justly.

In an interview with Martin Jacques in The New Statesman (1997), cultural theorist Stuart Hall discusses the social changes of the 1960s: the ‘prewar cultural order had been changed by the democratisation of the war, the decline of deference, Americanisation, the birth of mass consumption and the coming of television’. Hall believes that these changes in power relations are now to be seen everywhere:

...from the family and gender relations to sport and personal relationships....The codes which regulate moral and sexual life, social interaction, the literary canon, our definitions of masculinity and femininity, have been transformed by the ways ordinary people live their lives, rather than by the attitudes and tastes of some narrow elite.

---

2 Throughout the thesis, all references to society refer specifically to Western society. Also, any reference to ‘today’s society / children’s literature’ or ‘contemporary society / children’s literature’ refers to post-1960s Western society. The social evidence used is also predominantly, though not exclusively, British. All four writers are British (though Dahl is of Norwegian ancestry) and, obviously, British social material was the most accessible.
Society is now driven from many different points, old hierarchies have given way.

(Hall 1997: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi)

Amongst these far-reaching social changes was the democratisation of childhood: the expression ‘children’s rights’ began to be heard frequently in the Western world. However, children’s rights did not emerge suddenly in the 1960s: along with other humanitarian and democratic values, they can be traced back primarily to the Romantic era in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the beginnings of legislation in Victorian times. K.P. Smith discusses the early days of children’s rights, particularly the public school reforms by Samuel Butler and Thomas Arnold, which were followed by many attempts (not always successful) throughout the nineteenth century to improve the working conditions and education of lower-class children. Reform was slow, but reflected an increasing awareness of the needs and rights of the child: ‘The changes affecting not only the English upper-classes but the middle and lower spectrums as well, marked a growing concern for childhood in general and raised it to a level of some importance for the Victorian adult’ (Smith 1993: 117). Thus, while children’s rights (along with an intense interest in parenting, education and all issues surrounding the child) gained full force in the 1960s, this can be seen as a build-up of something which had been developing slowly over a much longer period of time. Nonetheless, as Egoff points out, in the 1960s ‘the change of social attitude to children seemed to come with wrenching suddenness’ (1981:11).

Children’s literature in the post-1960s era is undoubtedly part of this broader cultural climate, and literary critics often emphasise that children’s books from the 1960s onwards differ significantly from those which came before, as the quotation from McLeod at the beginning of the chapter pointed out (Tucker and Gamble also address this in some detail in Family Fictions 2001). Post-1960s children’s literature often reflects society’s intense interest in childrearing: there is a continuation of the child-only
adventures which featured heavily in the first half of the twentieth century, but there is also a ‘return of the parent’ and an emphasis on adult-child relations: even the Harry Potter books always begin and end with Harry’s family relationships – he must always return to the Dursleys. Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine all explore family relationships, both conventional and unconventional; various ‘types’ of parenting and discipline; the differing attitudes of adult characters towards children (and vice versa) and the power-relations between the two.

It is widely acknowledged that the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of the new social realism for children which tackled previously taboo subjects such as divorce and child abuse (discussed in more detail in chapter two). However, this does not mean that other types of children’s book have diminished. The Daily Telegraph recently featured an article entitled ‘Forget fairy tales, children vote for reality’ (Womack: 24 Dec 2003): the title refers to a poll in which secondary school children voted realist writer Jacqueline Wilson\(^3\) as their favourite author. However, what the article does not acknowledge is that, in the top ten as a whole, there are only two writers who could be clearly classified as social realists (Wilson and Anne Fine); the others are fantasists, science-fiction writers and writers whose work includes both fantasy and realism. K.P. Smith confirms that fantasy has continued to flourish alongside new developments in social realism:

> The interest in reading fantasy seems unabated among children, young adults and adults themselves. It is felt that it will, as the title of this section [‘Celestial Whirlwinds: the unwavering flame’] indicates, continue to flourish despite changes taking place over time, thus preserving this aspect of imagination as the unwavering flame.

\(^{(1993: 312)}\)

\(^3\) Wilson is now, in 2005, the new Children’s Laureate.
Not only does fantasy continue in popularity (all the more so since the advent of Harry Potter⁴), it is, as the thesis will explore, also influenced by the social changes which have played such a big part in the emergence of social realism for children. Egoff believes that other types of children’s book, including fantasy, have been influenced by modern concerns and by the developing social realism. Despite the popularity, from the 1960s onwards, of what Egoff calls the ‘problem novel’, ‘another element of children’s literature persisted in its triumphant expression of fine writing, enduring values and original imaginative power. While linked to the best of literature that had gone before, these novels also exemplified the freedom of experimentation in style and content, in a variety of genres, that defined their own era’. She goes on to list various types of children’s book, including fantasy (Egoff 1981: 15).

A central part of this thesis’ aims is therefore to consider how much these writers, both fantasy and realist, engage with and continue (or react against) literary traditions, and how much they engage with contemporary social issues. Contemporary social realism, such as the work of Anne Fine, is clearly very focused on social issues, as we have seen, and is less obviously interacting with literary predecessors - yet this does not mean that there is no engagement at all with literary traditions. Fantasists, on the other hand, are more obviously employing traditions such as fairytale discourse but, as Peter Hunt points out, ‘one thing that can rarely be said of fantasy is that it has nothing to do with reality....alternative worlds must necessarily be related to, and comment on, the real world’ (Hunt & Lenz 2001: 1;7).

Jack Zipes discusses the way in which fairytales, and fantasy literature in general, have always had a social engagement.⁵ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as oral folk tales developed into written fairytales, they began to be aimed specifically at

---

⁴ The popularity of Philip Pullman’s slightly earlier trilogy His Dark Materials (1995-2000) also attests to this.
children. Oral folktales focused on empowering the oppressed, and tended to centre on class struggles. For this reason they appealed particularly to the lower classes. As they became written fairytales, and so became the domain of the educated classes, class struggles were usually replaced by adult-child power-struggles: the child became the central focus of the story, rather than the peasant (information from Zipes 1983: 1-12).

Zipes points out that, as writers appropriated the oral folk tale, they ‘converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values and manners’ for the socialisation of children according to the social codes of the time. Thus, ‘writers of fairytales for children acted ideologically by presenting their notions regarding social conditions and conflicts, and they interacted with each other and with past writers and storytellers of folklore in a public sphere’ (1983: 3). This point probably applies to all children’s books (and literature as a whole): writers inevitably engage with both social context and literary heritage. The degree to which Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine balance their engagement with literary and social discourse will therefore be explored.

The era in which oral folktales became written fairytales was also the era in which children’s literature as a whole began to develop. Gillian Avery locates the beginnings of the children’s book industry in approximately 1740, although she notes that children had various reading materials long before this (Avery 1995: 1). John Newbery (1713 – 1767) was the first major children’s book publisher, and is usually given the credit for turning children’s publishing into a serious business. His publications for children were primarily didactic and pious, written with the intention of ‘training’ children into appropriate behaviour. Children’s literature has therefore always had a strong didactic element, and its writers have always been considered to have a position of moral

6 For a definition of the traditional fairytale, I would agree with Bottigheimer: ‘Fairytales, unlike tales about fairies, more often than not, do not include fairies in their cast of characters and are generally brief narratives in simple language that detail a reversal of fortune, with a rags-to-riches plot that often culminates in a wedding. Magical creatures regularly assist earthly heroes and heroines to achieve happiness, and the entire story is usually made to demonstrate a moral point, appended separately, as in Perrault, or built into the text, as in Grimm’ (Bottigheimer 1996: 152). Thus, a text which incorporates some elements which are common to the traditional fairytale can be said to be employing fairytale discourse.
responsibility towards their child readers. Zipes sees fairytales as very much part of the transmission of bourgeois values: ‘Exquisite care was... taken to cultivate a discourse on the civilization process through the fairytale for the benefit of well-raised children. In this regard fairytales for children were no different than the rest of the literature (fables, primers, picture books, sermons, didactic stories) which conveyed a model of the exemplary child.’ (1983: 9). However, the fairytale also had ‘many levels’ (Zipes 1983: 10), one of which was its subversiveness. It was partly because of this subversiveness that fairytales were disapproved of in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, until Victorian writers began to revise and re-work them (see chapter three).

What this highlights is the issue of didacticism versus entertainment. Early children’s literature, as we have seen, was heavily didactic (often in a religious sense), and the last two hundred years or so have seen a gradual decrease in overt instruction and preaching, and a corresponding increase in imaginative entertainment. However, this does not mean that today’s children’s books are entirely free of didacticism - one might argue that this is neither possible nor desirable, since child readers are far more impressionable than adults, and are constantly learning and absorbing both information and values and belief-systems. Adult authors, therefore, will always carry the responsibility that goes along with this. As Peter Hunt points out, in response to the widely accepted view that children’s literature has progressed from ‘didacticism to freedom, or from strictness to corruption’:

... as history [this view] is false because children’s books can never be free of didacticism or adult ideological freight. Certainly the earliest writers for children were more obviously aware of their stewardship - children’s books were part of God’s work; but even the most modern, liberated book cannot escape the adult-child relationship. Adults know that they influence, they know that their readership is less experienced than they; they know that society is looking over their shoulders.

(1995: xii)
Thus, just as even Newbery’s early books contained some entertainment as well as instruction, so post-1960s children’s literature is not solely for entertainment. However, both the methods and the content of today’s didacticism have inevitably been altered by changing attitudes to childhood, and more empathy with the child’s-eye-view. The thesis will therefore examine just how and what these four writers impart to their child readers, focusing on the depiction of children themselves and their relationships with adults.

Choice of authors

Roald Dahl, J. K. Rowling, Diana Wynne Jones and Anne Fine were chosen for many reasons: they were selected for their relevance to the chosen themes, and also their popularity and longevity (Rowling, of course, has not been writing as long as the others, but her future longevity is assumed). A fundamental part of the thesis is to examine the texts in relation to ‘real’ people and everyday life (as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter); it therefore seemed important to choose novels which are widely read, for they are closely interlinked with the cultural climate and the lives of ordinary people.

The first author selected was Dahl: he seems the most obvious choice in terms of child liberation, though, as the thesis will explore, he is not as much of a child anarchist as some critics believe. The original idea for the thesis stems from my undergraduate and M.A. work on Roald Dahl. The second choice was Fine. Dahl and Fine seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum in two ways: style of writing and ‘respectability’. Dahl’s anti-adult stance has often led to condemnation by adults, while Fine’s work is not

---


Another useful reference is the Dahl profile on www.jubileebooks.co.uk, which provides a selection of comments from various reviewers, most of which point out that Dahl has always been loved by children, but often made adults uncomfortable with his depictions of adult flaws.
usually attacked in this way. Despite these differences, they express a similar overwhelming concern for, and empathy with, the child’s-eye-view.\textsuperscript{8} This point could undoubtedly be made about many children’s writers in the era concerned, but I wanted to investigate how writers who appear so different on the surface can also share common ground, and the different ways that these issues can be represented.

The third choice was J.K. Rowling: the Harry Potter phenomenon cannot be ignored (and, when this thesis was begun, very little critical work had been published on Rowling). There are also obvious links between Rowling and Dahl, though it is widely felt that Rowling’s work has multiple influences. I was interested to discover whether Rowling is primarily continuing (and reinventing) literary traditions or whether she is engaging with contemporary childhood issues, or a combination of both. Diana Wynne Jones came to my attention because the majority of her novels were reprinted in 2000 (just prior to the beginning of the thesis), thus suggesting ongoing popularity.\textsuperscript{9} It was also felt that Jones provided a useful ‘link’ since, on one hand, her Chrestomanci series in particular shares much with the Harry Potter series, while on the other hand, there are many parallels between the work of Jones and Fine.

The majority of literary criticism appears to take an either / or standpoint with regard to fantasy and realism, and certainly such an approach is important. However, this does not mean that fantasy and realism should always be discussed separately. Firstly, this denies the many parallels and overlaps which exist between the two and, secondly, it overlooks the fact that many writers do not fall neatly into either category. The boundaries between fantasy and realism are not, therefore, always clear-cut.

Fine is the most easily classified of the four writers: her social realism cannot be disputed, yet this does not mean that she cannot also have parallels with other types of writer. Jones, on the other hand, often combines fantasy with contemporary social issues:

\textsuperscript{8} The expression ‘child’s-eye-view’ is used widely by critics of children’s literature.
\textsuperscript{9} This reprinting is probably also due (in part) to the popularity of Harry Potter, which showed publishers that children still have a strong appetite for fantasy novels.
as Teya Rosenberg says, Jones' work shows 'recognizable worlds transformed', with a 'desire to intertwine the facts of twentieth (and now twenty-first) century children's lives with myth and magic' (Rosenberg 2002: 1; 3). Jones herself dislikes rigid categorisation, as she indicates in an interview with Charles Butler:

Genre, and talk of genre, irritates the hell out of me, actually. I do not see why something should be the sole type of property of one type of book and not of another....I've got this notion that there's space to get round anyone's prejudices, and if you can just think of the right way you can slide round all the nonsense they talk and do something that involves both their Yes and their No. I spend a lot of time before I write a book thinking about this space into which I can slide.

(Butler 2002b: 166)

Rowling's novels take this further and combine many genres: traditional fantasy; adventure; detective novel; school story. Hunt discusses the diversity of fantasy, and the difficulties of categorisation:

...from Kingsley's awkward, self-destructing use of the form, to J.K. Rowling's hard-edged and eclectic Bildungsroman. What emerges strongly is the complexity of these books, and the sheer fecundity of imagination, whether at the service of intellectualism or humour, generally defies or challenges classification.

(Hunt & Lenz 2001: 23)

Hunt's point could also be applied to Dahl, whose work often frustrates those who are trying to categorise children's writers. Clute and Grant include Dahl in their Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997), but find his novels difficult to characterise: in C & C Factory, 'the events themselves, though fantastic in the direction of technofantasy, do not quite cohere as fantasy, for there is a mildly absurdist, Wonderland feel about Charlie's world', while, of Dahl's other novels, some 'are fantasy, some verge on other realms' (1997: 246). Sheila Egoff subdivides fantasy into various subsections, and classifies Dahl's work as 'light fantasy'. This type is most notable for its use of humour: '...the sharp parody or good thunderous fun of much [light fantasy] almost makes it a separate genre in children's literature' (1981: 119-124).
I have, therefore, always visualised the four writers linking together in the following way: Dahl - Rowling - Jones - Fine. This is not to imply that they have been kept in any rigid order, though they did quite often break into two pairs (yet this was never forced). Overall, the four writers were selected because they have much in common, yet they also have enough differences to enable variety and the exploration of various issues from different angles. It was always a priority to avoid simply repeating the same points over and over with regard to different writers, and so I deliberately avoided choosing writers who had closer similarities.

Most of the novels selected are in the middle-childhood range, aimed at an audience of approximately eight to twelve years of age. With regard to Fine and Jones, a selection of their middle-childhood novels has been chosen, as both these writers are prolific. The process of selecting novels was similar to the choice of authors: novels were chosen which were felt to be appropriate for the issues in question, yet I again felt it was important to ensure variety rather than repetitiveness. In Jones’ case, the Chrestomanci series provides a coherent whole (one which also foreshadows Rowling’s Hogwarts world), yet other Jones novels were also included for the sake of diversity and relevant issues. Most of Fine’s novels focus on family life, yet, within this, the issues covered in the selected novels are broad: divorce and step-parents; deserting parents; child abuse; care of grandparents; mental illness.

Occasionally, books for younger or older age-groups have been used, when their relevance for the topics discussed helped me articulate various points. The most notable example here is Jones’ Fire & Hemlock (1985), which features throughout the thesis and is aimed at a slightly older age-group than, say, Dahl’s James & the Giant Peach (1961). Fire & Hemlock, with its combination of child abuse, family break-up and myth and magic, has been particularly apt for discussing the overlap between fantasy and realism. It should also be pointed out that intended age-group is no more fixed and
absolute than genre boundaries: for example, the Harry Potter novels are read by all ages, from very young children to adults. These novels also become more complex and controversial as the series progresses: the fourth, fifth and sixth Harry Potter novels are on a par with *Fire & Hemlock* in terms of complexity. Jones herself disputes ‘age categorising’ as well as genre divides: some of her books have been marketed at children, some at adults. In general, there are also transatlantic differences here - Philip Pullman’s Dark Materials trilogy, as one example, was marketed to adults in the USA, but aimed at adolescents in the UK. Jones believes it is important not to make assumptions about the reader’s abilities (and she is here referring specifically to *Fire & Hemlock*):

> I think it’s quite important to give children as many pegs to hang things on as possible. This is the way you learn....So I never worry about putting in things that are not within children’s capacities, because I don’t think this matters. I think it’s very good for children to notice that there’s something going on that they don’t quite understand. This is a good feeling because it pulls you on to find out.

*(Butler 2002b: 172)*

Fine writes for all age-groups, from very young children to adults. With each novel, she seems to target her intended audience quite specifically, and has been quoted as saying that ‘ “I always know whether my reader is four or forty” ’ *(Nicolette Jones: 30 April 2004)*. However, though she has a specific age-group in mind, she herself may not always be correct in her predictions. In my own personal experience, I have several adult friends who have read some of the Fine novels discussed in this thesis (those aimed at middle-childhood) and enjoyed them for their own sake, as opposed to merely looking ‘over the fence’ at a children’s book. I also doubt Fine’s claim always to target a singular age-group. *The Tulip Touch* (1996) focuses on the experiences of specific individuals in dealing with a child who has been horrifically abused, and it is this individual story with which the child-reader is most likely to engage. However, as discussed in chapters one and four, the novel as a whole enters into a much broader
debate regarding the way in which society reacts to and deals with disturbed children: it was written in the wake of the murder of two-year-old James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys in 1993. It is this which is likely to interest the adult reader, and the novel certainly speaks to an adult audience as well as a child one. Even novels like *Madame Doubtfire* (1987) and *Flour Babies* (1992), though less dramatic, focus on family issues in a manner which can be of interest to a wide range of age-groups.

Peter Hunt discusses the ‘double audience’ of children’s literature:

...a text must “imply” a reader: that is, the subject-matter, language, allusion levels and so on clearly “write” the level of readership (it is no accident that the Pooh books, or several of Roald Dahl’s books, have proved popular with adults as well as children: the audience implied in the books is as much an adult one as a child one).

(Hunt 1991: 46)

It is therefore assumed throughout the thesis that children’s books speak both to and about adults, and society in general, as well as children: they are by no means part of an isolated nursery world.

**Methodology**

Victor Watson explains the close relationship between children’s books and the culture in which they are embedded: ‘Children’s books reflect and are bound up in cultural changes; they are particularly susceptible to developing assumptions about the nature of childhood, adolescence and education. They also have a lot in common with popular literature and share a good deal of ground with wider popular cultures’ (Watson 2001: vi). K.P. Smith agrees that the ‘current philosophies and realities - beneficial as well as harmful - of a society are reflected in the contemporary literature of that society’; she feels that children’s literature in particular has always been interlinked with the attitudes towards children of the society that produced it (1993: 89). Indeed, Smith’s

In a similar manner, my thesis examines representations of children and adults, and their relationships, in the work of Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine, and comments on the way in which these images engage with adult-child issues in real life. I therefore place strong emphasis on the cultural context of these writers, as well as the literary texts themselves. In places, where I consider possible effects on child readers, I do not claim to be an authority in child psychology or educational issues. Rather, as a literary academic, with an interest in social and cultural issues, I am exploring the relationship between these texts and the readership and society into which they both emerge from and are received. Sometimes this involves considering the potential effects on child readers, but these are only hypothetical considerations.

A two-way cycle is therefore assumed, whereby literary representations are thought both to reflect and influence social attitudes. For this, the expression ‘engage with’ (or ‘relate to’) is felt to be appropriate. In discussing children’s literature in this context, a useful essay is Nicholas Tucker’s ‘Good friends or just acquaintances? The relationship between child psychology and children’s literature’ (1992). Tucker stresses that children’s authors rarely make *deliberate* use of child psychology: ‘Any child psychology they need can be made up as they go along in accordance with the demands of the plot and the personalities of the characters they have created’ (Tucker 1992: 156).

---

10 My approach has similarities with both Anglo-American feminism, and also New Historicism. Anglo-American feminist critics analyse images of men, women and relationships between the two, and consider the way in which these images may relate to gender issues in real life. I take a similar approach to images of children and adults. Peter Barry points out that Anglo-American feminists ‘also place considerable emphasis on the use of historical data and non-literary material (such as diaries, memoirs, social and medical history) in understanding the literary text’ (Barry 1995: 124).

M.H. Abrams’ definition of New Historicism is also relevant to my approach: ‘In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production….new historicists conceive of a literary text as “situated” within the institutions, social practices and discourses that constitute the overall culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes’ (Abrams 1999: 182-3).

However, authors are inevitably influenced by their culture, and ‘some of those psychological theories of childhood have been widely taken up and will inevitably begin to work their way into their writing’ (ibid p157). In turn, literary representations ‘feed’ back into the culture, and influence social attitudes. Fiedler discusses literature as a source of social evidence:

...most students of the “history of childhood” tend to dismiss literature as a source of reliable information about child-rearing. “The literary historians,” one of the most recent writes, “mistaking books for life, construct a fictional picture of childhood, as though one could know what really happened in the nineteenth century American home by reading Tom Sawyer.” What he has forgotten or never knew is that literature can tell us...how people at a given historical moment perceive and evaluate and therefore experience what they are doing. Poets and novelists reflect, reinforce - sometimes even, however slowly but perceptibly, change awareness and attitudes........

(Fiedler 1980: 150-1)

It has always been my intention to analyse the texts in relation to the attitudes of ‘everyday’ people in the post-1960s era, concentrating predominantly on middle-class attitudes, since these are the most accessible in terms of social evidence. Obviously, such attitudes cannot easily be contained or defined in any fixed manner, nor should they be, as attempts to do so would probably stifle inevitable diversities, fluctuations and developments. However, as far as is possible, I am attempting to gauge a sense of attitudes which have been widespread during the last four or five decades in middle-class Western society, particularly British society, and to examine the texts in relation to this.

For this reason, I have made a conscious decision not to use abstract sociological theories (except occasionally where they help me to articulate my ideas), but instead to obtain my social evidence from ‘everyday’ material such as childcare manuals, newspaper articles and television programmes. In Guardians and Angels: Parents and Children in the Nineteenth Century (1978), David Grylls’ description of his own

11 Reference not cited.
approach foreshadows mine. He rejects official documents, such as those relating to laws, statistics and demographics:

What they lack is illuminating discussion of domestic thoughts and sentiments, for these cannot adequately be deduced from external circumstances. Again and again the leap from statistics to generalisation about family feelings has collapsed into sheer conjecture.

(Grylls 1978: 44)

In order to gauge attitudes rather than statistics, different sources of information are required: ‘vaguer, certainly, than statistical ones, but wider in application’ (1978: 44).

The work of Raymond Williams, though not referred to throughout the thesis, has been useful in helping me articulate my methodology. In the chapter ‘Structures of Feeling’ in *Marxism & Literature* (1977), Williams discusses the difference between ‘the social’, which is fixed and abstract, and ‘the personal’, which is not ‘thought’ in the abstract, but ‘consciousness, experience, feeling’ (1977: 128). In Williams’ use of the term ‘structures of feeling’, the word ‘feeling’ is chosen to emphasise a distinction from more formal concepts of “world-view” or ideology (1977: 132). Williams also uses the term ‘practical consciousness’ to emphasise the ‘gap’ between abstract theories and real experience: ‘Practical consciousness is almost always different from official consciousness….For practical consciousness is what is actually being lived, and not only what it is thought is being lived’ (1977: 130-1).

I am therefore using child-care manuals and other forms of popular media because, although I cannot determine precisely how they are understood and made use of, they are, I feel, much closer to the real experiences and consciousness of ordinary people than abstract ideas and theories. They are at least aimed directly at the public, not the academic, and attempt to speak both to and about real, lived experience - they are often anecdotal, based on ‘real’ problems, arising with ‘real’ children. I do not claim to be fully documenting all the diversities and fluctuations of the attitudes and beliefs of
‘ordinary’ people, but I feel that my approach comes closer to Williams’ ‘practical consciousness’ and ‘structures of feeling’ than would a concentration on abstract and specific theories.

Williams also believes that the cultural hypothesis of ‘structures of feeling’ is particularly useful in literary analysis, and that art and literature are among the most effective expressions of these structures:

....forms and conventions in art and literature [are] inalienable elements of a social material process...[and] may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced.

(1977: 133)

Not only this, but, as the McLeod quotation at the beginning of this chapter has pointed out, children’s literature usually expresses social attitudes more quickly and explicitly than its adult counterpart. Peter Hunt agrees:

There can be no question that [children’s books] are culturally formative, and of massive importance, educationally, intellectually and socially. Perhaps more than any other texts, they reflect society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be.

(Hunt 1990: 2)

The argument of the thesis develops through six chapters. Chapter one, ‘Childhood in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries’, is a contextual chapter which is made up entirely of social information. Since my intention is to examine the texts in relation to childhood issues in post-1960s society, this chapter provides detail about this cultural climate. There are various sub-headings which outline the most prominent issues with regard to childhood, from legislative changes to parenting advice to media discussions. There are further examples of social evidence filtered throughout the thesis, but the fundamental issues are addressed here, enabling me to refer back to them in later chapters without disrupting the flow of argument.
Chapter two, ‘Family & Parenting’, is intended to be broader and more generalised than later chapters. Some of the issues raised here are discussed again in more detail in subsequent chapters - some overlap is therefore intentional. Here I examine the post-1960s family, firstly in society and then in children’s literature, along with a brief look at the history of depictions of family in pre-1960s children’s literature. The chapter considers whether or not the types of family depicted in Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine coincide with or react against general trends. This focuses particularly on the nuclear family: I will be examining whether or not it still features and, if so, if it is idealised or demystified. The chapter goes on to discuss abuse, external intervention, and the child’s position in the family, with a particular focus on whether the child is shown to be vulnerable or dominant, and the way in which power struggles between parents and children are negotiated (or not, as the case may be).

While chapter two considers the fallibility of the family, chapter three, ‘Fallible Adults’, goes on to discuss the fallibility of individual adults. It begins with a brief literary-historical contextualisation, similar to that included in the previous chapter, examining the changing figure of the adult in children’s books from the earliest days of children’s literature. This history primarily traces the emergence of the satirised adult, which coincides with increasing anti-authoritarianism in society, and can also be seen as a form of psychological empowerment for those who do not have actual power. The discussion of my writers considers both the continuation of the caricature, and the development of the (much more recent) sympathetic fallible adult, examining whether both types feature in both fantasy and realism, or whether there are divisions here. The chapter also concentrates on how much adult fallibility can comfortably be revealed to child readers, and the tactics which are used to defuse anxiety and reassure readers.

Chapter four, ‘Perceptions of Childhood I: Angels and Devils’, begins with an examination of changing attitudes to childhood throughout the history of the modern
world. Attention is paid to Philippe Ariès’ seminal *Centuries of Childhood* (1960) which raised awareness of ‘childhood’ as a social construct: despite criticisms of Ariès’ work, it is primarily due to him that it is possible to discuss ‘perceptions’ of childhood at all. The conflicting belief-systems of Original Sin (child as demon) and Original Innocence (child as angel) have influenced attitudes towards, and treatment of, children for many centuries. This chapter considers the texts in relation to these attitudes and their continued relevance in post-1960s society.

The chapter initially concentrates on the attitudes of adult characters towards the children in their care, exploring what fuels such attitudes, and whether the narrative tone encourages us to share their views or not. It goes on to examine the depictions of various ‘bad’ children in the texts with regard to the nature-nurture argument, highlighting certain difficulties which suggest that post-1960s attitudes to children may not be as ‘enlightened’ as some presume: Fine tackles this directly in *The Tulip Touch* (1996), by exploring the attitudes which arose in response to the Jamie Bulger murder in 1993. Finally, this chapter goes on to discuss various child characters who appear to embody the Victorian stereotype of the innocent child, considering the ways in which they may actually differ from their nineteenth-century counterparts, particularly in their sophistication.

Chapter five, ‘Perceptions of Childhood II: Developing Potential’, was initially part of chapter four, but became substantial enough to form a chapter on its own (though, as the title suggests, it follows on closely from part I). It addresses the way in which many of the child characters (both fantasy and realist) undergo challenging experiences which enable them to develop their potential. This was a tradition in Victorian children’s literature which has subsequently been developed. The chapter then considers how much assistance and guidance the children are provided with by adults, and to what
degree boundaries are set for them: the issue of freedom-versus-guidance features heavily in post-1960s concerns about child-rearing.

The chapter goes on to discuss whether the child’s potential is something which emerges naturally, or something which depends on adult intervention. Along with this, the relationship between childhood and adulthood is explored - is the ‘inner child’ left behind when one enters adulthood, or continued into it? I also examine which adult characters relate best to children, and what this tells us about their relationship to their own childhood. This inevitably leads me to comment on those adult characters who cannot bond with children.

Chapter six, ‘Magical Empowerment’, considers the way in which children can be empowered (or not) through magical forces. Particular consideration is given to whether magic is shown to be an external force, outside the child’s control, or an internal psychological power - thus, can children empower themselves, or can they merely be empowered by something outside themselves? I also examine whether magic is always benevolent or if it can also be harmful, and whether it is complex or simplified and straightforward.

This chapter also considers the possibility that magic may have replaced religion in children’s books - sometimes its depiction echoes elements of Christianity, while sometimes it comes closer to Eastern religions such as Buddhism, which have become increasingly popular in the Western world since 1960s anti-authoritarianism. The chapter goes on to discuss the possibility of ‘realist magic’ - if magic can be a form of psychological power, and have links to religious elements, can these same issues feature in realist texts? This part of the discussion explores in detail the blurred boundaries between fantasy and realism. Ultimately, I consider here the various ways in which each of these writers attempts to empower children.
As chapter one will discuss, Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine are, or have been, writing within a cultural climate which harbours many complex and contradictory attitudes towards children. Age-old debates, such as those regarding nature-nurture issues, and Original Innocence versus Original Sin, have been inflected and redirected by the cultural changes of the 1960s and onwards. Increasing numbers of empowered children and disempowered adults contrast strongly with fairly frequent high-profile cases of abuse and oppression of children. Similarly, children’s literature in the post-1960s era has undergone many changes, yet old literary traditions have not been abandoned. The thesis therefore examines what these writers make of the old and the new, both in terms of literary and social issues, particularly the way in which they depict children, and their relationships with adults, in this era which appears to have no clear-cut answers.
CHAPTER 1:  
CHILDHOOD IN THE LATE TWENTIETH & EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

Throughout the twentieth, and now twenty-first, centuries, attitudes to children and childhood have been rife with confusion, contradictions and paradoxes. Paul Harrison's comments on a 1976 exhibition of photographic images of children aptly sum this up; the issues he raises have undoubtedly continued and increased in the three decades since. Harrison discusses the contrasting views of childhood that were particularly poignant in the nineteenth century, most notably the child as an innocent, protected angel, and the child as an experienced, hardened ruffian:

Both these earlier images have persisted into our own era, and others have emerged to produce a thorough confusion of views. Though the pressures of survival no longer age children prematurely, those of their friends and the media do. But their dependency and submission role has been prolonged by the progressive raising of the school leaving age. At the same time, the permissive theory of parenthood gave children greater autonomy, while most adults began to resent the results of that autonomy. The result of all this has been to destroy any agreement there ever was on the role of children.

(Harrison 1976: 203)

This chapter will explore the profusion of post-1960s debates regarding children and childhood. One of the most notable is the tension between children's rights and liberation and the many counter-reactions. As Harrison has outlined, above, there is also a strong conflict between the alleged death of childhood and the prolonging of dependency. Part of this conflict is the tension between those who advocate independence and freedom to explore, and those who stress the importance of excessive protection. Western society is currently very uncertain how to regard and treat its children.

The role of the parent, therefore, is now extremely unclear. Now that parenthood is a choice, adults are unsure whether to regard children as a burden or a pleasure - many adults experience continual ambivalence regarding this. There are many issues that
contribute to the stress of parenting. The abundance of contradictory childcare advice, designed to help both parents and children, has (as will be discussed shortly) increased parental anxiety and undermined confidence and authority - this often results in neurotic or domineering children. The nature-nurture debate continues and, while ‘nature’ is still generally believed to have a strong influence, there is a heightened awareness of children’s psychological vulnerability. This has increased sensitivity to children’s feelings and needs, yet places more pressure and guilt on parents. There are also further contradictions here: despite this focus on ‘nurture’ and the importance of sufficient psychological care, the media and the public often react harshly to deprived and delinquent children.

The adult-child relationship, in its many forms, is, it seems, experiencing more conflict and uncertainty than ever before. However, while arguments rage, what cannot be disputed is the intense interest in childhood in this period: it is now a fundamental part of social concerns, constantly under scrutiny and debate. As N.K. Denzin has pointed out:

....children find themselves talked about, legislated over, tested and scrutinized by society’s experts: by its social workers, educational psychologists, probation officials, judges, courts, teachers, sociologists, anthropologists, politicians and psychiatrists.

(Denzin 1977: 16)

The post-1960s era has also witnessed various infamous cases of child abuse and child murder, both domestic cases and stranger abduction. The 1960s moors murders were the first high-profile case, while the most controversial is the 1993 murder of two-year-old James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys. Intense media coverage of these incidents tends to fuel debates regarding the nature of childhood, and the role of the adult towards the child. These debates often contribute to legislative changes, as the following section will explore – though child murders are by no means the only factor in changing legislation.
Children's rights: legal & institutional changes

Marina Warner summarises the way in which twentieth-century legislation has attempted to deal with childhood issues:

...children are no longer chattels, any more than women, and new legal measures like the Children’s Act [1989] give them voice in choices and decision-making about their legal situation. Incest, molestation and even rape in families have always taken place, but never have more attempts been made - often with appalling clumsiness - to save children from their violators.

(Marina Warner 1994: 36)

Warner’s point about ‘clumsiness’ in child protection will be addressed in a later section (‘How far can the law and social services protect children?’), but firstly it is worth discussing some of the major legal and institutional changes in Britain regarding children and their rights that have taken place over the last few decades. 1948 produced a landmark Children Act1 whose main provisions were as follows: ‘the establishment of local authority Children’s Departments... a new emphasis on boarding out in preference to residential homes; restoration of children in care to their natural parents; greater emphasis on adoption; and the partial responsibility of the Children’s Departments for young offenders’ (Hendrick 1997: 55). This shows an increasing emphasis on a nurturing family environment, as opposed to institutional care. It helped child care professionals to realise that preventative work (working with whole families) was as important as working with children already in care. The 1963 Children and Young Person’s Act developed this further and stressed the idea more clearly; it also emphasised constructive treatment rather than punishment for juvenile delinquency (Hendrick 1997: 57). This period therefore shows the way in which legislation and childcare professionals were attempting to understand and help the ‘difficult’ child, rather than merely condemn. Again, this was taken further in the 1969 Children and

1 I have not included all the Parliamentary Acts relating to children over the last few decades, only those that seem particularly significant.
Young Persons’ Act, which made increased attempts to understand delinquency rather than punish: taking young offenders to court was to be seen as a last resort.

In the 1970s, however, there was a slight change. In 1973, seven-year-old Maria Colwell was killed by her stepfather. The inquiry into her death was held the following year, and this was the first of many inquiries into similar incidents over the following few decades. It was felt that there had been too much focus on keeping Maria with her family, and attempting to help the family as a whole, rather than intervening to remove Maria for her own protection. Consequently, the 1975 Children Act, responding to the Colwell inquiry, emphasised a return to focusing on the child, rather than the whole family.

The Colwell tragedy did at least help to raise awareness of the abuse and hardship suffered by many children. The 1980s saw some significant changes, both in legislation and other areas. In 1980, the BBC broadcast its first Children in Need ‘telethon’. Christmas day appeals - of a shorter duration - had started in 1927 (radio) and 1955 (television); since 1980, however, there has been an annual telethon. The money raised helps British children experiencing ‘problems or hardships, such as abuse, serious illness and poverty’ (BBC, Children in Need Appeal 2003, http://www.bbc.co.uk/pudsy/aboutus/index.shtml). Even more significant was the launch of Childline in 1986. Childline is a free telephone helpline for children, started by Esther Rantzen and the BBC programme That’s Life!. While charity events like Children in Need keep the child in a submissive, dependent and ‘grateful’ position, Childline is more proactive in that it enables the child to take the initiative, rather than waiting for help. Abused and neglected children were now entitled and encouraged to acknowledge that they were not being sufficiently cared for, and to seek help outside the family.
1989 was the year of both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and another landmark British Children Act. The former was drafted between 1979 and 1989, and ratified by the UK government in 1991. It spells out ‘in an unequivocal manner the rights to which every child is entitled, regardless of where born or to whom, regardless of sex, religion or social origin. The body of rights enumerated in the Convention are the rights of all children everywhere’ (Unicef, http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm). Across the world, in legislation at least, the child’s rights had now been fully acknowledged.

In Britain, the 1989 Children Act is widely acknowledged to be the most important and comprehensive Act relating to children in the last few decades. Prior to 1989, the law relating to children was chaotic: as Nick Allen says, each government ‘had got into the habit of producing an Act here and an Act there....This piecemeal development...caused immense frustration’ (Allen 1990 / 1996: 3). The Children Act 1989 aims to create coherence and consistency regarding all areas of public and private law relating to children (child care, divorce, child protection and so on), without being rigid or dictatorial:

...it aims to create an enlightened and practical framework for decision-making, whether the decision is taken in the family home, in a local authority office, in a health centre or in a courtroom. The object of the Act is to provide the necessary legal tools to parents, relatives, foster carers, child minders, child care professionals and judges, so as to further the best interests of children in their care. Which tools are selected, and how exactly they are used, tends to be left to the discretion of the parties using their judgement.

(Allen 1990 / 1996: 1)

While the 1989 Children Act attempted to make legislation as clear and manageable as possible, various organisations developed in Britain in the 1990s in order to enable the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to be put into practice relatively smoothly. The Children’s Law Centre opened in 1997. Founded on the principles set out in the UN
Convention of the Rights of the Child, it focuses particularly on putting children’s interests first and on giving children a voice. It stresses that it wants to ‘make a reality of children’s rights’ (Children’s Law Centre, http://www.childrenslawcentre.org/Joinus.htm). In 1999, meanwhile, the Children’s Rights Alliance in England (CRAE) was launched as a membership organisation, though it had existed since 1991 under different names. It is similar to the Children’s Law Centre in that one of its main stipulations is to ensure that laws and policies coincide with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRAE, http://crae.org.uk/about/about.html).

Despite all these efforts in the area of children’s rights, however, tragedies still occur on a regular basis. Eight-year-old Victoria Climbie was murdered in 2000 by her aunt and her (the aunt’s) boyfriend. They were fostering Victoria whose Nigerian parents had sent her to Britain for a better life. The Climbie Inquiry in 2003 made references back to the 1973 Maria Colwell case, stressing that lessons had not been learned, particularly with regard to failed communication (Climbie and the Colwell case are discussed further in the later section, ‘How far can the law and social services protect children?’).

2003 was also the year of the Government green paper, Every Child Matters. It ‘sets out the Government’s proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children, young people and families’ (Dfes, www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters/summary.cfm). The death of Victoria Climbie (along with Maria Colwell, Jasmine Beckford and others) is cited as a significant ‘past failing’, but the paper stresses the importance of developing the potential of all children, including, but not exclusive to, those at risk.

Victoria Climbie’s death in particular highlights the difference between official legislation and real, lived experiences. Bren Neale points out that while changing legislation reflects society’s theoretical beliefs about childhood, the actual practice is often very different, or very confused. Many policies, particularly the UN Convention
on the Rights of the Child, clearly show the principle that ‘children have the right to participa-
te in decisions about matters which affect their everyday lives.’:

The legislation thus appears progressive and liberal in its child-centredness. Yet, in the con-
text of the private law provisions of the legislation, those concerning divorce and parental conflict, this potential has yet to be realized. Overall, there remains a great deal of professional uncertainty over what it means to ‘ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child’, or, indeed, whether their views should be ascertained at all.

(Neale 2002 http://www.ingenta.com)

Changing legislation shows a widespread intention to protect children, give them a voice and make life easier for them, and a belief that effort should be made in this area, but it should not be assumed from this summary of the legislation that things work smoothly in practice.

**Parenting**

The twentieth century has witnessed fluctuations and tensions between strict, behaviourist methods of childrearing, which were widespread in the early part of the century, and child liberation, advocated by Spock and others, which has voiced its views quite strongly from the middle of the century onwards. This tension, however, actually dates back several centuries: Locke discussed these opposing views in the seventeenth century, as did Rousseau in the eighteenth. As Kieran Bonner points out, ‘In many ways what is surprising about these positions is not which is better but rather the way the debate between discipline and freedom has sustained itself over three hundred years of modernity’ (Bonner 1998: 92).

This debate has been particularly acute throughout the twentieth century, and continues into the twenty-first: this is the era which saw the birth of widespread childcare advice, though it was and still is predominantly a middle-class phenomenon.

---

2 See particularly Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762).
Heather Ingman points out that the inter-war period saw an ‘emerging discourse on motherhood’ (Ingman 1999: 3). Concern for mothers and children is evident in ‘a number of laws passed during the inter-war period, for example, the 1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act, the 1922 Married Women (Maintenance) Act, the 1922 Law of Property Act and the 1925 Guardianship of Infants Act’ (Ingman 1999: 4). It was also at this time that parents (primarily mothers) began to be subjected to ‘a proliferation of childcare advice...in women’s magazines and childcare manuals’ (Ingman 1999: 4).

Two of the most well-known names in this era are Frederick Truby King and John B. Watson: both took a scientific approach and advocated strict schedules. King started the Plunket Movement in 1907, and wrote his first mothercraft manual, *Feeding and Care of Baby* in 1913: the impetus behind both was his belief that mothers needed training. Thus, faith in one’s own instincts began to be undermined. King was extremely concerned with reducing high rates of infant mortality, and much of his advice regarding hygiene and habits was justified in this respect. Nonetheless his emphasis on ‘regularity of all habits’ was quite extreme, and laughable by today’s standards: ‘Don’t let ten o’clock in the morning pass without making baby’s bowels move, if they have not moved in the previous twenty-four hours’ (1913: 1). For detailed information on how to ‘make’ baby’s bowels move, the reader must refer to the section on enemas.

King did recognise the importance of ‘moderate’ physical contact and stimulation between parent and child (see particularly pp102-6), but in this, as in all aspects of childcare, he believed that the mother must be taught how to behave and interact with her child. In his final section he stresses that the state of a nation depends entirely on how effective its mothers are:
...it may not be out of place to remind those mothers who now take the duties and privileges of parenthood lightly...that it lies almost entirely with the mother to make or mar not only the jaws and teeth of her offspring, but...to determine largely the intellectual, moral and spiritual destiny as well.

(1913: 154)

This leads Ingman to conclude that King contributed heavily to a widespread shaking of parental confidence which, as we shall see, can be extremely damaging to both parent and child: ‘With King, motherhood became institutionalised. This, in turn, placed tremendous pressure on mothers’ (1999: 4).

Despite his final point about moral destiny, King, like other childcare writers at this time, places most of his emphasis on physical needs - he seems to feel that the child’s psychological and moral needs will automatically be met by a good routine and good hygiene. This ‘overlooking’ of emotional needs is, however, far more severe in the writings of American psychologist John B. Watson. Watson is usually credited with being the originator of the school of psychology known as Behaviourism. *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* was published in 1928 and widely used in US hospitals. The title seems ironic, given Watson’s cold and scientific attitude towards ‘psychological care’. He previously worked with animals and felt that similar techniques for conditioning behaviour (such as those used in Pavlov’s famous experiment with dogs) could, and should, be applied to children: the words ‘training’ and ‘control’ feature frequently, and at one point Watson refers to children as the ‘products’ of his experiments, discussing the comparison of ‘laboratory raised products with the home raised’ (1928: 20).

In one of his chapters, ‘The dangers of too much mother love’ (pp64-77), Watson makes clear his attitude towards emotional behaviour. He discusses the way in which sentimental ‘coddling’ makes the child weak and self-centred, and hinders it from developing stoicism and self-reliance. There is certainly some validity in this (some of
the scenarios described call to mind Rowling’s Dudley), but his instructions are extreme and inflexible:

Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say goodnight. Shake hands with them in the morning. Give them a pat on the head if they have made an extraordinarily good job of a difficult task.

(1928: 73)

Watson’s ultimate undermining of the mother comes in his belief that children are better off in institutional care away from the family: ‘It is a serious question in my mind whether there should be individual homes for children - or even whether children should know their own parents’. A mother, according to Watson, is ‘unquestioningly unfitted to bring up her child’ (1928: 11). In this he differs from King who, despite similar condescension, did believe that mothers could be effective with the right training (King states explicitly that children ‘waste away’ in institutional care, without sufficient one-to-one interaction and physical contact (1913: 102)). Thus, despite a similar undermining of the mother’s instincts, King believed ultimately that the family environment was the best place for the child, whereas Watson quite radically advocated institutional care as the ideal, though he realised that the chances of his dream materialising were extremely remote.

The extremity of Behaviourism naturally invoked a counter-reaction, and Dr Benjamin Spock is usually the first name that comes to mind here, but there are others. Christina Hardyment’s *Dream Babies: Child Care from Locke to Spock* (1983) notes that theories which advocated parental deference to the child had begun to surface as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. However, despite the Child Study Movement’s enthusiasm for such theories, they were primarily abstract ideas at this time, and did not really influence everyday childcare until the post-WWII era (Hardyment 1983: 169). The first substantial and influential reactions against

---

3 The Child Study Movement was a particular area of ‘The New Psychology’, pioneered by psychologist G. Stanley Hall.
Behaviourism were Andersen and Mary Aldrich’s *Babies Are Human Beings* (1938) and Margaret Ribble’s *Rights of Infants* (1943), followed shortly after by Spock’s *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (first published 1946). Bowlby’s *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) also raised awareness (quite alarmingly so) of the effects of maternal deprivation. However, I would describe Bowlby’s work as an academic / psychoanalytic book rather than a child-care manual aimed at the everyday parent. This is not to undermine the book’s influence - which was widespread - but merely to point out that the everyday parent probably did not read it directly.

The new child-centred approaches were a much needed reaction against Behaviourism, and were the first to stress the importance of warmth, comfort and physical contact for babies and children, as well as empathy with their emotions. However, the potential anxiety and guilt created for parents by these writers are arguably much greater than those caused by Behaviourists. Ribble states in clear unambiguous tones that incorrect parental care will most probably cause later mental illness in the child: ‘The natural impulses of an infant cannot be summarily dammed up or snuffed out when their expression becomes inconvenient for adults....[Parents] have to face the fact that failure to balance and direct the natural functions of the baby from his birth predisposes the child to personality difficulty later on and even to mental breakdown’ (1943: vii). There is certainly some truth in what Ribble says, and it is of course necessary for the child’s psychological needs to be understood, but one can only shudder at the thought of how a nervous new mother or father must have felt upon reading them.

Ribble’s most significant chapter is chapter nine, ‘Babies must not be thwarted’. Here, she even gives accounts of how insufficient mothering, most particularly, ‘thwarting’ of the baby’s instincts, can cause severe and life-threatening medical problems, as well as psychological ones: in one case, the ‘symptoms were always definitely related to some
inattention on the part of the mother' (1943: 77). In short, Ribble makes no allowance for parents' own feelings and needs (or for their fallibility).

Spock, in contrast, seems far more relaxed and understanding with his famous opening line, 'Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do' (1946: 3). In the first edition (1946), this is followed by several sections advising parents to relax and trust their instincts, while the second edition (1958) extends this into a long section entitled 'Parents are Human'. Nonetheless he does emphasise (more or less) free expression of the child's instincts and desires, though without the severe tone which pervades Ribble's work. A mother whose child wanders off continually is advised as follows:

His nature says to him, "Look at that path to explore! Look at those stairs!" Every time his mother calls to him, it reminds him of his newly-felt urge to assert himself.... If she has to get to the store promptly, she can take him in his pram. But if she's going to use this time for his outing, she should allow four times as long as if she were going alone, and let him make his side trips.

(1946: 212-13)

Ingman clarifies that in the 1940s and 1950s the focus of childcare manuals switched from giving authoritarian advice to mothers to dwelling on the child's physical and emotional needs' (Ingman 1999: 11). Nurture and environment were now emphasised above all else, and at this time the focus was usually on the mother. Her role in shaping the child's psychological as well as physical health was shown to be paramount. Though the importance of understanding the child's psychological needs cannot of course be overlooked (and probably was overlooked by Behaviourists), these developments in childcare advice nonetheless added greatly to ever-growing parental anxiety. Dr Christopher Green confirms this:

---

4 Green's own childcare advice will be discussed shortly.
As the twentieth century dawned...environment was thought to be the major influence on children’s behaviour. By the 1950s this notion had become highly refined: all behavioural blame was laid squarely on the shoulders of inadequate mothers. It seemed irrelevant whether the marriage was stable and the parents exceptional. Mothers still collected the blame, regardless of the untold unhappiness, guilt and suffering it caused.

(Green 1984 / 1992: 24)

Ingman refers to this as ‘the idealisation of mothering’ by ‘middle-class male theorists’ who did not understand the realities of mothers’ lives (1999: 12).

Inevitably, the Spock school of child liberation has again incited counter-reactions, and even Spock himself modified his views in later editions of his book. He continually revised his ideas; seven editions were published throughout his life, with an eighth one brought out posthumously in 2004. As early as 1958, Spock admitted that when he began writing he was trying to stress a greater understanding of children, against the ‘strict and inflexible’ attitudes which had then prevailed. He realised, however, that ‘Since then a great change in attitude has occurred, and nowadays there seems to be more chance of a conscientious parent’s getting into trouble with permissiveness than with strictness’ (1958: 12).

It does seem likely that the excessively liberal approach widely associated with Spock is due at least partly to exaggerations and misinterpretations of his work. In my own reading of Spock I found him to be far more relaxed and friendly in tone, and far more understanding of parental feelings, and of the need for discipline, than I had expected. Nonetheless, at various points in the thesis I use expressions such as ‘Spock-type approach’ to refer to excessive permissiveness because this is the attitude with which he is synonymous, and it does of course have much validity.

Since Spock and his contemporaries, there have been ever-increasing numbers of childcare ‘experts’ on the shelves, and the childcare manual is now an accepted part of middle-class parenthood. In addition to this, there are now numerous television
programmes and websites devoted to giving parents advice. What is most noticeable, however, is that there is little agreement between these ‘experts’. The childcare manual may be a valuable friend in need, but it can also cause confusion, undermining the confidence and instincts of parents: ‘Amanda and Kevin Charles had a library of childcare books when their children were small and difficult to care for. Toddler Taming, The Baby Whisperer, The Secret of Happy Children, More Secrets of Happy Children...“You name it, we had it,” says Amanda, “but the more we read, the more confused we became” ’ (Lockyer: 1 July 2004).

Childcare advisors who are currently widely read range from the Spock-like Penelope Leach to the Watson-like Gina Ford (thus both ends of the spectrum still voice their views quite loudly). For Leach, the mother must put aside her own feelings and focus completely on the baby, even during the excruciating pain of childbirth: ‘It is his safe arrival with which your body is concerned. He, not you, is the star of the show. It may help you as you labour if you can think of him while you strive to produce him. It will certainly help him if you can consider his likely feelings from the moment he emerges’ (1977 / 1988: 29).

Ford, on the other hand, advocates a return to strict routines. According to journalist Joanna Moorhead, ‘Ford’s philosophy is all about taming the little horrors, letting them know who’s boss...Ford’s instructions for breastfeeding a four-week-old are draconian: up by 7am, feed to be finished by 7.45am, nap in his room at 8.45am, woken an hour later, twenty-five minutes at the breast at 10am, play on his mat at 10.30am.....’ (Moorhead: 25 Oct. 2000). Yet Ford’s belief is that babies are only ‘little horrors’ if they do not have a routine, and that there is no need for parenting to be so stressful: ‘..I got into maternity nursing fourteen years ago [late 1980s] when demand feeding was at its peak, and all the experts were saying that you had to do it. I had years of going into houses and clearing up messes of children not sleeping properly with sleeping problems...
leading to feeding problems and behaviour problems. And it goes back to not having a routine in the early days’ (Ford 2004 http://www.amazon.co.uk).

Both these approaches, as with Behaviourism and Spock, could easily induce extreme parental guilt: Leach may make one feel guilty for not being the perfect parent, ever-brimming with affection and empathy, while Ford could induce guilt in the parent who even occasionally gives in to sentimental feelings. As Hardyment quite rightly points out, parental guilt and anxiety in the name of child-concern are extremely counter-productive, for psychological distress in the parent can only lead to psychological distress in the child:

Ironically, considering that their main aim was to protect the child from severe anxieties, the effect of books of this type was to create anxiety in the parent - especially in the mother - to a degree unparalleled in child-care history.

(Hardyment 1983: 233)

Journalist Barbara Ellen believes that ‘All mothers need to stick two fingers up to notions of idealised motherhood - otherwise you end up like those glassy-eyed Stepford Mums who always make such a point of being smiley, immaculate and devoted, but then you find out they’ve been putting their cigarettes out on their children behind closed doors. That should be the mantra of all new mothers: beware perfection’ (Ellen: 7 March 2004).

Celebrity Paula Yates published The Fun Starts Here: A Practical Guide to the Bliss of Babies in 1990 (followed by several sequels). Her approach is Leach-like in its rose-tinted idealism: the jacket cover even uses the old cliché, ‘Everyone knows that God couldn’t send angels to earth so he sent mothers instead’. The tragic demise of Yates, who died of a drugs overdose in 2000, having lost custody of three of her four children, perhaps shows the damage that can be caused by expecting oneself to live up to impossible ideals. Interestingly, Ingman also attributes the much earlier suicide of Sylvia Plath to a feeling of inadequacy regarding society’s and her own expectations of
mothers (1999: 13). At the very least, Yates’ situation demonstrates just how big a gap there can be between what childcare writers advocate to other parents, and what they actually do themselves. It also emphasises the way in which parental anxiety and lack of confidence can cause the most damage to the person the childcare advisors are claiming to help: the child.

While the neurotic parent / neurotic child syndrome is one consequence of over-zealous childcare advisors, another is the emergence of the overly-demanding and assertive child who knows his rights and will exploit his submissive parents to the full. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the excessive emphasis on children’s rights and respecting the child’s feelings can sometimes be exaggerated and misinterpreted as letting the child have everything it wants. This can be seen partly as the continuing influence of Spock and his contemporaries, combined with the wider social changes that began to blossom in the 1960s. Hardyment comments on the former:

With no long-term aim but that of having fun, the spectre of discipline only arose when the parents reached the limits of their tolerance. At first the existence of those limits was skated over. Full of the importance of baby’s right to follow his developmental plan, to explore and discover just as his inner drives directed him, the Aldrichs, Ribble and the young Spock denied any possibility of “spoiling.” The infant had to be free to eat, sleep and play as he pleased.

(Hardyment 1983: 282)

Many parents and other child carers no longer have confidence in their right to have authority over their children; the fear of oppressing or inhibiting them is so great that their every whim is often pandered to. This can create a situation where the parent is fearful and submissive, and the child is able to take advantage and exert power. This issue is also acute in schools, as will be discussed shortly. A recent BBC programme, *What Kids Want...and How They Get It* (BBC1, 19 Dec.2001), referred to the current generation of children as the ‘negotiation generation,’ taking advantage of their parents’ uncertainty. The programme featured a four-year-old as a perfect example: on a
shopping trip with her mother, the two were engaged in constant ‘negotiation’ regarding
sweets, toys and other desired purchases. The four-year-old negotiator spoke to her
mother with authoritative comments such as ‘That’s not a good enough reason,’ and
‘It’s not up to you, you’re not in charge’ (the mother, evidently, had given her this
impression).

An attempt to balance the rights of the parent with the rights of the child has been
made by the advocates of ‘good enough parenting’. Bruno Bettelheim’s A Good-
Enough Parent: The Guide To Bringing Up Your Child (1987) is often credited as the
first to use the term ‘good-enough’, although in his acknowledgements he does actually
attribute it to D.W. Winnicott.\(^5\) Bettelheim and his predecessor can therefore be seen as
attempting to counteract perfectionist theories. However, Bettelheim’s book can be seen
as contradictory and confusing (note the subtitle - not ‘a’ guide, but ‘the’ guide). While
he claims to be relieving parental guilt and advocating the concept of ‘good-enough’,
Bettelheim’s advice is really of the idealistic type, emphasising extreme empathy with
the child’s feelings at all times:

...the good enough parent will examine his child’s motives, try to
understand his thoughts, appreciate his desires so as to comprehend
what it is he [the child] hopes to gain, and why and how. On the basis
of such comprehension, we may be able to show our child on his,
rather than our, terms how his method may be inappropriate to his
goals, and how he may better achieve them.

\[(1987: 50)\]

If this is merely ‘good-enough’ parenting, there is little hope for the average parent.

Nonetheless, the general concept of ‘good-enough’ parenting has now come into
widespread use (a recent computer search came up with 18 000 entries) and there are
now child-care writers who genuinely try to combine understanding of children with
understanding of parents. It can also be seen that these ideas, if not the term itself, were

\(^5\) See particularly ‘The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship (1960)’ in Winnicott’s The Maturational
Parents, first published in 1969 (1970 UK) was an early attempt to relieve parental guilt. Homan’s down-to-earth and humorous style makes it clear that ‘experts’ are not always right (1969: 7), and he pokes fun at the way in which child-empathy can be taken to extremes:

The fact is that the rare schoolroom course and the many instruction books on parenthood...are unrealistic and contradictory....My child has just dismembered his sister, castigated his mother, and burned the house, and I discover from the experts that to communicate effectively with him, I should say, presumably in a level voice, “I see something is bothering you; you are angry at your teacher; Daddy often feels this way himself.” Reading such advice, I know that I can never be a good parent. Not without prolonged psychotherapy and treatment for my colitis.

(Homan 1969: 4-5)

Homan is in no way one-sided, and does not in any way advocate harsh or insensitive treatment of children. On the contrary, he seems to realise that a child will grow up happier and far more well-balanced in the hands of a parent who possesses confidence and a sense of humour. This type of parent, one who tries their best but can admit their mistakes, is what Homan refers to as a ‘successful and bumbling parent’ (Homan 1969: 7).

A similar tone is taken in the books of Dr Christopher Green, who began writing in the 1980s but is still popular today (he regularly updates his books). His childcare advice is not only humorous, practical and easy to read, he also writes with refreshing honesty and empathy. Toddler Taming (1984 revised 1992) opens with the following: ‘I used to be a childcare expert. Then a strange thing happened. My wife and I had two children and suddenly I discovered how little I knew, and how impractical was the vast majority of childcare information of the day’ (1984/1992: i). Green is certainly positive about the delights of children and parenting (‘Toddlers are so alive, so full of fun...and the most vivid of vivid imaginations’ (ibid p9)), yet this is combined with a realistic awareness of the not-so-delightful traits in the young child:
It is said of normal 2-year-olds that 44 per cent attack their younger or older brother or sister...83 per cent whinge and nag, 94 per cent constantly seek attention, 95 per cent are stubborn and 100 per cent are active and rarely still....That's life! There are quite enough genuine worries in the world without making ourselves feel inadequate by believing we are to blame for the normal non-problems around us.

(ibid p3)

This guilt-free ‘That’s life!’ attitude contrasts strongly with both the Behaviourists and the Spock / Leach - type advisors. For Green, children, though delightful in many ways, simply are troublesome; childhood / parenthood will be fraught with difficulties and this is not a sign of an inadequate parent or an indication of future psychological problems in the child. He presents much practical advice for coping with such behaviour, but always with a tone which strongly suggests that it is all normal and to be expected.

Green is aware that the media and many childcare advisors ‘promote the everyday endeavour to find perfection....Needless to say nothing is perfect and most of what we are striving for are unattainable myth-like goals’ (ibid p3). He lists ‘some of the way-out and incorrect ideas’ promoted by various ‘experts’ and offers his own guilt-lifting comments:

Every mother should want to be a 24-hour-a-day parent. If she does not, she should feel ashamed. Rubbish. Few fathers want to be 24-hour-a-day fathers and some time to ourselves is a help to both parent and child.....The toddler who wakes repeatedly every night must be comforted by its parent. An impractical, out-of-touch theory. This is a sleep problem which should be cured quickly. Sleep deprivation is a form of torture, and parents who chronically lack sleep become a little deranged, which is not good for their children.

(ibid p5)

Green therefore accepts difficult traits in the child while also accepting the parent’s entitlement to find these traits annoying and frustrating. He thus presents a balanced view of the nature / nurture argument (particularly in chapter four, ‘The Difficult Child: Born or Made’ pp24-8). He stresses the importance of environment, encouraging
parents to be sensitive to their child’s needs, but also points out that nature has a role. Parents must simply do their best with the child they have.

What is most noticeable in Homan and Green is their empathy, humour and their awareness of the importance of parental confidence, which, as we have seen, has been shattered throughout the twentieth century. The first chapter of Green’s Toddler Taming is entitled ‘Confidence is the key’ and he lists parental confidence as one of five factors ‘which provide the foundation for strong and emotionally secure children’ (ibid p1). Parents are allowed to be human, and should not berate themselves for it. Children, though they have needs which must of course be met, are not as fragile as other psychologists would have us believe: they can survive and even thrive on a reasonable amount of parental fallibility. These writers, then, have great concern for the child, but also faith in its strength and resilience: ‘There is no one right way to bring up children. Child care fashions come and go with the regularity of Parisian hemlines. As we chop and change, the children look on in bemusement, showing how well they survive despite our professional interference’ (Green 1984/1992: 7).

Hardyment echoes this:

There is space on the bookshop shelves for Penelope Leach and Gina Ford (they complement each other usefully, in fact), for playful parenting and positive parenting, for silent nights as well as three in a bed. New mums and dads should browse at will and pick the advice that chimes comfortably with their own instincts.

(Hardyment: 25 Nov. 2000)

This perhaps explains the point made at the beginning of this section regarding parenting debates that have been ongoing for several centuries. The dialectic nature of these debates is probably important, enabling parents to have a wide spectrum of advice from which to choose (problems are caused when any one extreme takes over). However, to reiterate Green’s point, parents must have a reasonable amount of
confidence in their own instincts to enable them to filter this advice, rather than be dictated to.

**Feminism & children’s rights**

The idea of child liberation was undoubtedly part of widespread social changes in the 1960s. Yet this itself has created many contradictions, particularly between feminism and children’s rights (so often linked together). A 1986 article in *The Independent*, ‘A pregnant pause’ points out that the ‘woman’s right to choose’ means that the unborn child now, seemingly, has no rights at all. While 1960s changes have granted rights to children, the mentally ill and even animals, ‘Only the human foetus has found its rights steadily undermined. Legalised abortion has severely limited the most fundamental right of all for the unborn - the right to survive’ (*The Independent*, 9 Oct. 1986).

However, simultaneously, mothers who do not terminate their pregnancies can be subjected to harsh consequences for not taking sufficient care of their unborn children. The same article discusses two cases. In the first, a California mother has been prosecuted for contributing to the death of her baby son who was born brain-damaged. Traces of illegal amphetamines were found in his blood and thus presumably taken by the mother during pregnancy. Secondly, in London there is a similar case of a mother whose child was fostered because it was born addicted to methadone. The article points out that both these mothers could easily have had abortions, thus ‘We are approaching a situation in which society effectively tolerates abortion on demand - the destruction of a foetus on grounds of convenience - yet insists upon policing the mother’s social life during pregnancy’ (*The Independent* 9 Oct. 1986).

These cases emphasise the way in which the power dynamic between mother and child is set up even before the child is born. From the moment of conception onwards, neither mother nor baby can have everything she wants without it being at the other’s
expense. At the time of writing, the most recent abortion controversy is the report that some late-abortion babies do not die immediately after being removed from the womb: consequently they are left to die. Along with this, many premature babies are surviving after gestation periods of only twenty-two weeks. The limit for abortions currently stands at twenty-four weeks, but the media and various medical professionals have recently discussed reducing it. The point at which a 'foetus', who has no legal right to life, becomes a 'child', with extensive rights, is not at all clear.

The conflict between women's rights and children's rights also contributes to debates regarding the experience of parenthood and the nature of children themselves. While children's rights are now a fundamental concern in Western society, and countless parenting theories abound, widespread contraception and abortion combined with increasing career opportunities for women mean that motherhood is no longer the inevitable path for women (particularly the educated middle-class woman). It is now a choice, and many women choose to delay it or avoid it altogether. Now that children are a choice, the question has arisen: are children a burden or a pleasure? Which choice is preferable? Journalist Sophie Radice believes that:

The question of whether a baby - wanted or not - is a blessing or a burden is being debated now as never before. We live in an age when many women delay motherhood because they wish to establish a career. Publishers are falling over themselves to publish books shattering the 'myth' of motherhood....The emerging consensus seems to be that babies are indeed a burden.

(Radice: 23 June 1999)

However, for many women brought up with feminist ideals of independence and freedom, life took a surprisingly different turn. Journalist Joanna Briscoe grew up believing that motherhood meant patriarchal misery and oppression. She followed contemporary trends by opting for late motherhood (she had her first child at thirty-

---

6 In June 2005, the British Medical Association conference voted on reducing the abortion limit, but the majority were in favour of maintaining the twenty-four week limit.
7 Katha Pollit also discusses the difficulty of reconciling motherhood with feminist ideals (Pollit: 9 Sept. 2003)
seven), but found the experience a delightful surprise: ‘The culturally licensed refusal by the post-baby-boomer generation to grow up means that vast swathes of society believe that parenthood will wreck their lives. But it’s not until it actually happens that the universal truth hits home: the wonders outweigh the horrors’. Another mother who had her first child at the same age agrees: ‘“I wish, wish, wish I’d thought about having kids earlier. It was just that I assumed that life as I knew it would end (it did) - but I had no idea how lovely parenthood would be!” ’ (Briscoe: 1 May 2002). Briscoe also admits to the exhaustion and difficulties of motherhood, but emphasises the importance of compromising. Ultimately she seems to feel that some feminist ideals are too stringent (and too uncompromising), and overlook the joys of children (Briscoe: 1 May 2002; 13 Sept. 2003).

Significantly, these women who realise and accept that children and motherhood are simultaneously burden and pleasure, and that feminist ideals and motherhood will never entirely coincide, parallel the childcare writers who try to balance the extremes of strictness and permissiveness, and reassure parents about their negative feelings and experiences while also emphasising the positive ones. There seems to be a strong emphasis on letting go of extremes and idealism, and on accepting mixed feelings and mixed blessings: ‘Every parent with an ounce of honesty will admit that being with your children is the most boring, rewarding, infuriating, pleasurable and confusing thing you can do - and that as blessings go, having kids is about as mixed as you can get’ (Radice: 23 June 1999).

**Schools in crisis**

Conflicts regarding children’s rights are particularly acute in today’s schools. One of the most significant articles to appear in the media recently is ‘The secret diary of a teacher’ (18 April 2004a) by Stuart Williams, originally under the pseudonym Matthew
Fuller: it originally appeared in *Private Eye*, and was reproduced in *The Sunday Telegraph*. Williams articulates the power struggles and the sense of helplessness felt by many of today's teachers.\(^8\) Day after day he deals with unruly, aggressive pupils, while his power to discipline them and enable constructive learning is almost non-existent:

Tracy Jones attempts to push past me and leave by the main door. She tells me I can't keep her in because she has got rights. This is a common complaint. They all have lots of rights. They know how long you can hold them back after school without notice....They know the nights they are supposed to have homework and complain bitterly when it is set on a wrong night, even though they never do it.

(Williams: 18 April 2004a)

Supply teacher Jonathan Dunning Davis, who was recently cleared of sexually harassing a female pupil, agrees: 'It is a power-to-the-pupil environment. Gone are the days when teachers had any authority in the classroom' ' (BBC1, 24 March 2004a). In a follow-up article, Williams blames the parents (for not instilling respect and discipline) and the wider society of which they are part: 'The parents of the pupils I taught come from the Thatcher generation, the every-man-for-himself generation....Caning children did no good at all. Exclusion does no good at all. We need - somehow - to get the message through to parents that it is they who must teach their children how to behave themselves'' (Williams: 2 May 2004b).

However, despite these power struggles in which children appear to have the upper hand, today's children are also being put under more pressure to achieve than ever before (Childline recently reported a record number of calls, citing exam stress as the most common problem (BBC1, 28 May 2004b)). School league tables (both British and international) are now a central educational issue; if schools want to survive they must produce good results. Thus education is being 'measured' excessively: children now do SATs (Standard Attainment Tests) at the ages of seven, eleven and fourteen, though this is now only in England, after Wales and Scotland abolished the tests and replaced them

---

\(^8\) In my own personal experience, I know many school teachers, all of whom express feelings similar to Williams'.
with teacher assessment. A recent report by Cambridge University’s faculty of education cited the pressure of these tests and league tables as a contributory factor in behavioural problems:

Secondary education in England is collapsing under the twin strains of Government pressure on schools and deteriorating pupil behaviour....Painting a grim picture of bored, aggressive children, hostile parents, and teachers at the end of their tether, the study said the Government’s interventionist policies had brought schools to the point where they could no longer deliver what was expected of them....‘The decline in pupil behaviour is clearly linked to the nature of the curriculum and the structures which frame it,’ the report said.

(克莱尔：2004年5月27日)

Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers regard SATs, along with psychologists’ tests, such as IQ tests, as a symptom of modern society’s desire to measure everything: ‘One of the strongest stories of modernism is that if we want to know about something, what we need to do is measure it....The idea of testing children is now not just accessible but taken for granted by many in our society - even our politicians!’ (1992: 16). The Stainton Rogers believe that ‘tests’ cannot really tell us about the child:

Indeed the futility of the endeavour is shown by the shift from the eleven plus examination to SATs....While they use very similar techniques, in the former, it was the child’s capabilities which were being evaluated; in the latter, it is the school’s. But, of course, neither tells us anything direct, either about the child, or the school. If anything, they tell us about the ideology within which each test has been conceived.

(1992: 16)

In the struggle for high results, children’s rights and needs seem to have been overlooked in favour of, firstly, parents’ ambitions for their offspring; secondly, the individual school’s need for reputation, funding and survival, and thirdly, the government’s desire to score impressive results in international league tables. There seems to be a huge contradiction in schools: on one hand children are often viewed as overly empowered and assertive individuals over whom their teachers have little control
or authority, yet simultaneously they are being used as small pawns in a large political game. However, although I would agree that ‘pupil behaviour is an issue which goes beyond schools to wider social changes and the decline in respect for authority’ (BBC News Online, http://news.bbc.uk/1/hi/education), it is also the case that these two apparently contradictory issues are at least partly interlinked, with pressure on schools contributing to behavioural problems.

**The death of childhood?**

While the experience of parenthood is now quite ambiguous, so too is the experience of being a child, particularly with regard to the duration of childhood. Marina Warner discusses the contradictions in today’s society regarding this: ‘The duration of the age of expected innocence has been greatly extended since Victorian times, for instance: a good thing, if it can prevent exploiting child labour and adult molestation but perhaps not, in other cases’ (1994: 45). There are many age-related laws, for example, school-leaving age, sex, drinking, smoking, driving. Most teenagers probably break some, or many, of these laws, with the exception of the school-leaving age and perhaps driving which, being more public, are easier to enforce. Thus, there are again differences between official information and actual experiences of living: laws deem certain ages ‘appropriate’ for the transition from childhood to adulthood but, not only do these ages vary for different things, the real lives of many people often contradict the ideologies which inform the law.

Warner goes on to say that, while today’s children are in many ways more protected than their Victorian chimney-sweeping counterparts, ‘At the same time, the notion of child sexuality is encoded in upbringing at a much younger age than before’ (1994: 45). This ranges from a clear distinction between male and female baby clothes to ‘the little girl in the black dress, patent pumps, lipstick and earrings who was brought out in the
finale of a recent Chanel collection’. She was ‘showing off her body, and looked like a travesty of the sex-free youth children are supposed to enjoy’ (1994: 46).

The ultimate extreme of the ‘death of childhood’ is probably child pornography, in which the child is used solely as an object of desire, but there are milder issues which are still a great cause for concern, from children’s beauty parlours to schoolgirl mums (these issues seem to apply more to girls, though not exclusively). ‘Children’s Express’ (a website in which children / teenagers discuss issues which affect them) recently published an article, ‘Cosmetic Changes’, which pointed out that children as young as seven can now book into ‘Pure Health and Beauty’ for a ‘Little Miss Makeover’. Several teenagers expressed quite a sophisticated understanding of the problems inherent in such activities:

“I feel sad when I see little girls dressed up to look sexy with mountains of make-up on,” says Tessa Robins, 15....“The media has a lot to answer for in making young girls unhappy about their looks - more and more adverts for beauty products are being aimed at really young girls”....“The thought of a young person wanting to have beauty treatments sickens me,” says 14-year-old Sabrina Golding...“It shows what an overpowering influence the beauty market has over both males and females....People want to grow up too fast today....They will look back and wonder ‘where did my childhood go?’ because they will have spent it trying to be someone older.”


Toys have also changed accordingly. An American organisation, ‘Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children’, recently campaigned against some of the toys marketed in the 2004 American International Toy Fair. The encouragement of precocious sexuality was one of the problems cited, along with introducing children ‘to the inappropriate content of adult media’. One of the toys discussed was ‘Lil’ Bratz fashion doll Yasmin’, recommended for children aged four years and up: ‘Bratz dolls are highly sexualized dolls with extremely high heels, heavy with make-up, large puffy lips and very skimpy, tightly fitting clothes. The dolls are at the forefront of a toy trend for girls that promotes

Children growing up too soon and wanting various consumer items also raises another issue: ‘To add to the difficulties, economic individualism has brought us the ultimate nightmare - not just the child as commodity, but the child consumer....children are expensive to raise, anyway, but all the products made for them unashamedly appeal to their pester power...’ (Warner 1994: 47). This is also another aspect of the changing relationship between parent and child, in which the child seems to have more and more power to persuade the parent to do as he or she wants.

More disturbing still are the various cases recently featured in the media of schoolgirl mothers as young as twelve, though it is difficult to tell if this is a new phenomenon, or simply a newly reported one. Nonetheless, this must be one of the most difficult consequences of precocious sexuality, one which forces the child-mother into the ultimate adult responsibility.

**Why can’t children go out to play any more?**

Ironically, while some argue that children are overexposed to aspects of the adult world and thus lose their innocence too early, there are just as many arguments which claim that children are now being excessively overprotected and infantilised. The summer of 1995 saw two horrific child murders (involving three children): seven-year-old Sophie Hook was murdered while camping in the back garden with her sister and cousins, while friends Paul Barker, thirteen, and Robert Gee, twelve, were stabbed to death while out fishing. A year later, thirteen-year-old Caroline Dickenson was murdered as she slept in a youth hostel on a school trip to France. These incidents
prompted an array of media articles about the dangerous world our children now live in which prevents them from being able to enjoy innocent outdoor activities.

Fear of violence and murder combines with fear of traffic danger so that the issue of freedom-versus-protection is now hotly debated. However, it is not clear whether life for children and the dangers they face have actually changed dramatically, or if there is simply more awareness of dangers. In particular, more sophisticated media means that child murders are now given more extensive coverage, and moral panic often ensues.

Walter Ellis' article, 'The Death of Childhood: the time has passed when to be young was very heaven' (1 Aug. 1995), paints a somewhat nostalgic picture of his own blissful 1950s childhood, roaming freely in the countryside with no fear of danger: 'What was important was that there existed a benign, and effective, sense of community. Once...I did stray too far, only to be returned cheerfully by the milkman on his float'. Ellis believes firmly that today's children face more danger: 'Childhood over the past twenty years [writing in 1995] seems to have become as fraught with danger as it has always been for the young of other species. There are predators about, ready to molest and kill' (Ellis: 1 Aug. 1995).

Mary Ann Sieghart poses the question: 'What has happened to make the world so dangerous? Or are parents simply more neurotic?' She gives extensive statistics from a survey by the Policy Studies Institute (published in 1990) which, overall, conclude that very few of today's British children are allowed to cross roads, walk to school or use buses without an adult. Parents' fears are as follows: forty-three per cent fear traffic, while twenty-one per cent fear molestation and assault. The point is made that many of these fears are exaggerated, and media sensationalism contributes heavily to this (Sieghart: 5 Aug. 1995). I would also add that adults' rose-tinted visions of their own childhoods probably play a part (Walter Ellis, in the above article, can certainly be accused of this).
Sieghart quotes one more statistic which seems significant: twenty-one per cent of parents believe their child is unreliable. Thus exaggerated fears of danger combine with a probably exaggerated sense of the child’s vulnerability and incompetence. Sieghart summarises the potential consequences very articulately:

If children are never free from adult supervision, they cannot internalise a parental voice or find a way of setting their own boundaries. They have no chance to do mildly dangerous things and find out how risks should be judged. They cannot chart their own course through the minor hazards of everyday life. Nor can they explore the real bonds of friendship and loyalty that are formed through common adventures with other children.

(Sieghart: 5 Aug.1995)

The overprotected, indoors and often computer-oriented lifestyle which now characterises the childhood of many Western children has also created other problems. One of these is the health of children: a recent government report revealed the worrying extent of childhood obesity. David Hinchliffe, chairman of the Commons health committee, said that ‘“Obesity will soon supersede tobacco as the greatest cause of premature death. It is staggering to realise that, on present trends, half of all children in England in 2020 could be obese”’ (Derbyshire: 27 May 2004).

Home computers, and the amount of time many children spend on them, not only cause health concerns. Ironically, these ‘overprotected’ children are often free to surf the internet and thus are exposed to adult worlds they would probably not otherwise experience. While parents attempt to protect their children from abductors on the street, paedophiles are able to disguise their identities and ‘groom’ young girls in internet chat rooms.
**How far can the law & social services protect children?**

The failures and mistakes that allowed Victoria Climbie to die are uncannily echoed in a string of previous inquiries into the deaths of children stretching back three decades....Seven-year-old Maria Colwell, beaten to death by her stepfather in Brighton in 1973, triggered a national debate over the care of children.....The Laming inquiry [into the death of Climbie] is expected to lambast repeated failures by doctors, social workers and others to share information.

*(The Observer, 26 Jan. 2003)*

"The best way of protecting children from known and dangerous paedophiles who have already offended is to ensure that they are not released from prison if they still pose a genuine risk....Public access to details about known sex offenders would not have saved Sarah Payne. A reviewable sentence and extended supervision might have done."

*(The Guardian, 12 Dec. 2001)*

The murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman could have been avoided if only the police had done their job properly. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from the Humberside force’s failure to flag up the string of sex allegations against Ian Huntley when Soham Village College requested checks on its new employee....Home Secretary David Blunkett has been quick to order inquiries.....

*(Daily Express, 18 Dec. 2003)*

The above quotations refer to various cases of child murder, both domestic abuse (Maria Colwell 1973; Victoria Climbie 2002, and many in between) and stranger-abduction (Sarah Payne 2000; Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman 2002). There are many other similar cases (the above have been highlighted because they are among the most notorious), but what makes them poignant is the widespread feeling that these particular tragedies could, and should, have been avoided. Social services ‘should’ intervene and rescue children in danger; Roy Whiting was a known and convicted paedophile and ‘should’ not have had the opportunity to abduct and kill Sarah Payne; Ian Huntley had been accused of dozens of cases of sexually interfering with young girls and ‘should’ not have been given employment in a school....and so on. In such cases, individuals and organisations are held responsible for allowing child killers to have the opportunity to
prey on the innocent. These cases highlight the attitude that deems the child innocent, precious and deserving of absolute protection.

Before the 1960s, child abuse, particularly within the family, was far more invisible in society than it is today. This of course does not mean that abusive families have increased in recent times; rather that post-1960s society has shown more willingness to acknowledge it and attempt to do something about it. As Ian Hacking says in his article ‘The Making and Molding [sic] of Child Abuse’:

Previously our present conception of abusing a child did not even exist. People do many of the same vile things to children, for sure, that they did a century ago....Yet aside from occasional scandalous court cases, the public had little interest in such matters [before the 1960s].

(Hacking 1990-91: 253; 259)

Leslie Fiedler’s article ‘Child Abuse and the Literature of Childhood’ makes a clear link between attitudes to child abuse and representations of parent-child relationships in literature. Like Hacking, he discusses the ‘invisibility’ of the abused child prior to the 1960s, and believes that abuse was ‘overlooked’ by professionals because of:

....an a priori set of assumptions about what was conceivable in parent-child relationships. Such assumptions are typically derived not from technical or medical textbooks but from the novels doctors read, the plays and movies they see, the television shows they watch – along with everyone else in their time and place – from childhood on; and they fall, therefore, within the purview of professional writers, and professional readers, which is to say, literary critics.

(Fiedler 1980: 148)

This is not to suggest in any simplified way that literature (and the other media cited by Fiedler) has absolute control over people’s perceptions of children and child-abuse; rather to stress the two-way interaction between social attitudes and literary representations. Hacking agrees that child abuse has gained ‘sudden prominence’ since the 1960s (Hacking 1990-91: 258). This can be attributed partly to the feminist movement, along with general growing awareness of children’s rights and needs, and of the effects of upbringing on psychological development.
However, the other side of the coin with regard to this is that there are just as many cases where social services and medical authorities have overreacted, interfered and made incorrect diagnoses, resulting in parents and other carers being wrongly accused of harming children. One of the most well-known of these cases happened in Cleveland in 1987, when large numbers of parents were wrongly suspected of sexually abusing their offspring, and consequently many children were taken into care. Authorities later admitted making mistakes, and many of the children were returned home.

In 1997, in the USA, English au pair Louise Woodward was convicted of murdering the baby in her care: it was thought that she had shaken him (consequently, ‘Shaken Baby Syndrome’ is now a well-used phrase). The conviction was overturned after extensive campaigns by the public, though this case remains highly ambiguous: the cause of the baby’s death was never determined, and Woodward still has a manslaughter charge.

Several recent cases, of mothers wrongly accused of murdering their babies, are more clear-cut. Sally Clarke was convicted in 1999 for murdering her two baby sons. The conviction was overturned in February 2003. Angela Cannings was also convicted of murdering her two baby boys in April 2002, and this was overturned in December 2003. Thirdly, Trupti Patel was tried, but cleared, of killing her three babies in June 2003. All these child deaths were actually due to sudden infant death syndrome, infections and other natural causes.

In all these cases, Professor Roy Meadow was the medical authority who gave supposed medical evidence which convicted these mothers. He claimed that the chances of two or more cot deaths occurring in one family are so rare that these children must have been murdered (saying that one cot death is tragic, two is suspicious and three is murder). Meadow has now been investigated by the British Medical Council - in July 2005 he was found guilty of serious professional misconduct, and was struck off. There
is also a government review taking place, examining the procedures used for investigating mothers in these circumstances.

It seems that authorities cannot get it right, and are constantly being accused of either under- or over-reacting. Nick Allen presents a balanced view in his realisation of the importance of legal protection for children, and also his understanding that no legal structures can be absolutely watertight. He is referring specifically to the Children Act 1989, but his points can also be taken more generally:

The Children Act is without doubt a landmark development in English law but it contains no magic cure for family problems....No cast-iron guarantees of children’s welfare or safety are given in the Children Act and none could reasonably be demanded. No law can force an absent parent to see their child....No law can ensure that a child at risk is removed (or is not removed) from the family home at exactly the right time for exactly the right period. What we can reasonably demand of the law in this field is that it is clear, consistent and fair, and that it properly reflects the values to which our society subscribes [Allen believes the Children Act succeeds in this].


Thus the child deserves as much protection as it is possible to give, but we should appreciate that both systems and individuals can only do their best.

Protecting others from the child-demon

All child murders incite extreme public reaction, but nothing challenges our perceptions of childhood more than the murder of a child by another child. These cases are certainly rare, but there have been two infamous cases in recent times.\(^9\) 1968 saw eleven-year-old Mary Bell’s murders of two small boys (in two separate incidents) and, twenty-five years later in 1993, two-year-old James Bulger was murdered by two ten year-old boys, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables.

\(^9\) At the time of writing, another similar case has just occurred in the UK, though the victim did survive. A group of children aged between eleven and twelve are suspected of the attempted murder of a five-year-old boy in West Yorkshire. However, this case has not attracted excessive media attention, presumably because the child did not die.
It is sometimes felt that Bell received more sympathy and understanding than Thompson and Venables, and this applies to both the media and the law. As one example, *The Times*’ report on Bell’s conviction appears on page four of the newspaper: a very small article with a moderate headline, ‘Girl, 11, sentenced to life detention for killing boys’ (*The Times*, 18 Dec. 1968). Admittedly, *The Times* is by no means a sensationalist tabloid newspaper, but this manner of reporting the event suggests that the murders did not warrant anywhere near the amount of attention and horror that erupted in 1993. Also significant is that Bell, though initially given a life detention, was cleared of murder because of diminished responsibility: Home Office psychiatrist Dr David Westbury stated that she had a ‘psychopathic disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act’ (*The Times*, 18 Dec. 1968). As such, she was found guilty of manslaughter.

Thompson and Venables, on the other hand, were found guilty of murder.

It seems that the 1990s’ media, with their sensationalist reporting of the Bulger case (the boys were repeatedly demonised as ‘evil’), actually contributed to the length of sentence. Politicians expressed similar views. In the period leading up to the trial:

Prime Minister John Major demanded that society “should condemn more and understand less”. Leading politicians and the media denounced any attempt to try to understand why the children had killed as an apology for murder. There were no reasons other than that the two were “evil” and “freaks of nature”, they claimed.

( Hyland: 24 March 1999)

Even the judge who originally convicted Thompson and Venables used tabloid-style language in describing the murder as “an act of unparalleled evil and barbarity. This child of two...was battered to death without mercy....your conduct was both cunning

---

10 This view is expressed in the website ‘Murder in the UK’ (http://www.murderuk.com/childkillers/marybell.htm) and also in *Time* magazine, ‘The Hard Case of Mary Bell’ (Gleick 1998)
and very wicked". In contrast, the judge in Bell’s case described her more dispassionately as ‘dangerous’ (reported in The Times, 18 Dec. 1968).

Several years after the Bulger case, the House of Lords’ ruling on the original sentence (fifteen years minimum) stated very clearly that the Home Secretary who passed the sentence had been influenced by the media and the public: in particular, campaigns organised by the News of the World demanding that the boys remain locked away for as long as possible.

Victor Watson articulates the way in which such cases fuel society’s fear of the child-demon:

> We have as part of our cultural thinking assumptions about children as innocent victims. This is well documented. But we also have fears about child demons, or child monsters, or child criminals - and usually the latter are kept safely remote from everyday life in horror films like Rosemary’s Baby. The innocent child victim and the demon child monster are two powerful cultural icons of our thought. The killing of one child by two others brought into direct and articulate conflict our compassion for the innocent child victim and our fear of the child monster. While there continues to be a national anxiety about juvenile crime (exploited by journalists and politicians when it suits them), we will continue to be haunted by variations of this particular child demon.

(Watson 1996: 1)

Many schools of thought feel that it is mythical images of angelic childhood innocence (widely prevalent since Victorian times) which cause such harsh reactions: children who do not live up to this ideal are feared and condemned, either ‘modestly by simply being ordinary kids, or horrendously by becoming victims or criminals’ (Warner 1994: 46). Thus, Thompson and Venables were treated harshly by the media and the public, and tried by the law as if they were adults (‘their trial revealed a brutal absence of pity for them as children’) because ‘they had betrayed an abstract myth about children’s proper

---

11 Cited in the House of Lords’ ruling on the original sentence: 12 June 1997 (session 1997-8); http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld199798/ldjudgmt/jd970612/va

12 Information from the House of Lords ruling, cited in previous footnote, above. This intervention by the House of Lords, and also the European Court of Human Rights, resulted in the sentence being reduced to eight years. The boys were released, under anonymous new identities, in 2001.
childlikeness’ (Warner 1994: 34-5). Images of children as either angels or devils are discussed further in chapter four, particularly with regard to Fine’s *The Tulip Touch* (1996).

Children who kill are thankfully rare, but there are frequently less severe cases of children terrorising others. The most recent measure to control troublesome children and teenagers is the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (known as the ASBO), though this is not exclusively confined to children. Offenders are subjected to curfews and often banned from certain streets or areas, usually to keep them away from their partners-in-crime. In contrast to children being kept under close supervision for their own protection, these children and teenagers are being closely monitored in order to protect others (including adults) from them.

It seems that the response to troublesome children is often to react after their behaviour has escalated, and to act with force and restraint. Some would say this contradicts modern-day society’s supposedly enlightened understanding of child psychology, and seems to place the emphasis on a reactionary approach rather than a preventative one. Earlier in the chapter, the point was made that the last few hundred years have seen attitudes to children fluctuating back and forth between harshness and permissiveness: it is clear that this tension is now extremely acute. Yet perhaps this is not surprising: if the permissiveness advocated by Spock and his contemporaries has created children who are out of control and have little respect for authority, it is understandable that this then leads to a feeling that harsh restraint is necessary. This echoes Gina Ford’s point: parents taught to believe in demand-feeding are now crying out for Ford’s bestselling book in order to regain order and peace.

This may also explain why public and media condemnation of Thompson and Venables appears to have been harsher than that received by Mary Bell: Bell committed her crimes when 1960s liberalism was at its peak, as evidenced in the 1960s’ Children
Acts and their attempts to understand juvenile delinquency. When Thompson and Venables committed a similar crime in 1993, a widespread feeling was beginning to emerge that liberalism had gone too far: thus the pendulum was swinging back the other way. A decade later, this debate continues: the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was recently reported to have blamed the liberal ‘anything goes’ attitudes of the 1960s for today’s anti-social behaviour. Studio discussion on BBC1 made the point that the 1960s highlighted important humanitarian values, but was also the start of a ‘complete collapse of adult authority’ (BBC1, 24 July 2004c).

However, it could also be argued that there are class divisions here: while many middle-class children now fall into the category of being overly empowered and knowing their rights to quite an extreme degree, those children who are truly deprived and in need of help still do not seem to have their needs met. It certainly seems to be the case that fear of the child is far greater when the child is lower / working class. ITV’s GMTV recently discussed the use of ASBOs and referred to offenders as an ‘underclass of children roaming the streets and causing trouble’ (ITV, 19 July 2004). Thus, in this respect, fear of the potential anarchy that can be caused by the working-class masses, and of the disruption that can potentially be caused by the child, come together. The result of this fear is an exaggerated response which demonises the object of fear and favours harsh restraint and control.

July 1995 saw the 150th anniversary of the birth of Dr Christian Barnardo. The anniversary provoked media interest in examining the situation of today’s vulnerable children, in comparison with their nineteenth-century counterparts. Polly Toynbee, along with other journalists, found the conclusions disturbing. Post-1960s society has seen an increasing emphasis on therapy, but it seems that those who need it most are not getting it. According to Toynbee, most disturbed children - especially those in care, who are predominantly lower-class - do not get psychiatric help:
The cost of caring well for these children would be huge. They need social workers to see them frequently; they need psychiatry. Better-rewarded foster families need proper support, as do the natural parents, to help to take them back. Nearly all these children need extra education, and all this should last well into their early twenties, instead of casting them adrift alone at eighteen, or sometimes sixteen.

(Toynbee: 4 July 1995)

Perhaps the final point to make here is that Thompson and Venables were, to the disgust of some of the public, given extensive, and presumably expensive, rehabilitation during their years in detention. It appears to have worked, as it did for Bell, and they have now been released back into the community, albeit under extensive identity changes to protect them from public backlash. It seems that the behaviour of disturbed children has to be this extreme before they get the help they need.

**Conclusion**

One of the most significant things to arise from this chapter is that centuries-old issues regarding the ‘sin’, ‘innocence’ and ‘experience’ of children are still paramount, along with corresponding nature-nurture debates. Arguments regarding the innocent child in need of protecting versus the demon child from whom others must be protected arise again and again in different forms. The most significant difference is that these arguments are now presented in secularized language.

Thus Harrison’s comments (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) are extremely accurate in two ways: his identification of the continuation of older issues, and his realisation of the many diverse and contradictory attitudes to childhood in existence in the twentieth (and now twenty-first) century. It is clear from the many areas discussed in this chapter that no single image of childhood is dominant. Legislation certainly shows increasing concern for the rights of the child, but within society and everyday lives it is not as straightforward as this. This is why, as I have discussed in my
Introductory chapter, it is important to look at what is going on in everyday lives and everyday thinking, rather than looking exclusively at ‘official’ information.

In parenting (and, most particularly, parenting advice) there is continuing tension between the child as creator of chaos, in need of firm handling, and the child as a fragile, vulnerable creature whose psychological as well as physical well-being can easily be shattered. Along with this, writers like Homan and Green try to balance the two views, with an emphasis on humour and confidence. Feminist issues, meanwhile, often complicate attitudes to children and parenting: the contradictory views of parenthood as a precious privilege and parenthood as an unenviable burden can easily exist within one individual, as well as one society.

Today’s schools appear to be in crisis, and embody the contradictory attitudes to childhood quite acutely. On one hand, the school pupil is a little demon aware only of his rights and not his responsibilities, terrorising teachers and making constructive education almost impossible; on the other hand, he is an innocent pawn who is being exploited in the name of league tables and funding.

Meanwhile, the ‘death of childhood’ is alleged to be upon us by those who fear that ‘experience’ comes too early for today’s children, and that a prolonged period of sheltered innocence is preferable. It certainly seems to be the case that today’s children become interested in adolescent concerns (particularly fashion, beauty and sexuality in general) at younger ages than in the past. Simultaneously, however, there are concerns that children are being overprotected and excessively sheltered because of media-exaggerated fears of abduction, sexual assault and murder (as well as concerns about traffic). Thus today’s children are not being given the opportunity to explore and develop in ways that are considered necessary to create self-sufficiency and psychological strength, while being kept indoors excessively creates new problems such as obesity and, ironically, exposure to the dangers of the internet.
Overexposure-versus-Overprotection is also evident in concerns about the law and social services. Various infamous cases of child abuse and child murder have prompted an outrage that these are incidents that should not have been allowed to happen: the innocent child has not received the protection it deserves, and legal inquiries often result. However, there are just as many incidents in which social services and other authorities overreact and interfere, falsely accusing parents and carers of child abuse, and so ruining lives.

Yet, if child murder by an adult creates confusion and chaos, this is nothing compared to that caused by a child killing another child. Passion for the violated innocence of the victim conflicts harshly with the challenge to our attitudes presented by the killer. Even in less serious cases of delinquent behaviour, the response is often to condemn and restrain, rather than understand and help, and there seem to be clear class-divisions here. It is these incidents which perhaps make us most aware how much confusion there is regarding the modern-day child. As journalist Nicci Gerard points out:

> We are sentimental about children, we are scared of them, we want them to stay young, we force them to grow up. We are confused. The line between adulthood and childhood used to be tyrannically drawn - like the Berlin Wall, the two states were denied to each other, and in the authoritarian zone, the adults were the oppressors. But now it has collapsed. Children step over its rubble and into the grown-up world prematurely....Adults step back into a state of culturally trendy immaturity.

(Gerard: 31 July 2004)

Perhaps the biggest paradox is that, in our era of child psychology, child concern and increasing legislation designed to make life easier for children, many people now believe that childhood today is more difficult and traumatic than ever. It seems likely that this is precisely because there is so much confusion: if adult society is so uncertain of the role and nature of the child, and of the adult, then this is bound to cause difficulties for children. An article in The Independent on Sunday discussed a 1994 survey by Barnardo’s which stated that two-thirds of British parents ‘vehemently
believe that their children’s childhoods are poorer than their own....there is growing evidence that modern children are subjected to pressures unimaginable to their elders’ (Braid & Victor: 6 Aug.1995). This, then, is the cultural climate in which today’s children are living, and in which Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine are (or have been) writing.
CHAPTER 2: FAMILY & PARENTING

Defining ‘family’

There are numerous different ways in which ‘family’ can be discussed. Jeffrey Blustein’s Parents & Children: The Ethics of the Family (1982) believes that there are ‘two different sets of norms pertaining to the family: those that regulate the family’s relation to the state, and those that regulate the relationships among family members’ (1982: 21). This chapter deals primarily with the latter, concentrating on the emotions within the family, particularly between parents (or parent substitutes) and children, and the various parenting styles which result. I will also be looking at the need for family, the emotional benefits and the burdens and stresses for both parent and child.¹

Nonetheless, despite this concentration on relationships and emotions within the family, these issues are, as Blustein says above, affected by the relationship between family and state, and it is necessary to look briefly at what exactly is meant by ‘family’. This conforms to what Hendrick describes as a ‘sentiments’ approach. Although he is referring specifically to historians, he sees the sentiments approach as one that looks closely at family relationships, viewing ‘attitudinal and behavioural shifts as emanating from broader cultural trends, like market capitalism or changes in political, religious or philosophical thought’ (Hendrick 1997: 17).

A glance through changing notions of family throughout the last few centuries makes it clear that the term is a social construct, not something fixed and absolute. It should also be stressed that all discussions of family refer to Western society and perceptions, and do not claim universality. Catherine Waters’ Dickens and the Politics of the Family (1997) contains an introductory chapter which analyses the family throughout history. The word first appeared in English in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

¹ One aspect not fully explored is that of sibling relationships and there are two reasons for this: one is simply lack of space, the other is that my overall topic focuses mainly on the adult/child dimension, and I feel that the sibling relationship is somewhat tangential to this.
Originally, it was used to describe the entire household (including servants), and later it 'was extended in the fifteenth century to refer to a “house”, in the sense of a particular lineage or kin-group descending from a common ancestor’ (Waters 1997: 13). Thus, family could designate both blood-relatives who did not share the same residence, and people who lived under the same roof, but were not necessarily related by blood or marriage. Waters notes that it was not until the nineteenth century that ‘co-residence and kinship’ joined together to define ‘family’ (1997:13). It was also at this time that the middle-class nuclear family – father, mother and children living together – began to be perceived as the norm in Western society. Many theorists argue that:

…the nuclear family has developed in response to the structures and values of modern industrial society, its role being to socialise children appropriately, and to provide the emotional environment that would protect and sustain the (male) worker....Marxist accounts of the family have also tended to explain its development as an effect of external factors in their argument for the emergence of its nuclear form as a result of the relations of production that obtain under capitalism.

(Waters 1997: 12)

How, then, do we perceive family in the early twenty-first century? It seems worth elaborating on Waters’ ideas: if family has gone from originally having broad and ‘loose’ meanings to a very specific concept (the nuclear family), the process now seems to be in reverse. Today’s Western society has seen a breakdown of the nuclear structure and a huge increase in non-traditional families – divorced parents, single parents, step parents, unmarried parents living together:

Between 1961 and 1997...the number of households comprising an adult heterosexual couple plus dependent children, which in 1961 accounted for 38% of all UK households, fell to 25%...of all households. Yet over 70% of the population still live in households headed by a couple. The number of single-parent families...almost trebled between 1971 and 1996....Cohabitation either instead of or as a prelude to marriage has dramatically increased.

(Abercrombie et al 1988/2000: 293)
Once again, family is starting to encompass diversity. The film *Mrs Doubtfire* (Columbus 1993) (adapted from Anne Fine’s novel *Madame Doubtfire* (1987)) sums up (albeit with Hollywood sentimentality) the way in which, in contemporary Western society, our definition of family is expanding considerably:

There are all sorts of different families....Some families have one Mummy, some families have one Daddy, or two families. Some children live with their uncle or aunt, some live with grandparents, and some live with foster parents. And some live in separate homes, in separate neighbourhoods, in different areas of the country....But if there’s love, dear, those are the ties that bind, and you’ll have a family in your heart – wherever.

(Columbus 1993)

The fact that the film *Mrs Doubtfire* felt the need to stress its point so explicitly suggests that there is resistance to ‘new’ types of family, and conflict between the old and the new. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall discusses the way in which the Conservative British government of the 1980s tried to promote the traditional family: ‘ “The long-term trend has been towards more diversity, but the pull of the traditional family is still very powerful. Many people believe that the new values don’t provide the same kind of stability and security as the older moral values did” ’. He also feels that the absence of a clear alternative encourages this return to traditionalism: ‘ “...there are many who accept the legitimacy of this new diversity....But there isn’t yet an ethical consciousness that corresponds to that sociological way of organising our lives. Its absence is what allows born-again reactionaries...to evoke a response when they call for a return to traditional familial and gender roles. So the situation remains fluid” ’ (Hall 1997: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi). Abercrombie et al make a similar point, discussing the Labour government’s green paper of 1998, in which Home Secretary Jack Straw asserted what he saw as the superiority of the nuclear family (Abercrombie et al 1988 / 2000: 286-288).
However, despite the conflict between the traditional and the non-traditional, both sides would probably agree that today’s Western family (both nuclear and unconventional) is infinitely more child-centred than in any other era. Thus, the ‘shrinking’ of the family to nuclear-size gradually brought children to the centre of family life, yet this child-centredness is continuing and increasing despite the breakdown of the nuclear structure. Significantly, the above quotation from *Mrs Doubtfire* does not even acknowledge the existence of families without children, although it is aimed at child-viewers and is clearly trying to help children come to terms with their own families.

James et al cite ‘the well-documented change in family structure’ (in the late twentieth century) as ‘instancing a fragmentation from an identity as a unit to the experience of a coalescence of individuals’ (James et al 1998: 5-6). Thus the child’s needs, and the child as an individual, have become more important than family as a unit. This perhaps explains why children and parenthood have remained central, despite the breakdown of the nuclear family. Björnberg believes that family and parenthood are actually in the process of separating; thus, new forms are emerging:

> People want to have children, not because they are married, but for other, more complex reasons. Many persons exercise parenthood outside the traditional frame of reference of a family. Parenthood, partnership, and family are drifting apart from each other and are developing into separate institutions....the changing structural patterns in family formation are signs of a complicated process of transition...to something which sociologists do not yet know what it will be [sic], but which they are calling modern family forms.

*(Björnberg 1992: 4; 27)*

**Family in children’s literature**

It is useful to trace changing depictions of families throughout the history of children’s literature. One of the most well-known examples is Mary Martha Sherwood’s
The History of the Fairchild Family.\textsuperscript{2} The family consists of Mr and Mrs Sherwood, and their three children, Lucy (who is aged about nine), Emily and Henry (aged, respectively, about six and eight). It is therefore nuclear and traditional, appears to be upper-middle class and, though family life is very strict, it is also loving and very happy.

Though the children are sometimes punished for being naughty, there is no real conflict in the family, despite the long hours they spend together. This extremely traditional family is therefore presented as the ideal, but it is problematic in that Sherwood overlooks the practicalities of their situation: neither parent works, but no explanation is given as to their source of income. For some unexplained reason, they therefore have endless time to spend with (and educate) their children, and are able to ensure that family and parenting are the be-all-and-end-all of their lives.

Dickens is often at the forefront of discussions of family in nineteenth century literature. In my own critical reading, Dickens is frequently mentioned in discussion of both children’s and adult literature. Inglis cites him as ‘the greatest poet of childhood’ (1981: 37) (my emphasis) and believes he is also an important influence on children’s literature for his work is ‘exemplary of the best that we may look for in children’s novelists...’ (ibid p292).

Dickens’ \textit{A Christmas Carol} (1843) is usually credited as a significant perpetrator of images of cosy Victorian domesticity (most of which centred on the nuclear family). Though the Cratchits are poor, this is used to add greater poignancy to their virtues, for their love for each other is so strong that they are able to experience great merriment even in the face of adversity:

\footnote{2 This novel was produced in three volumes, published, respectively, in 1818, 1842 and 1847. They were reprinted for many years to follow.}
They were not a handsome family, they were not well dressed, their shoes were far from being waterproof, their clothes were scanty....But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time....

(p80)

Images of Victorian domesticity were often enhanced by sensual depictions of open fires, luscious food and so on. Even in the poverty-stricken Cratchit household, readers experience the meagre Christmas dinner through the ravenous and appreciative eyes of this deprived family: ‘Mrs Cratchit made the gravy...hissing hot, Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour, Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce...’ (p75). Dickens makes it clear that this family is by no means unique, for ‘as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours and all sorts of rooms was wonderful...’ (p81).

However, despite this, Dickens more frequently opted to depict his child protagonists as orphans, alone and helpless in the world. The idyllic nature of the idealised nuclear family is thus emphasised more acutely because the child is deprived of it. Dickens’ orphans were often subjected to horrific child abuse, and Dickens was one of the first novelists to explore this subject in detail.3 However, the identity of the abuser is significant: these child characters are usually being abused by adults who are not the natural parents. This is a way of avoiding acknowledging that abuse may also happen in nuclear families, at the hands of biological parents.

In this, Dickens’ work echoes fairytales. Fiedler acknowledges the traditional fairytale’s representation of the abuser as someone other than the natural parent (1980: 152), and Hornyansky also discusses this in relation to Snow White: ‘A child hesitates to accuse Mummy of being jealous enough to murder her, so Mummy turns into step-

---

3 It should be reiterated that Dickens was obviously not specifically a children’s writer. Though he features child abuse (and was not the only Victorian writer to do so), this is something which very rarely featured in children’s books in the nineteenth century (and well beyond it).
Mummy - which partly explains her behaviour, partly makes it okay for the child to hate her’ (1980: 125).

In Dickens, then, despite an open acknowledgement of child abuse, there is nonetheless an acute idealisation of the biological nuclear family. In literature intended specifically for children, these idealisations continued (and, if anything, increased) in the early- and mid-twentieth century. It is well known that the two World Wars contributed greatly to escapism in children’s literature; thus, depictions of idealised families are part of a broader issue during this era. K.P. Smith terms children’s literature at this time ‘diversionary’: ‘Fully conscious of the vigorous drama of world turmoil being played out during the first half of the twentieth century, writers sought to remove the child from that conflict. The majority of diversionary authors sought to avoid serious conflict in terms of individuals, society and nature during the course of the story’ (1993: 228-9).

Smith goes on to cite Edith Nesbit as a prime example of the above. Nesbit’s stories about the Bastable children, amongst her other novels, show a united family. The Bastables consist of six children and their father; the mother is deceased and the father has lost most of his money to a corrupt business partner. They are therefore a traditional middle-class nuclear family who have fallen on hard times, both in terms of their mother’s death and their father’s finances.

Nonetheless, family life is not just happy but also exciting and fun; despite petty sibling arguments, family affection overrides difficult circumstances, though not in the sentimental manner of Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. As Oswald tells us in The Story of the Treasure Seekers (1899):

---

4 The Story of the Treasure Seekers (1899) and The Wouldbegoods (1901).
I thought I heard Albert-next-door’s uncle say something that sounded like “Poor little beggars!” He couldn’t have meant us, when we’d been having such a jolly time, and chestnuts, and fireworks to look forward to after dinner and everything!

(p73)

However, in order for authors to feature idealised families, it seems that various ‘tactics’ are necessary. While Dickens follows fairytale discourse in featuring orphans abused by adults other than the (usually romanticised) natural parents, Nesbit is typical of early twentieth century children’s literature in simply removing the parents into the background. The Bastable mother, as we know, has died, while the father is distant. He is often referred to (usually affectionately) but rarely features in person. The Bastable children, like many of their literary contemporaries, have most of their adventures without adults.

As late as the mid-twentieth century, Enid Blyton was continuing this tradition: most of her families are middle-class, nuclear and traditional, often consisting of two girls and two boys. As in Nesbit’s novels, the children in these families experience continual adventures which are always fun and ‘jolly’ and safe. Parents are usually warm and affectionate while also being respected as authorities but, again, they are kept in the background. Blyton’s Famous Five series (1942-1963) does touch on family conflict and adult flaws, primarily in the form of Uncle Quentin, but this only forms a minor part of each story, and the children’s adventures are always away from their adult relatives.

Nesbit and Blyton are typical of pre-1960s children’s literature in that the families featured are usually middle-class. Eve Garnett’s The Family from One-End Street (1937) was extremely unusual in depicting a working-class family; yet, though the Ruggles are presented positively and endearingly, the tone is patronising. The family consists of mother, father and ‘a great many Ruggles children - boys and girls, and a
baby that was really a boy but didn’t count either way yet’ (p1). The novel opens by
telling us that the family are most contented with their lot in life:

Mrs Ruggles was a Washerwoman and her husband was a Dustman.
“Very suitable, too,” she would say, though whether this referred to
Mr Ruggles himself, or the fact that they both cleaned up after other
people, it was hard to decide.

(p1)

The family’s economic difficulties feature in some episodes, but are not seen to
present any real problems: once again, family affection always prevails. Nonetheless,
Garnett does not keep parents in the background as much as her contemporaries: the
children do have child-only adventures, and are always free to explore without adults,
but the novel does actually feature the parent-child relationship (and the parent-parent
relationship) as well. Conflicts, however, are always minor and easily solved.

Thus, well into the twentieth century, children’s literature, even when it occasionally
moved outside a middle-class environment, continued to present traditional nuclear
families. Tucker believes that family sentimentality continued in the immediate post-
war period (Tucker & Reynolds 1998: 1-19). By the 1960s, however, the far-reaching
social changes which infiltrated children’s books as a whole began to alter depictions of
family. As Tucker says, by this time ‘parents and children were ready for a greater
degree of truth-telling about what can sometimes go on in the domestic scene’ (ibid
p17).

How, then, do Dahl, Fine, Jones and Rowling portray family? There is diversity
amongst the four writers here – in attitudes as well as in style.5 Dahl and Rowling do in
many ways seem to advocate the traditional, nuclear, father-breadwinner / mother-at-
home, white, middle-class type of family, and perhaps this is a reaction against
changing society and a desire to re-assert traditional ideals. The ‘good’ and happy
families all fulfil some, if not all, of the above criteria: in Rowling, this applies to
the (deceased) Potters, the Weasleys and Hermione’s parents, and, in Dahl, the Buckets 
(*C & C Factory 1964*) and James’ (deceased) parents (*James & GP 1961*).

However, there are some variations here: the Buckets and the Weasleys are poor, although this perhaps veers into the virtuous-poor stereotype, which links back to Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. Hermione’s mother also works, but she is the only working mother in Rowling, and only features in a very minor way. There do not appear to be any working mothers in Dahl. Mothers are usually housewives, and the primary childcarers. In addition, these two writers rarely feature divorce, step-parents or single-parents (surprisingly, given Rowling’s own situation).

In this respect, Dahl and Rowling seem to be going against the dominant trends in contemporary children’s literature. Gamble confirms that a new era in children’s literature began in the 1960s, in which ‘authors wrote about diverse family circumstances, and the middle-class family was no longer the dominant representation’ (Tucker & Gamble 2001: 26). Dahl’s work spans from the 1960s to the late 1980s (with some posthumous publications in the early 1990s), while Rowling is even more recent: late 1990s to the present day. In their apparent advocacy of the traditional family, however, these texts seem more reminiscent of a previous era. However, as we have seen earlier, there is continued resistance to the break-up of the nuclear family, and this is not just in political legislation. Björnberg confirms that, in many facets of society, the *image* of the nuclear family as the ideal is still strong:

> Circumstances change between generations, and the demands for change are great; but in practice the old model of bourgeois family ideology still has a great impact on the images of what makes up a happy family life, both in the East and the West [Europe], despite the number of changes in the organization of daily lives. It is a magic ideal and a firm normative model, even though reality has moved quite far from the ideal.

(Björnberg 1992: 4)

---

^5 See Introductory chapter for a discussion of the various different genres.
It should be mentioned that Dahl does feature single-parenthood in *Danny* (1975), in which Danny is being raised by his father. However, despite the father’s extremely loving and competent parenting, it is seen as an enforced and somewhat tragic situation which has come about through the death of Danny’s mother. The situation is very different from one in which single-parenthood has come about through divorce or the absence of marriage, and in which the reader may have the opportunity to judge the adults. Danny’s cosy nuclear family has therefore been partially destroyed through tragedy, not through choice or flawed character. Nonetheless, the two live together very happily, and Danny is certainly not shown to be deprived in any way.

It is also significant that, in Dahl and Rowling, the unhappy and dysfunctional families often conform to the traditional nuclear model too. Dahl’s abusive Wormwood family (*Matilda* 1988) is nuclear, as are the families of the spoilt children in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. In Rowling, meanwhile, the Dursleys are stereotypically bourgeois, and they are mocked for being ‘perfectly normal, thank you very much’ (*Philosopher’s Stone* 1997: 7). Thus, when it is loving and nurturing, the traditional nuclear family does seem to be shown as the ideal, and Dahl and Rowling could be criticised for their apparent advocacy of women as housewives. However, these two writers do not suggest that the traditional set-up is *automatically* a place of love and happiness. ‘Family’, even the most respectable, traditional kind, can also be oppressive, dysfunctional and even abusive.

Jones shows some advocacy of the traditional nuclear family - for example, the families in *Magicians of Caprona* (1980), and Chrestomanci and his wife (*Charmed Life* 1977), although the latter also ‘adopt’ extra family members. However, as we shall see later,⁶ life in these families, though relatively happy, is by no means blissful or stress-free. Jones also features divorce and single-parenthood. *Fire & Hemlock* (1985)

---

⁶ See the later section in this chapter, ‘Negotiating Everybody’s Rights’.
shows bitter warring between Polly’s parents (who eventually separate): the child is shown to suffer acutely because of her parents’ selfish focus on their own issues.

Black Maria (1991) also features an irresponsible father who deserts the nuclear family, leaving behind a very competent and strong single mother. The novel opens by telling us, firstly, how much the family dislike and resent Aunt Maria and, secondly, that Mig’s father ‘had gone away with a lady called Verena Bland and wouldn’t be coming back’ (p7). The latter point is made in a dry, matter-of-fact tone, as if it is now (in 1991) considered a normal part of family life, and an acceptable feature in a children’s book. Family discord is continued in the following paragraph: ‘Chris [Mig’s brother] doesn’t get on with Dad. He said “Good Riddance!” ’ (p7). Thus, on the first page, relations between husband and wife, parent and child, and immediate family and other relations are all shown to be difficult, yet all this is delivered in an understated manner.

However, despite its opening chapter’s apparent acceptance of family break-up, the same novel actually ends with only a begrudging acceptance of single-parent families: during an ‘auction’ of various orphans, the man in charge ‘gave several [children] to just one man or one woman, over the heads of married couples. And you could see it might work, in spite of that’ (p231). Jones also cannot resist a fairytale ending in which the mother gets married again, to a man who is loved and accepted by the children. Obviously, this is not a traditional family in the sense of two biological parents, but it does re-create the nuclear situation, while the difficulties of integrating a step-parent into the family are ignored.

A similar pattern occurs in Jones’ The Lives of Christopher Chant (1988). Throughout the novel, Christopher’s parents are shown to be locked in a bitter and loveless marriage, in which Mr Chant takes advantage of his wife’s money, while she in turn exploits his family’s good name. The tension between the two is extreme:
“I’m sorry to do this to you,” the third - or maybe the fourth - governess wept, “because you’re a nice little boy...but the atmosphere in this house! Every night he’s home...I have to sit at the dining table with them in utter silence. And she passes me a note to give to him, and he passes me one for her. Then they open the notes and look daggers at one another and then at me. I can’t stand any more!”

(p17)

The Chants, not surprisingly, eventually separate. What is surprising, and lacking in feasibility, is another fairytale ending in which the two somehow decide that they actually share a deep love for each other, and so re-unite.

In Jones, therefore, there is an acknowledgement of the break-up of the traditional nuclear family, but one senses an undertone of disapproval. However, as we have seen, she does not romanticise nuclear families either. Fine, meanwhile, fully and repeatedly explores divorce, step-parenting and single-parenting, in a manner which suggests acceptance, rather than just acknowledgement. Goggle Eyes (1989) features all three of these issues: it concentrates mainly on the arrival of the new step-father, but also looks back to the parents’ divorce, and explores how the mother has coped as a single parent; **Flour Babies** (1992) shows Simon coming to terms with his single parent family and trying to forgive the father who deserted him; **Madame Doubtfire** (1987) is brutally realistic about the bitterness between divorced parents. Fine also features nuclear families but, as in Jones’ traditional families, these relationships are not idealised: **The Granny Project** (1983) depicts feuding and reconciliation in a traditional family; **The Tulip Touch** (1996) shows both the ordinary ups and downs of Natalie’s family, and severe abuse in Tulip’s family (both nuclear). Thus, Fine shows the good and bad in both the traditional and the unconventional: family can be good or bad, or a mixture of both, whatever the household structure.

There certainly seems to be a link between genre and depictions of families. The fantasy novels of Dahl and Rowling veer towards traditionalism and some idealism in family life, while Jones, who combines fantasy with contemporary social realism, gives
some acknowledgement of the break-up of traditional families, but often opts for fairytale endings. Fine, meanwhile, continually shows the child’s-eye-view of divorce and non-traditional family situations, and in this she is quite typical of the ‘new social realism directly addressed [to the] problems of children’s everyday lives’ (Gamble in Tucker & Gamble 2001: 23).

Another typical feature of post-1960s children’s literature, particularly the new social realism, is the often explicit depiction of previously taboo subjects such as child abuse. Heins states that, since the 1960s, children’s literature has been ‘unrestricted by taboos and conventions and propriety of subject matter’ (Heins 1983: 88). Many critics cite John Rowe Townsend’s Gumble’s Yard (1961) as the first of a new generation of social realism in children’s literature – it features inner-city children abandoned by their relatives. This openness about unhappy families, particularly abuse, again links with changing social attitudes in Western society: chapter one pointed out that post-1960s society has been far more willing to acknowledge and attempt to tackle child abuse than any previous era. This openness has been reflected and reinforced in literature for children.

A significant issue here is not just whether or not children’s books depict child abuse but also whether it happens inside the family or outside it. The majority of Fine’s novels concentrate on (sometimes extreme) dysfunction within ‘ordinary’ families, but it is only in The Tulip Touch that she tackles severe abuse in quite a sinister way. Significantly, this is abuse which happens in a traditional nuclear family: Tulip lives with her mother and father, and suffers emotional, physical and sexual abuse, primarily at the hands of the latter. The novel thus contributes quite dramatically to the demystification of rose-tinted images of the traditional family unit.  

---

7 Tulip and her family are discussed in chapter three, ‘Fallible Adults’, and again, more extensively, in chapter four, ‘Perceptions of Childhood I: angels & devils’.
However, depictions of child abuse are not exclusive to the new social realism, and also feature in Dahl, Rowling and Jones. These fantasy novels may have been influenced by the lifting of taboos in social realism, but they also owe as much to the fairytale tradition (employed, as we have seen earlier, by Dickens) as to changes in social attitudes. They opt primarily for comical depictions rather than psychological realism and, again, follow fairytale discourse in portraying the abuser as someone other than the natural parent.

The Harry Potter novels, Dahl’s *James & the Giant Peach* and Jones’ *8 Days of Luke* (1975) make particular use of this tradition, portraying tragic orphans being raised by a step-parent, aunt or similar who does not want or care for the child. The dead parents of Harry Potter and Dahl’s *James* (*J & GP*) are romanticised. David’s parents are not mentioned directly, but he does ‘forlornly’ envy his friends who live with their natural parents, and he assumes that these families are happy and harmonious (p14). James’ first four years, before his parents’ deaths, are described as ‘the perfect life for a small boy’ (p195) with his ‘beloved mother and father’ (p197). Hagrid, meanwhile, tells Harry that he ‘“knew yer mum an’ dad, an’ nicer people yeh couldn’t find..” ’ (*Philosopher’s Stone* p45). The deceased Lily and James Potter are therefore presented as having been the ultimate ‘nice’ parents, but it goes further than this, as Dumbledore reminds Harry: ‘“Your mother died to save you...” ’ (ibid p216). The image of Harry’s mother is thus particularly sacred, which calls to mind David’s mother in Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1849-50). The fact that these parents conveniently die in tragic situations means that the orphans, when thinking about their parents, have predominantly positive feelings towards them (apart from obvious sadness at their loss).

The positive feelings of children towards their deceased parents suggests that the parents, when alive, felt equally enthusiastic about their children. Chapter one discussed the issue of whether children are a burden or a pleasure, something which is often at the
forefront of debates about contemporary parenting. In the texts, those adults who are abusive or neglectful towards the children in their care certainly view them as a burden. This may seem an obvious point to make, but it seems that it is their inability to generate any pleasure in child-rearing which causes their abusive treatment of their charges: for these adults, the idea of enjoying children is alien to them; thus it is inevitable that they resent and sometimes abuse them.

The use of step-parents, aunts and uncles enables authors to imply that real parents do want and enjoy their children, while abusive non-parents regard their enforced child-rearing as an unenjoyable chore in which the child is viewed as an object rather than a human being with rights and feelings. This is most obvious in the Harry Potter series: the Dursleys delight in caring for their own son, while fiercely resenting the burden of their nephew’s care. They accept Harry as their legal responsibility, but frequently complain about the situation, and express their contempt in front of him: they ‘often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn’t there – or rather, as though he was something very nasty…like a slug’ (Philosopher’s Stone 1997: 22).

Blustein describes the cold formality of the resentful-duty approach:

Family relationships, like all close interpersonal relationships, are not constituted by duties, but by bonds of sympathetic identification, caring and love. Duties introduce an element of formality, or if you will, puritanism, into the spontaneous emotional life of the family.

(1982: 103)

This puritanical attitude not only damages the child, whose emotional and often physical needs are left unfulfilled, it also prevents the resentful adults from experiencing the joyous rewards which can lighten the burden. Parenting is ‘a job involving nonreciprocal obligations, immense self-discipline and personal sacrifice,’ but this effort and sacrifice are disguised for those parents who gain pleasure, satisfaction and fulfilment from nurturing the child (Blustein 1982: 101). For such parents, the emotional rewards are more than sufficient. However, for the parent or parent-substitute
who does not experience such rewards, there is an all-too-constant awareness of how much effort and sacrifice are being made. Thus, such a parent not only embodies the resentful look-how-much-I-do-for-you attitude, but expects reciprocation, in place of emotional satisfaction. In Fine’s *Flour Babies* (1992), Simon realises how much pleasure you can get from a small child, but only if you do not expect reciprocation:

> It was easier to like them. In fact, they were a little like pets, the way you could feed and clean and tidy up after them every day, and even if you got bored or irritated, you didn’t feel they should be pulling their weight more. No one in his right mind would get all huffy because a baby wasn’t doing as much for him as he was doing for the baby.

(p97)

This passage, whether intentionally or not, ridicules those who do expect to get something in return, and the abusive parents and parent-substitutes in Dahl and Rowling, and in Jones’ *Eight Days of Luke*, are just this type, expecting instant and regular ‘payback’, in the form of verbal gratitude and household chores. James is expected to work continually:

> James had been put to work as usual. This time he was chopping wood for the kitchen stove….The heat was terrible. He was sweating all over. His arm was aching. The chopper was a large blunt thing too heavy for a small boy to use.

(p199; 202)

For Harry, the demands are those of continual ‘guilt-tripping’ rather than physical work. Aunt Marge voices what the Dursleys have always implied: ‘It’s damn good of Vernon and Petunia to keep you…. [Your parents] died in a car crash….and left you to be a burden on their decent hardworking relatives!’ *(Prisoner of Azkaban* 1999 p23; 27). In his orphan status, he is made to feel that he is not inherently entitled to love and care, and must be grateful for any small measures he receives. Again, there is a continual implication that real parents would never harbour such feelings.

In Jones’ *Eight Days of Luke* ‘gratitude’ is a theme which runs throughout. David, like Harry, is subjected to constant lectures about being grateful for the measly care he
receives. David realises that ‘all his relatives wanted was to get rid of him. He supposed that was why they made such a point of his being grateful - because they looked after him when they did not want him in the least’ (p32). David is aware that the constant demand for gratitude is a sure sign of a lack of affection – true giving does not keep score or demand reciprocation. Ironically, as David is to find out himself, it is the latter type of giving which does incite gratitude. Cousin Astrid gradually becomes David’s ally, and her genuine kindness is met with genuine gratitude from David, particularly when she takes his side against the rest of the family: ‘...to David’s gratitude and admiration, she stood firm....David thought this must be the first time he had ever been truly and spontaneously grateful to any of his family...’ (p170). Though David has spent many years with a family which operates with cold formality and duty, he begins to realise the difference between this and spontaneous emotion.

An important factor in David’s growing awareness is his encounter with an outsider to the family, Mr Wedding. The two have a conversation in which Mr Wedding explains that all children are entitled, both legally and naturally, to a certain level of care:

“You’re still a child, and you can’t earn a living or even look after yourself properly....So the law says that someone has to look after you until you can do it for yourself....And there’s another law which says that when you drop a stone it falls to the ground. Are you grateful to that stone for falling or does the stone ask the earth to be grateful?....You can be grateful if you want. But no-one should ask it of you.”

(pp99-100)

For David, ‘it was like having a huge weight slowly levered off his back’ (p100). This passage hints at the way in which a child can be brainwashed; both David and Harry Potter have been made to feel that they do not have any inherent rights, and this is used to keep them ‘in their place’. An outsider like Mr Wedding can help to lift this psychological burden and raise their self-esteem. They need to be told explicitly that
they have worth, value and rights – something that a loved and wanted child learns intuitively.

However, despite the continual implication in these texts that real parents always want and enjoy their children, there are, as we have seen, exceptions in Fine’s *The Tulip Touch* and Dahl’s *Matilda*. In the latter, the biological parents view their daughter as a ‘scab’ and ‘looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away’ (p4). Indeed, when Miss Honey offers to adopt Matilda, their first thought is ‘“Why don’t we let her go….It’ll be one less to look after” ’ (p232). In this novel, as in *The Tulip Touch*, readers are not consoled by fantasies of deceased biological parents which, in other texts, preserve the sanctity of the nuclear family. Dahl’s *Matilda*, though humorous, thus subverts rose-tinted images of the nuclear family almost as strongly as does Fine’s *The Tulip Touch*.

Depictions of abuse (or, at least, children who are not adequately cared for) also raise the issue of external intervention in the family. For all four writers, the rescue (or lack of rescue) of an abused or neglected child is often a central part of the story. Blustein debates the pros and cons of this issue in late twentieth-century society, viewing it as part of the ‘children’s rights versus parents’ rights’ debate. In a democratic society, ‘parents’ rights to raise their children as they think best is thought of as a particular instance of the right to privacy that belongs to every mature citizen in a free society’ (Blustein 1982: 5).

Dahl, Rowling, Fine and Jones appear to be critical of this ‘right to privacy’, showing lack of external intervention as something which allows abuse and neglect to thrive unnoticed. As Hacking says, although contemporary society recognises and tries to prevent child abuse, ‘the law and its practice are unclear because of another entrenched

---

8 It is not possible to discuss the attitudes and behaviour of Tulip’s parents in any depth, as we do not witness the abuse first hand. We discover Tulip’s story through the eyes of her friend, Natalie; consequently, there are very few scenes which actually feature Tulip’s parents.
right, the right of a family to conduct its affairs on its own’ (Hacking 1990-91: 270). Thus there is a complex web of state versus family privacy versus children’s rights. Both Jones and Fine explore these legal complications. Jones’ *Eight Days of Luke* questions exactly what type of treatment classifies as ‘abuse’ and merits external intervention. David leads a very unhappy existence with a great-aunt and uncle who view him as an undesirable burden. However, he is fed, clothed and educated, and David himself knows that this fulfilment of his physical needs is enough to ensure that they qualify as reasonable guardians: he ‘wished his relations were wicked, instead of ordinary people, so that he could do something awful to them’ (p32).

Fine’s *The Tulip Touch*, meanwhile, explores this point in a far more sinister way, suggesting that even severe physical as well as emotional abuse is complicated by legal barriers. Natalie is horrified to discover that everyone has known all along about Tulip’s situation, and she debates the issue with her father:

“You really mustn’t think that nobody tried...both schools were always well aware of Tulip’s background. The Pierces have had social workers round there time and again.”

So everyone was in it! Everyone knew!

“So what was the matter?” I asked sarcastically. “Wasn’t it bad enough?...” “No,” he said... “It wasn’t bad enough. And I’m afraid life’s a bit like that, Natalie. It has to be a whole lot worse than bad to count as unbearable....”

(pp153-4)

*The Tulip Touch*, written in the aftermath of the Jamie Bulger murder, paints a bleak and despairing picture of what happens to a child who is not rescued - she tries continually and maliciously to inflict her pain on others (including a bereaved mother), and ultimately attempts mass murder of her former friends by arson. Jones, Rowling and Dahl, meanwhile, often focus more on the benefits of external intervention. In Jones’ *Charmed Life*, Cat and Gwendolen (orphaned rather than abused) are shown to be helpless and entirely dependent on the generous support offered by the town:

---

9 However, *Matilda* does have a subplot in which Miss Honey reveals that she was orphaned as a child
Cat did not mind [being fussed over]. It made up a little for the empty, lost way he was feeling. Ladies gave him cake and toys. Town Councillors came and asked how he was getting on; and the mayor called and patted him on the head. The Mayor explained that the money from the fund was being put into a Trust for them....Meanwhile, the town would pay for their education.

Similarly, in Jones’ *Fire & Hemlock*, despite some quite horrific suffering on Polly’s part, the child is rescued repeatedly (and, finally, permanently) from her cruel and selfish parents by her kind and loving Granny.

In Dahl, James’ situation is made worse by the isolation of the aunts’ home - there are no visitors, and he is not allowed out. An old man arriving with a magic spell enables his escape, which is also aided by the giant insects who travel with him. Matilda, meanwhile, is rescued by Miss Honey (her teacher), although this is dependent on her parents giving their permission and voluntarily relinquishing their rights to her.

In Harry Potter, Hagrid (on Dumbledore’s behalf) rescues Harry. Later (in *Chamber of Secrets* 1998 and *Goblet of Fire* 2000), the Weasleys (first the children, then the parents) help him get away. In *Goblet of Fire*, Mr and Mrs Weasley are extremely assertive in intervening, and Harry is shown to need this help (pp40-8). Even in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when he runs away himself, Harry is lost, alone and frightened until the Knight Bus comes to help: ‘...a reckless rage had come over Harry....“I’m going...I’ve had enough.”....But after ten minutes alone in the dark street, a new emotion overtook him: panic...He was stranded, quite alone...’ (pp28-9). A few moments later, however: ‘There was a deafening BANG....“Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand, step on board and we can take you anywhere you want to go” ’ (p30).

For Harry Potter and James, of course, it is a fairytale rescue, whereby escape comes via magical forces: Hagrid, and Dumbledore who sends him, are variations of the Fairy and abused by the aunt (Miss Trunchbull) who raised her.
Godmother, as are Miss Honey and Polly’s Granny, though they are not magical characters. James’ situation, meanwhile, is strongly reminiscent of *Jack & the Beanstalk*. However, though magical, this help still comes from an outsider, and not the child’s own powers. Even later, when Harry is developing into a talented wizard, he is not allowed to use his powers outside Hogwarts - some rule-breaking goes on, but he remains in a vulnerable position whenever he is at the Dursleys’. Thus, even in fantasy texts, the child’s vulnerability and dependence on others (whether guardians or outsiders) are still emphasised.

**The child as head of the family?**

The child, then, can be extremely vulnerable within the family. However, this is not always the case: children can also be dominant and overpowering, and usually the parents are shown to be at fault here. In the novels discussed, cruel and neglectful parents may be condemned, but so too are the overindulgent ones, and spoilt and overly-assertive children feature heavily in the work of both Dahl and Rowling, and occasionally Jones (the Dursleys, of course, fall into both categories – abusing their unwanted nephew Harry, and overindulging their own son, Dudley). Since the beginnings of children’s literature in the eighteenth century, there have always been stories that preach about obedience and good conduct in children. It may seem surprising, therefore, that writers whose work tends far more towards child democracy and child empathy still seem to find it necessary to warn about the dangers of spoiling a child.

However, as we have seen in chapter one, this is an issue which is particularly poignant today: children’s rights taken too far are creating fears that many children are out of control, while adults - parents, teachers and others - have lost the confidence to discipline with authority. Despite the long literary traditions evident in Rowling’s
portrayal of the Dursley family, Mrs Dursley behaves like a contemporary submissive parent, displaying fear whenever Dudley threatens a tantrum:

Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon...in case Dudley turned the table over. Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger too, because she said quickly, “And we’ll buy you another two presents while we’re out today....”

(Philosopher’s Stone p21)

This style of parenting confuses wants with needs, assuming that everything the child desires is something that it actually needs:

To give children what they need, however, we must rely on more than advice or persuasion, for children may not be aware of their needs, or may not want what they need, or may have no basis for deciding how their needs are to be met.

(Blustein 1982: 119)

Jane Ribbens has conducted research regarding parental attitudes to child-rearing, and some of the parents interviewed discussed whether or not children should always get what they want. For some this ‘led to careful consideration at times of children’s real “needs”, since “attention-seeking” children might “play on” their needs to obtain unjustified concessions from their parents’ (she cites an example of a child sleeping in its parents’ bed until its late teens). One parent believes that ‘...it’s the trend nowadays, isn’t it, not to be too strict. Free-thinking, and let them do what they like. Let children rule. You wonder what’s going to happen, don’t you?’ (Ribbens 1995: 65).

Dahl’s Charlie & the Chocolate Factory contains a similar warning:

“I don’t think [Veruca Salt’s] father played it quite fair, Grandpa, do you?” Charlie murmured. “He spoils her,” Grandpa Joe said. “And no good can ever come from spoiling a child like that, Charlie, you mark my words.”

(p39)

The same novel features an array of spoilt children who take an authoritative stance with their parents and other adults: for instance, ‘“All right, mother, keep your hair on!” ’(p46) and ‘“Quiet! Didn’t I tell you not to interrupt!” ’(p48). This shows a clear
role-reversal and imbalance of power which again links to the issues discussed in chapter one: the child is not simply having its rights and needs met, it has been given a position of power *above* the adult, and becomes the oppressor rather than the oppressed. Thus, it is not simply a matter of child-*centredness*: the child has actually become the head, rather than the centre.

Extreme parental deference, described by Hardyment as the ‘follow rather than lead’ approach (1983: 218) not only creates a child who is demanding and intolerant, it also places too great a responsibility and burden on the child. In 2004, Channel Four began screening a new programme entitled *Supernanny*, in which former nanny Jo Frost advises parents who have lost control of their children. *The Times* discussed one episode in which we see that two-year-old Charlie ‘rules the roost. He is a toddler version of Keith Moon at his most outrageous…. “To be honest, we’re scared of him,” says his mother’. His mother also admits that she indulged his terrifying tantrums because ‘...the sound of his crying was incredibly upsetting for me’. Consequently, she allowed her son to manipulate her. However, what Frost realises is that Charlie was suffering greatly by being given too much power; he needed to feel that his parents were in control and, consequently, ‘had sky-high levels of rage about the lack of parental authority. Instead of being told what to do he was given choices that his infant mind could not make sense of’ (Lockyer: 1 July 2004).

One of the reasons for such submissiveness is that, as Hugh Cunningham says, many parents ‘now look to children for emotional gratification’ (Cunningham 1995: 184). This parental ‘neediness’ can be seen in Mrs Dursley’s behaviour with her son. She, like Charlie’s mother, above, indulges him because *she* cannot handle seeing him upset, and thus is indulging her own feelings as much as his: Dudley ‘knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted’ (*Philosopher’s Stone*, p22). Not only this, but her emotional well-being seems to depend on receiving
love and approval from her child (as opposed to giving it to him), and she seeks his validation of her: during one battle, she begs ‘“How’s that popkin? Two more presents. Is that all right?....” ’ (Philosopher’s Stone p21). In the name of well-intentioned child-empathy, all power has been handed over to the child, who is not mature enough to cope with it.

The spoilt children are often shown to encounter many difficulties in the way in which they interact with other people outside the home. They are usually portrayed as unlikeable bullies, believing they can exploit and manipulate others as they do their parents. Consequently, they have little respect for others, and are always in conflict with those who will not defer to them. In Jones’ Charmed Life, Gwendolen is shocked by Chrestomanci’s refusal to give her everything she wants; his detached amusement leads to furious temper tantrums:

Gwendolen stamped her foot....“Why not? You must, you must, you must!” Chrestomanci looked down at her, in a peering, surprised way, as though he had only just seen her. “You seem to be annoyed ....But I’m afraid it’s unavoidable.”’

(p59)

Rowling’s Dudley, on the other hand, is not restricted in any way, and this includes his eating habits. Goblet of Fire emphasises this greed – his school insists that he goes on a diet as his weight reaches colossal proportions. His over-eating is perhaps suggestive of his inability to restrain or deny himself in all aspects of his behaviour. Dudley is a ‘consumer’ to the extent of being parasitical – he ‘takes in’ and gives nothing back. His physical proportions have become large and overpowering, as is his emotional presence – he demands to be constantly ‘fed’ in every sense of the word.

This desire for constant ‘feeding’ can also manifest itself as extreme control and manipulation of other people. At home, Dudley is allowed to bully Harry, to see his own desires and needs as being more important than Harry’s. In school, he bullies in a similar manner, trying to dominate other children in the way he is allowed to dominate
Harry and his parents. Charmed Life’s Gwendolen believes that other people are there entirely for her use and benefit, and her behaviour is more calculated than Dudley’s thoughtless bullying. In particular she treats her younger brother Cat as a plaything, and is shocked when he disobeys her orders:

“...[Gwendolen’s] cross with me for playing with you,” said Cat.
“Her stupid fault for thinking she owns you,” said Roger.

(p102)

Eventually we find out that Gwendolen has siphoned her brother’s magic powers for her own selfish use and she is prepared to kill Cat to get what she wants. She displays the ultimate in selfish manipulation when she uses the magic powers to take over other people’s lives and identities:

“Let me go! I’ve got to go back and be queen.”
“Don’t be so selfish,” said Chrestomanci. “You’ve no right to keep snatching eight other people from world to world...”

(p241)

This is a particularly extreme example, but all the spoilt children are shown to take and consume with no consideration for, or even awareness of, the rights, feelings and needs of others. None of these writers denies the importance of children’s rights (quite the contrary), but they also reflect Blustein’s ideas about finding a balance:

Children should also learn early to respect the rights of others....Children who are taught that their wants are paramount are led to expect a continuation of such deference by others outside the context of childrearing and are ill-prepared for group life; they must learn that they can only attain their own ends by allowing others to attain theirs.

(Blustein 1982: 127)

It is particularly significant that, in all the examples cited, the spoilt children are never content or happy. They may cause undue distress and frustration to others, but they suffer equally themselves. Perhaps it is even possible to see Dudley’s overeating as a sign of inner distress - no matter what these children get, it is never enough to satisfy
them. Even Spock who, as we have seen, has often been blamed for the prevalence of overindulgent and permissive parenting, realised (in his second edition at least) that limits and discipline are necessary, not only for the sanity of the parent, but for the long-term happiness of the child:

...good parents naturally do, and should, expect something from their children....considerateness, affectionateness, and willingness to accept the parents’ standards and ideals. The parents want these qualities in their children not only selfishly, for themselves, but because they want their children to grow up to live co-operatively and happily with others....children can’t be happy [in the long run] unless they are behaving reasonably.

(Spock 1958: 18-19)

Thus we can understand why authors who clearly have so much concern for children’s feelings, needs and rights, also feel the need to preach the age-old warning about the dangers of spoiling.

**Negotiating everybody’s rights**

The work of all four writers, then, shows a variety of unhappy, ineffective and even harmful methods of child-rearing. They all feature abuse or neglect in various ways. Dahl, Rowling and Jones are equally condemning of overindulgence, while Fine, though she rarely features spoilt children, certainly does not advocate excessively liberal parenting. However, do the texts explore any alternatives regarding how ‘good’, or at least better, adult-child relationships might work?

As we have seen earlier, Dahl, Rowling and (occasionally) Jones employ the fairytale tradition of depicting perfect-but-tragically-deceased parents. These romanticised images provide a strong contrast to the abusive adults. Dahl, who has a tendency to go to extremes, also features the very much alive, near-perfect Bucket family. They are idealised in both family structure and relationships with each other: the family is more
or less nuclear,\textsuperscript{10} and the parents also conform to gender stereotypes - working father and stay-at-home mother.\textsuperscript{11} They are not, however, a ‘typical’ bourgeois family; rather, the Buckets conform to the Victorian virtuous poor stereotype, and their dire circumstances enable Dahl to depict the martyr-like parents with Dickensian sentimentality (there are strong echoes of the Cratchits). They go hungry in order to give Charlie more cabbage soup (p14), and make huge sacrifices in order to save for his birthday present - a bar of chocolate (p14).

The happiness and harmony of the family relationships, as in Nesbit and Garnett, are shown to override the practical and economic problems. Every evening, Charlie would go into his grandparents’ room to listen to stories:

> Often, Charlie’s mother and father would come in as well, and stand by the door, listening to the stories that the old people told; and thus, for perhaps half an hour every night, this room would become a happy place, and the whole family would forget that it was hungry and poor.

(pp17-18)

Even typical family conflicts, like getting a small child to bed, all run smoothly and lovingly in the Bucket household: ‘“Charlie, dear,” Mrs Bucket called out from where she was standing by the door, “it’s time for bed. That’s enough for tonight.” “But Mother, I must hear…” “Tomorrow, my darling…” [and Charlie goes]’ (p25).

However, it is significant that the majority of the novel features Charlie with Grandpa Joe, with whom he has a more ‘matey’ relationship; consequently, the relationship between Charlie and his parents is not fully explored. This echoes early twentieth century children’s literature - writers such as Edith Nesbit and Enid Blyton, as we have seen, often featured children having adventures away from their parents. Depictions of

\textsuperscript{10}All four grandparents share the family home due to ill health; thus in this sense, it is an extended family, but it centres on the unit of Charlie and both his parents.

\textsuperscript{11}In the film version there are some variations - there is no Mr Bucket, and consequently Mrs Bucket works due to necessity. Please note that all references to the film adaption of this novel refer to the original version: \textit{Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory} (Stuart 1971).
deceased parents and distant parents serve the same purpose: an idealised parent-child relationship can be implied by not actually featuring it very much.

However, these portrayals can also be seen to subvert themselves, suggesting perhaps that the only time a parent can be viewed as perfect or near-perfect is in bereavement or any other form of absence. Real parent-child relationships, in which both parties are still alive, and regularly spend time together, can never be like this - even in fiction, rose-tinted visions exist primarily in the fantasies of the bereaved and the separated. In Rowling’s fifth novel, *Order of the Phoenix* (2003), Harry discovers some of his father’s negative traits and his feelings towards James’ memory become more complex. Significantly, it is when Harry discovers more detailed knowledge about his father that his previously rose-tinted image is partially dismantled, though he does work through the feelings this raises. Thus, the image of perfect parent can only exist when Harry is in a state of blissful ignorance.

Nonetheless, despite the strong link between perfect-parent and absent-parent, these images of perfection held up by Dahl and Rowling may still be guilt-inducing to real parents, in the same way that many theories of child-rearing, from the early Spock in 1946 to Paula Yates in the 1990s, depict models of ideal family relationships which most parents can never hope to attain. The result can only be a feeling of failure.

Anne Fine’s *Flour Babies* (1992) explores parental guilt and its damaging effect on the child. Simon’s class take part in the ‘Flour Baby Experiment’, taking care of a sack of flour each as though it were a real baby - it must be kept clean, well-fed, never left alone and so on. Simon finds the learning experience beneficial, but his friend Robin lasts eleven days before losing his temper and kicking his flour baby in the creek. Robin’s distress echoes that of a real parent, burdened with guilt from too much well-meaning advice:
“Take care of your flour baby!” [Robin] screamed, in mimicry of all the adults who had been nagging him for days. “Don’t forget! Take it here! Take it there!...Don’t lose it! Keep it out of the mud!”

For every order he shouted, he gave the flour baby a hard punch....Now he was shaking it so fiercely the rip widened, and flour spilled on the path.

(pp85-6)

The scene is comical, but nonetheless makes a chilling point about what can happen in real situations when the parent is made to feel that they are not perfect enough - the resulting guilt is often directed at the child itself, or, in this case, the poor abused flour baby.

Depictions of perfect or near-perfect parents do not actually explore the complex issues of parent-child relationships; they are fantasies which deny the conflict that usually exists within the family. However, many of the novels of Anne Fine and Diana Wynne Jones do just the opposite, highlighting the chaotic nature of family life. Although Jones uses fantasy settings and Fine is a social realist, one of the things they have in common is that their novels for children often depict struggling families which are neither abusive nor perfect, and they explore how these types of adult-child relationship may work - or not, as the case may be. Rowling’s chaotic Weasley family can also be seen along these lines - certainly more so than the deceased Potters.

This approach can be seen as psychologically beneficial to both child-readers and the adults reading over their shoulders. Children in the texts to be discussed are usually well-loved and have their rights and feelings respected, but are not subjected to indulgence of their every whim, for they are made aware that other people, including their parents, also have rights and needs. Blustein points out that the foregrounding of children’s rights in recent years has created a conflict between the rights of parents and the rights of children, and an uncertainty about how to balance the two: ‘...much of our current perplexity about the family stems from the fact that we are committed to both kinds of autonomy, parents’ and children’s, and yet do not have any clear sense of how
to reconcile them to one another’ (Blustein 1982: 5). Overall, the families discussed attempt to find a balance between the rights of the child and the rights of the adult and society - yet this is never shown to be a smooth or easy process.

Dahl’s Bucket family, though near-perfect, do recognise the importance of helping Charlie cope with the disappointment of not getting what he wants: ‘They all knew it was ridiculous to expect this one poor little bar of chocolate to have a magic ticket inside it, and they were trying as gently and kindly as they could to prepare Charlie for disappointment’ (C & CF p41). It is obviously significant that, in this instance, Charlie’s desire is not within his family’s power, yet neither parents nor grandparents encourage him to feel self-pity or anger. He is ‘prepared for disappointment’, and not encouraged to feel that he should get his own way. He is therefore being equipped with life-skills and an emotional strength which is more likely to result in successful integration in society.

Jones’ novels frequently explore similar issues. In particular, Magicians of Caprona shows the Montana children as part of a family unit; an important and cherished part, but not the centre of it. The children must learn to integrate with others and this sometimes means sacrificing their own desires and whims for the good of the whole. During a time in which war threatens, the children are expected to sacrifice their free time in order to copy out ‘war charms’. The adults regard the children’s complaints, and any sense of exaggerated children’s rights, with amusement:

“Oh why?” [the children complained]....
“IT’s exploiting children, that’s what we’re doing,”
Rosa said cheerfully. “There are probably laws against it, so do complain.”
“Don’t worry, I will,” said Lucia. “I am doing.”
“As long as you write while you grumble,” said Rosa.

(p84)

The Montana children are loved and cared for, and never treated harshly, yet they are shown to have duties and responsibilities as well as rights. Childcare writer Gayle
Peterson advocates the benefits of exposing the child to ‘optimal frustration’ - that is, ‘healthy’ frustration which ‘becomes a tool for building strength of character’ (Peterson 1996 http://www.askdrgrayle.com/goodenuf.html). Not always getting his or her own way is therefore in the child’s best interests and can be seen as more authentic ‘children’s rights’ than overindulgence or ‘perfect’ parenting. Peterson also suggests ‘walking this line of maintaining empathy and attunement to your child’s needs while taking care of your own’ (ibid). Both Jones and Fine show families trying to balance the rights of the parent with the rights of the child and, again, suggest that it is beneficial to the child to learn to accommodate others rather than expecting total deference to their own desires.

Fine’s Goggle Eyes (1989) stresses the way in which the child benefits from such mutual accommodation and ‘balancing’. Kitty is initially hostile to her mother’s new partner - consequently she not only causes misery amongst the family, she suffers greatly herself. She later realises that she must make an effort:

> It suddenly occurred to me that part of the reason I couldn’t stand Goggle-Eyes was because he was so different from me and Mum....And suddenly I thought, if I could only understand, I might be able to get along with him better.

(p126)

Kitty soon finds that her ‘jumbo-sized effort to come to terms with Gerald Faulkner’ (p137) is matched by equal effort on Gerald’s part, and brings increased happiness to both herself and the family as a whole.

These novels help to create awareness of some of the contradictions in today’s Western child-centred society: making children the centre, encouraging them to feel that their needs and desires are more important than other people’s, and feeling under pressure to be a ‘perfect’ parent are not necessarily in the child’s best interests - such attitudes may actually be detrimental.
Homan discusses the way in which exaggerated children’s rights have led to a sharp decline in discipline, for many now equate discipline with oppressive treatment and lack of love (Homan was writing in the late 1960s, and his points continue to be relevant today). For Homan, the contrary is true: ‘you discipline because you love’. Moreover, ‘discipline’ as opposed to ‘punishment’, is a method of teaching and ‘preparing the child to fit into and deal with society’ (Homan 1969: 11; 24-5).

In Rowling’s Harry Potter novels, the Weasleys can be seen to provide a middle-ground between the extremes of the Dursleys and the Potters. Mrs Weasley in particular takes very seriously her responsibility to discipline her children and mould their characters for the outside world. She is frequently harassed and exasperated by her children’s behaviour, but she is clearly the disciplinarian of the family, in contrast with her somewhat weaker husband:

All three of Mrs Weasley’s sons were taller than she was, but they cowered as her rage broke over them.
“Beds empty! No note! Car gone!....You could have died, you could have been seen, you could have lost your father his job - ”

(Chamber of Secrets p30)

The Weasley family scenes also show realistically that children need discipline, and can be unruly and disobedient. This contrasts with Charlie’s obedience, as discussed previously: the Buckets can be ‘perfect’ parents because their ‘perfect’ child does not give them any reason not to be.

As with many of Fine’s and Jones’ families, Mrs Weasley’s attempts to discipline emphasise the chaotic nature of family life: she clearly understands the need for discipline, but the process is fraught with difficulties. Though these families strive for a balance between child and parental rights, this is never a smooth and easy process, and family life can be tumultuous and stressful. Family can sometimes be a burden and a strain, for both parents and children, and there are various different reasons for this. In Jones’ Magicians of Caprona, Tonino, a slow-learner, sometimes feels the strain of
belonging to a high-status family with many long-established reputations to keep up with:

...even [far away from home], Tonino could not get away from his family. A little metal plate was set into the stone ....It was leaf-green [the family colour]. Tonino burst into tears.

(p23)

This dilemma is echoed by Rowling’s Ron Weasley, also from a large family of high achievers. He struggles to explain this to Harry who, deprived of family support, feels only envy:

I’m the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts....Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it’s no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either........

(Philosopher’s Stone p75)

Ron’s and Harry’s experiences with the Mirror of Erised (revealing the heart’s desire) epitomise this ambivalent view of family life: Harry sees himself surrounded by the family he has never known, while Ron sees himself independent of other Weasleys (Philosopher’s Stone p155-7).

Tucker refers to Anne Fine’s ‘realistic’ view of family life; she often suggests an ongoing sense of:

...the natural, electrical storm of being alive when young, or when surrounded by the young. The main constituents of this storm, as Fine depicts it, are the irreconcilable demands of one human being surrounded by so many others, all with their own conflicting agendas, too.

(Tucker & Gamble 2001: 51)

In Fine’s Radio Four interview with Sue Lawley (Fine 2001), she discusses her feelings about family life and the way in which it is presented in her novels. Lawley wonders if ‘your [Fine’s] view is that every family is a dysfunctional family; there is no such thing as a happy family?’ Fine agrees, saying that the image of the truly happy family is a mythology that we all cling to: ‘I just think that life is so complicated, and it is so
difficult'. Her advice to all family members is to 'grit your teeth, get through and do your best' (Fine 2001).

In Fine's *Goggle Eyes*, raising children is referred to as 'battling' and 'trouble and strain' (pp. 149; 151), while Kitty herself articulates the stress and guilt of these 'irreconcilable demands': 'when you know that everyone you care about will feel dead rotten if you get your way, getting your way goes sour. Whose feelings count for most? And why?' (p. 71). She goes on to argue that 'things are much *simpler* when it's your real dad' (p. 71). However, it is possible to argue that Kitty is simply being nostalgic about the absent parent; on many other occasions she discusses memories of identical conflicts involving this 'real dad'. The turmoil in this step-family is shown to be no worse than it was in their days of being a traditional unit.

Fine's *Madame Doubtfire* (1987) also depicts a broken family, but again the tension is not shown to be unique to such a situation - the message is clearly that all families, traditional and non-traditional, suffer from turmoil. Daniel takes the children to see a particularly poignant play:

Scene after scene of quarrelling... unfold a tale of two couples, one happily and one miserably married, working their way through a convoluted plot of deep-seated grudges, misunderstandings and malice. Even the happily married couple became quite crusty under the strain of it all.

(p. 123)

This could easily be interpreted as extreme pessimism and despair on Fine's part, yet the novels always contain humour and, as Tucker says, 'She never seems to grieve over such imperfections, perhaps because the expectation is that they will always be there, come what may' (Tucker & Gamble 2001: 52-3). Jones seems to echo this idea of simply *accepting* the chaos of family life, rather than fighting it. In *Black Maria* (1991), Mig's mother explains why the father left: he was unable to cope with the
unpredictability of family life, believing that people are a ‘set of rules’ by which he
could control them and create rigid order (p136-7).

Throughout Fine’s novels there also seems to be a sense that an important lesson to be
learned from family chaos and conflict is the way in which it prepares the child for life
in society. In The Granny Project, the family can be seen as a microcosm of society.
The two elder children, Ivan and Sophie, are frequently in conflict, yet their mother,
Natasha, despite a tendency to favour her eldest son, makes it clear that she values the
different characters and temperaments of both:

“There are all sorts of people in the world. You are one sort
and Ivan is another.”
“My sort is better. My sort is kinder.”
“Ivan might say: You kind people can distribute free sacks of
grain to scores of starving peasants, but I am here across the
same valley, planning the revolution that will give them back
their land.”
“And getting thousands killed while he does it!”
“Dying of wounds, dying of hunger - dying is the same.”

(p49)

The different temperaments may conflict with each other, but both are valuable in their
own way, and this is shown as healthy and necessary for dynamic social interaction.
Fine acknowledges and celebrates difference, while always being realistic about the
tensions created by conflicting ideas and needs.

Ivan’s ambition to become an industrial negotiator in adult life is significant, and also
optimistic. His desire to ‘“sort things out for a living” ’(p124) again suggests the link
between family life and society: there are always conflicts which need ‘sorting out’, yet
this ‘sorting out’ is possible, though it may be a continuous and cyclical process. Family
life and social life, therefore, simply are tumultuous and unstable, and both children and
adults require the skills to negotiate it as best they can. Homan reiterates this, believing
that a family without conflict ‘would, I am sure, inevitably produce an unfortunate
child, completely unfit and unprepared to deal with any of the meanness and inequities of the real world he would have to live in’ (Homan 1969: 7).

The mutual benefits of family relationships

However, despite being realistic about the negative aspects of family, both Fine and Jones (and Rowling with the Weasleys) ultimately show these struggling families as a source of love and support; a ‘safety-net’ for each child. In Magicians of Caprona, Tonino’s disappearance brings the family together: ‘In the Casa Montana, if anyone was in distress, it always fetched the rest of the family’ (p14). Tonino, away from home, begins to appreciate what he gains from being part of such a large family: ‘It suddenly struck him that he was all alone, far from the friendly bustle of the Casa Montana. Even when he was hidden in the corner of the Casa with a book, he knew the rest of the family was all around him’ (p132). Similarly, during his period of struggling at school, and living in the shadow of family reputation, he is met with great support, both emotional and practical, from parents, siblings, aunts and cousins (pp14-16).

In Fine’s Granny Project, family is portrayed in a less sentimental manner, but the underlying support system is still evident. Tucker believes that ‘the occasional glimpse of such angry, irreconcilable feelings does not inspire great confidence in the future, whether this applies to the children’s continuing relationships with each other or their parents’ (Tucker & Gamble 2001: 60). However, I disagree, and feel that the final impression given by the novel is one in which the problems and challenges will no doubt continue, but that positive feelings will prevail and maintain the bonds between them. The final scene shows the family together, and reasonably harmonious, at the grandmother’s grave. Ivan and Sophie notice (initially with horror, then with a sense of peace) that their grandmother’s body will aid the growth of the tree that it is under - thus, life cycles continuously, and each life is interdependent: ‘She’d like that....She
once told me that she liked to feel a part of things. I think she'd be very pleased to think she would become part of a tree” (pp125-6). Not only this, Ivan’s reassurance of his sister’s fears emphasises the interdependence and emotional support within this particular family. The final line, though focusing on a sibling relationship rather than parent-child, is ‘“Right ho, then, comrade”’ (p126). The use of ‘comrade’ - also, significantly, the title of the last chapter - is not only affectionate, it also highlights the potential for friendship within the family. This is suggested as much in parent-child relations as in sibling bonds:

They stood side by side and watched as Henry and Natasha came in sight....As they came closer, Henry whistled across and Tanya and Nicholas began to leapfrog towards them.

(p126)

Our final glimpse of Henry and Natasha and their four children is positive, while avoiding sentimentality. The parents, overall, are caring and well-intentioned, with ordinary flaws and weaknesses, as are their offspring (most of the time). This perhaps provides relief, for both parents and children struggling to cope with the family chaos that is caused by trying to negotiate everybody’s rights. In novels such as *The Tulip Touch*, Fine unequivocally condemns harsh treatment of children, but she does not advocate goals of perfection either - for Fine, there seems to be a middle ground which *is* attainable and in which children manage well enough.

The children who are abused or neglected are usually shown to need substitute homes and families, and this need is often fulfilled. This further emphasises the necessity and benefits of family support which can, it seems, be provided by adults other than the natural parents. Perry Nodelman criticises this approach, though not these specific writers:
many characters in children’s novels who flee from broken and disrupted homes encounter bitter experience but still manage to find new homes where they can preserve their innocence and optimism.

(Nodelman 1992/1996: 151)

Nodelman is certainly justified in pointing out that such an approach is probably psychologically unrealistic. Abused children usually do have trouble forming relationships, and this is the line which Fine pursues in *The Tulip Touch*. Tulip struggles to bond with others; the only friendship she has (with Natalie) is one in which she (Tulip) controls and manipulates - presumably in the way her father has treated her. Ultimately, she drives her friend away. However, it is significant that Tulip *tries* to create a substitute family with Natalie’s family - she enjoys being taken under their wing, and is shown to need this care and support. Her final despicable act - setting fire to the family’s hotel while they are all in it - is an act of rage and bitterness because they ultimately rejected her. Even when she tries to destroy others, she is acting out of her need to have some kind of family support. One of the central differences here between Fine and the other three writers is that Fine’s psychological realism shows us how Tulip’s needs are so great that no-one is able to cope with her, however much she may need a substitute family.

The other three writers, on the other hand, are usually more optimistic about the creation of substitute families - even Dahl, who sometimes appears to advocate child-autonomy. Rowling’s Harry creates strong friendships with other children, particularly Ron and Hermione, but he also finds substitute parent-figures on which to ‘lean’ - Dumbledore, Mrs Weasley, Sirius Black. This need is emphasised particularly in *Goblet of Fire*:

> What [Harry] really wanted (and it felt almost shameful to admit it to himself) was someone like - someone like a *parent*: an adult wizard whose advice he could ask...someone who cared about him...

(p25)
Mrs Weasley... put her arms around Harry. He had no memory of ever being hugged like this, as though by a mother.

(p620)

Similarly, the orphaned Cat in Jones' *Charmed Life* finds a substitute mother in Millie (pp73-5). Millie and Chrestomanci’s castle contains a diverse collection of people - known as ‘The Family’ (always with a capital ‘F’). They eventually become Cat’s new family, particularly when his sister Gwendolen deserts him - they are, therefore, a more loyal and caring support-system than his blood-relative:

Cat lay, feeling comfortable and cheerful. For a while, everyone was there, settling him in....he drifted away to sleep while Janet talked, feeling snug and cared for.

(p200-1)

Meanwhile, David (*Eight Days of Luke*) creates a new home with Cousin Astrid, and Dahl’s *Matilda* does the same with Miss Honey.\(^{12}\) Thus, there is little advocacy of child-independence - usually, there remains a network of adult-support (and boundaries) and a need for it.

The exception here is James - the only one who ends up living independently. However, although his insect friends are not parent-like, the novel does end by stressing that they visit regularly, thus James needs this support. The film version further emphasises this, with a somewhat ‘cheesy’ song about needing each other: ‘Think of where we’d be if we were on our own....We’re family, all of us, and you..’ The voiceover informs us that ‘James Henry Trotter, who once was the saddest and loneliest little boy you could find, now had a loving family and all the friends in the world’ (Selick 1996).

Children, therefore, do benefit from appropriate adult care, but do they give anything back? Fine’s Tulip, as we have seen, distresses (and tries to destroy) everyone she

---

\(^{12}\) There are further examples here: Dahl’s Sophie (*BFG* 1982) is given a cottage (by the Queen) alongside the BFG’s specially made house (also bestowed upon him by the Queen); *The Witches*’ (1983) protagonist finds a loving home with his grandmother after his parents’ deaths.
meets. Fine therefore expresses the belief that if a child does not have her emotional needs met in early childhood, she will not only suffer greatly herself, but will infect others with her pain: Tulip is only eight at the start of the novel, and already irreparably damaged.

However, the other three writers again favour a more optimistic route. Harry, James, Matilda and David each find substitute parents on which to lean, but they are not entirely ‘needy’ in this way. They frequently give back as much as they receive, both to their new ‘parents’, and in other relationships. They are not only able to bond with others, but to create relationships in which the benefit and the support, as well as the pleasure, is mutual.

Harry Potter has this type of relationship with Professor Lupin, while even his parent-child relationship with Sirius Black becomes a two-way support system. He is, however, most frequently in the supportive parent-role with Hagrid. This is particularly evident in the hippogriff incident in *Prisoner of Azkaban* when Harry, along with Ron and Hermione, offers tea and sympathy along with practical help: ‘At last, after many more assurances of help, with a steaming mug of tea in front of him, Hagrid blew his nose on a handkerchief the size of a tablecloth and said: “yer right....Gotta pull meself together...” ’ (p163).

In Jones’ *Eight Days of Luke*, David creates a new family with Cousin Astrid; she too has been bullied by the rest of the family and they find mutual emotional support in each other:

> It had never occurred to David before that Astrid found his relations as unbearable as he did.... “Bottom of the pecking-order, that’s you. I’m next one up...” [said Astrid]....“How would you like it if we both got out - you and me - and lived somewhere else?”

(p127; 166)

Similarly, in Matilda’s relationship with Miss Honey, there is great emphasis on how the child helps the adult, both emotionally and practically, as much as vice versa.
During her visit to her teacher’s house, the little girl realises that the ‘voice she was hearing was surely crying out for help’ (pp189-190). The adult then proceeds to pour out her most heartfelt problems to Matilda who, like Harry Potter, offers both sympathy and solutions: ‘Miss Honey smiled. It was extraordinary, she told herself, how this little snippet of a girl seemed suddenly to be taking charge of her problems, and with such authority too’ (pp201-2). It is significant that these children are bonding with adults who are, or were, vulnerable themselves. There is, therefore, a mutual empathy.

It is not just those children who have been matured by difficult experiences who can benefit adults. Charlie Bucket, in a happy family, gives as much love and support to his parents and grandparents as vice versa:

[Grandpa Joe] was ninety six and a half, and that is just as old as anyone can be....he was delicate and weak, and throughout the day he spoke very little. But in the evenings, when Charlie, his beloved grandson, was in the room, he seemed in some way to grow quite young again. All his tiredness fell away from him, and he became as eager and excited as a young boy.

(p20)

Dahl’s Fantastic Mr Fox (1970) shows how the children not only help their father in a practical way, but motivate him to do his best: ‘Mr Fox looked at the Small Foxes and he smiled. What fine children I have, he thought. They are starving to death and they haven’t had a drink for three days. I must not let them down’ (p388). Thus a child may not only bring happiness and rejuvenation, but can also enhance the adult’s self-development, emotionally and practically.

Fine’s Flour Babies is a lot less sentimental and, as we have seen, can be brutally honest about the stress a child can bring. Nonetheless, there is also equal focus on the positive aspects, and Simon comes to pity his father, who deserted him, when he realises the emotional benefits that can be gained from a child:
To Simon it looked as if some mighty lightbulb had just been switched on inside the baby's head. The effect was magical....Drunk with power, Simon waggled the finger. Instantly the baby was reduced to paroxysms of mirth....[A baby] could make you feel like a million dollars just for being able to waggle a finger....Even if you were a complete hiccup, leading a totally sad life, a baby thought you were a real star....Babies were wonderful.

(pp96-7)

By implication, then, the abusive and neglectful parents are not only condemned for the suffering they cause: they are also shown to be missing something which would have been positive for themselves, as well as the child. In this, they can be pitied.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the novels in this thesis include a variety of unpleasant and oppressive parents and, equally, unpleasant and oppressive children. Fine and Jones, along with Rowling's Weasley family, also concentrate particularly on families who attempt to maintain some kind of balance between the rights of the parent and the rights of the child, but this is shown to be a continually chaotic process.

Overall, however, all four writers ultimately show that children need the support that comes from a reasonable family. This brings to mind the early twentieth-century behaviourist John B. Watson, who believed that children would be far better off in institutions, away from one-to-one family relationships (1928: see particularly p11). All four writers oppose this view.

However, it is not simply that children benefit from adult support; they also give back as much as they receive, and this is emphasised particularly in the situations in which children have formed substitute families. This also links to the 'children as burden or pleasure' issue, discussed in chapter one and earlier in this chapter. The novels of all four writers, in their different ways, come down firmly on the side of the latter - children are not only a pleasure, but a benefit, and any efforts put into childcare, by
parents, guardians or other adults, will be more than repaid, if carried out with sincere affection. The irony here is that the puritanical adults who expect and demand some form of reciprocation do not get it, while those who give without condition reap rewards. Children give back, not through duty, nor through the biological nature of the relationship, but in direct response to the manner in which they are treated - there is a strong sense of the old adage ‘you get what you give’. There are many traditional nuclear families in the work of these writers, and Dahl and Rowling in particular could be accused of idealism, but overall we are shown that adult-child relationships do not have to be conventional, traditional or even biological, for the mutual benefits to be enjoyed.
CHAPTER 3: FALLIBLE ADULTS

From Mr Fairchild to Mr Dursley...

Rationalist parents and guardians [in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century children’s literature] are usually portrayed as cool, self-possessed creatures, always ready with a superior smile and a wealth of antithetical advice. Their principles are benign but immovably austere, their monologues sound like extracts from an encyclopaedia, and sometimes are.

(Grylls 1978: 77)

Nowadays, of course, it is perfectly possible for an author to take the opposite tack, and adapt the indignant child’s view of adults as pointlessly malicious buffoons.

(ibid p100)

Chapter two discussed the way in which many of the texts demystify the family and reveal its fallibility. It is now worth looking in more detail at the depictions of individual adults, both within the family and outside it. Children’s literature, because of its history as a ‘teacher’ to children, has taken a long time to feel comfortable mocking authority yet, as the above quotations show, depictions of adults have changed gradually from flawless and infallible to extremely flawed and fallible. The most obvious example is, to use Grylls’ expression, the ‘malicious buffoon’. These are two-dimensional comic caricatures at whom the reader is encouraged to laugh and feel superior. This is satire for children, and it completely reverses the adult-child hierarchy.

Grylls is accurate in citing Sarah Trimmer, Thomas Day and Mary Martha Sherwood as typical examples of eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes, that is, authoritative and infallible adult / obedient and submissive child (1978: 77). Trimmer’s The History of the Robins (first called Fabulous Histories) (1786) preaches about various different issues, but obedience to parents is highlighted above all. Trimmer’s attitude is Evangelical in linking the authority of the parent with the authority of God, and this applies most particularly to the father.
It appears that, at this time, the vast majority of adults, particularly parents, were assumed to be wise, virtuous and in possession of absolute authority, with no suggestion that authority and respect had to be earned. There was little acknowledgement in children's literature of less-than-perfect adults. Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783-9) is slightly different in that Tommy is shown to be 'bad' through indulgent parenting, thus adult flaws are implied. However, as Grylls points out, 'to make both parents imperfect could be hazardous, subversive' (1978: 78). Day therefore chose to blame only one, and it is probably significant that he chose the mother, ensuring that male authority and infallibility remain intact, in both the father and the clergyman Mr Barlow, whose teaching of the children forms the main focus of the story.

Mrs Sherwood's three volumes of *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818, 1842, 1847), despite being much later, echoed many of their predecessors in being 'a major document of nineteenth century Puritanism' (Grylls 1978: 85). The Fairchild parents, as discussed in chapter two, are affectionate and well-intentioned in their child-rearing; nonetheless, Sherwood's novel is extremely brutal in preaching about obedience to parents. The chapter 'Fatal Effects of Disobedience to Parents' (volume one, 1818, pp153-161) tells the story of Augusta Noble, who has suffered the ultimate consequence of filial disobedience: death. Through playing with fire (having been warned not to), Augusta 'died in agonies last night - a warning to all children how they presume to disobey their parents!' (p155).

It should also be noted that Sherwood was very widely read, and the novel was reprinted well into the twentieth century (Grylls 1978: 86). The Evangelical belief that parents stood in place of God to children, as seen in Trimmer's much earlier novel, was widespread and long-lasting. Again, the father continues to have far more presence and authority than the mother.
K.P. Smith refers to the period 1780 - 1840 as the didactic era in children's literature, and confirms the above notion of the all-powerful and didactic adult: ‘After exposure to children in various stages of mischief and misbehaviour, it was not unexpected that somewhere in the story there would be a controlling adult (more than likely, more than one) regulating affairs’ (Smith 1993: 71-2). The child, consequently, was encouraged to be submissive and humble, and ‘visits to the poor and needy are inserted in the stories to emphasize the need for humility’ (Smith 1993: 75).

Needless to say, the model of flawless adult / obedient child was inseparable from extreme didacticism, and the feeling that children’s books had a moral responsibility towards their readers. However, even writers more sensitive and understanding towards children often conformed to this model, though to a lesser degree. Maria Edgeworth’s ‘The Purple Jar’ does, as Sheila A. Egoff points out, display ‘a sensitivity toward childhood that was far ahead of its time’ (Egoff 1981: 4). Rosamond is endearingly flawed, and quite outspoken for an early nineteenth century child character. Her mother, meanwhile, is far more loving and understanding than the cold and authoritarian parents who frequented children’s books at this time. Nonetheless, Rosamond’s ultimate aim is always to be as virtuous and obedient as possible (though she does not always manage it) and her mother is utterly perfect and wise, to the point of possible irritation on the part of the reader: she never displays signs of impatience, and always has the energy as well as the wisdom to do the right thing. While Rosamond frequently fails in her attempts to be the best that she can be, her mother has reached this plateau of flawlessness. The novel therefore promotes the idea of a progression to adult perfection.

It seems to be widely acknowledged that changes, both in attitudes to the adult-child relationship and its depiction in children’s literature, began in the nineteenth century,

---

1 ‘The Purple Jar’ first appeared in The Parent’s Assistant in 1796, and later in Early Lessons in 1801. I read the story in a collection entitled Rosamond, published in 1813 by Cummings and Hilliard (Boston).
particularly the latter half. However, ‘began’ should be emphasised, since change was very gradual:

The fundamental change in nineteenth century children’s books is clear enough: the move from instruction to entertainment. The early books [pre-nineteenth century] instilled facts and morals in a hastily assembled fictional setting; the emphasis was on adult wisdom. Later, as the discovery of childhood progressed, the emphasis shifted to children themselves....They were allowed not only to learn from their elders but also - occasionally - to laugh at them. Interest in childhood eventually blunted the edge of adult authority.

(Grylls 1978: 75)

Even Mrs Sherwood’s second and third volumes (written much later: 1842 and 1847 respectively) were much more gentle, while editors ‘expurgated’ later editions (Grylls 1978: 91).

However, there is another important and much earlier influence which is overlooked by many critics: fairytales. Despite early children’s literature and its flawless adults and obedient children, and the widely acknowledged changes which began in the nineteenth century, Jack Zipes points out that, much earlier still, fairytales had demystified adults and authority figures and altered power relations. During the didactic era (late eighteenth to early nineteenth century) fairytales were widely frowned upon and repressed. K.P. Smith states that Sarah Trimmer disapproved of fairytales, believing they distracted the child from moral principles (Smith 1993: 27). She also points out that both Locke and Rousseau were wary of children reading at all and, though neither specifically addressed fantasy and fairytales, ‘Both warned, however, of overexciting the imagination with stories of the supernatural, or the natural used in a horrifying manner’ (Smith 1993: 40-2).

It seems likely that, particularly for Evangelicals and those in sympathy with them (this is not to imply that Locke and Rousseau are in this category), it may have been the

---

The fairytale's subversiveness which created disapproval. As empathy for children and awareness of oppression increased (as part of the growth of general humanitarian ideals which focused on women, the working classes and other oppressed groups), many nineteenth century writers seemed to be re-discovering and making use of much older fairytale traditions, rather than creating something which was entirely new. However, one can assume that some fearful resistance to fairytales continued throughout the nineteenth century, as this is an issue which Dickens addressed directly: *Holiday Romance* (1868) tackles adult refusal to accept fairytales. Meanwhile, the unsympathetic Gradgrind (*Hard Times* 1854) also rejects this type of story, and this is most evident when he interrogates Sissy Jupe about her reading matter:

"And what," asked Mr Gradgrind in a still lower voice, "did you read to your father, Jupe?"
"About the Fairies, sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunchback, and the Genies," she sobbed out; "and about -"
"Hush!" said Mr Gradgrind, "that is enough. Never breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more. Bounderby, this is a case for rigid training, and I shall observe it with interest."

(p53)

Social changes, particularly increasing empathy with the child's-eye-view of the world, caused many writers to return to and re-work the ideas of some of their literary ancestors. For this reason Zipes defends the fairytale and its inheritors against those who believe it is now 'socially or aesthetically outmoded':

...the classical fairytale as genre has not been static. Such nineteenth-century writers as Charles Dickens, George MacDonald, John Ruskin, George Sand, Oscar Wilde, Andrew Lang, L. Frank Baum, and others, designated now as "classical", opposed the authoritarian tendencies of the civilization process and expanded the horizons of the fairytale discourse for children....Hope for liberating changes in social relations and political structures was conveyed

---

3 Gillian Avery points out that, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the 'Edgeworth School' (Richard and Maria Edgeworth and other Rousseau-ists) and the Evangelicals were usually in fierce disagreement with each other. However, both schools of thought agreed (and persuaded the public) that 'works of the imagination could only stunt the growth of the child's mind' (1975: 14). This was not just disapproval, but fear; the 'fear of the power of the imagination over the mind was to persist for many years' (with some protestors) (1975: 35).
through symbolic acts of writers who criticised abusive treatment of children.

(Zipes 1983: 171)

While the characters to be discussed have many Dickensian echoes, Dickens and his ‘malicious buffoons’ link back further to fairytales.

With regard to adult fallibility, some important landmark texts in the nineteenth century are Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* novels (1865; 1872), Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies* (1863) and, to move beyond novels specifically intended for children, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and, of course, various novels by Charles Dickens. Alongside satire, fallible adults are sometimes portrayed seriously and, very occasionally, sympathetically.

*Alice*, as Grylls points out, is ‘often taken to mark the real beginning of pure entertainment for children. Part of the appeal of the Alice books is the way they inflate to distortion the infant’s-eye-view of grown-ups; governess huffiness and classroom instruction blur into surrealist jumble’ (Grylls 1978: 97). In the final courtroom scene in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the behaviour of the adults, particularly the judge (the King) and the jurors, is shown to be ludicrous. It is not merely these individuals who are being satirised, but the entire legal and social system of which they are part. This is made clear as we witness old traditions and laws through the fresh, wise (and superior) eyes of the young child Alice:

“Let the jury consider their verdict,” the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.

“No, no!” said the Queen. “Sentence first - verdict afterwards.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” said Alice loudly. “The idea of having the sentence first!”

“Hold your tongue!” said the Queen, turning purple.

“I won’t!” said Alice.

“Off with her head!” the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

“Who cares for you?” said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). “You’re nothing but a pack of cards!”

(p131)
Alice can therefore see through the façade put up by fallible adults: she sees them for what they really are.

Kingsley’s *The Water Babies* is a mixture of both satire and seriousness. Grimes’ mean, selfish and oppressive character obviously has serious implications, but nonetheless he is mocked and satirised. His oppressive treatment of Tom is depicted in an exaggerated manner in order to emphasise his cruelty, and in the first few pages alone we are introduced to him as someone who ‘growled’, is ‘sulky’ and used ‘many bad words’ (pp9-11). Tom fights his oppression: he is often beaten, but ‘Tom was accustomed to that, and got his head safe between Mr Grimes’s legs, and kicked his shins with all his might’ (p11). Despite some tendency to naughtiness, there is no suggestion that Tom is in the wrong for fighting back. Ultimately it is Tom who forgives Grimes, not vice versa - quite a revolutionary role-reversal.

Grimes is also humiliated in the eyes of both Tom and the reader: firstly when the Irishwoman, who later turns out to be one of the fairies, berates him for his behaviour (p11), and later when he is taken to the Other-end-of-Nowhere and imprisoned inside a chimney until he feels genuine repentance. It is in this place that the fairies punish cruel adults on behalf of children:

“Now, Tom, every Friday I come down here and call up all who have ill-used little children, and serve them as they serve the children.”....[Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid] called up all the cruel schoolmasters....And she boxed their ears, and thumped them over the head with rulers, and pandied their hands with canes, and told them that they told stories, and were this and that bad sort of people.....

(pp109-110)

However, she points out that adults such as these ‘did not know that they were doing wrong: they were only stupid and impatient; and therefore I only punish them til they become patient’ . For adults like Grimes, far worse punishments await, for ‘they knew that they were doing wrong’ ” (p111). Ironically, sometimes the authoritative
voice of another 'good' adult is required in order to make clear the faults of the 'bad' one. It is also significant that, despite the groundbreaking nature of Kingsley's text, Grimes is counteracted by all manner of 'good' adults: the fairies, the ground-keeper, the schoolteacher, Sir John and so on.

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and various Dickens novels, though not written specifically for children, do contain 'childhood' sections and could be seen as 'borderline' texts read by both adults and children. Inglis discusses Dickens' use of humour and satire:

Dickens' force as object-lesson to children's novelists is his popularity and those things which made him popular: the boldness, colour and intensification of both effect and structure; all those things and above all his laughter. *Laughter* is the great crucial word. It underlines Dickens' other force as object lesson: that straightness of seeing which picks out Chadband or Podsnap as the disgusting, but disgustingly *funny*, hypocrites they are.

(Inglis 1981: 295)

Dickens is certainly a significant perpetrator of the satirised adult. This is always combined with serious social comment: while Dickens frequently satirises oppressive adults, their power to damage and destroy is no laughing matter. Not only this, but many of his adult characters are a combination of both satire and seriousness. Occasionally he even includes complex adults with whom we may be able to feel some sympathy.

In *Oliver Twist* (1837-8), Mr Bumble suffers from an exaggerated sense of self-importance, which is mocked and dismantled by the narrative tone, for instance when one of the workhouse authorities orders him to be quiet: 'Mr Bumble was stupefied with astonishment. A beadle ordered to hold his tongue! A moral revolution!' (p26). *Hard Times*’ Bounderby is very similar in this respect: he is a 'big, loud man....with a great puffed head and forehead....A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon..' (p21). Both these characters, and the narrative tone which
satirises them, foreshadow the self-importance of Rowling’s Mr and Mrs Dursley, particularly the former.

It is significant that both Bumble and Bounderby do not develop at all throughout the texts; they remain as two-dimensional caricatures. *Hard Times*’ Mr Gradgrind, on the other hand, begins the novel in this manner but gains some depth later on. Most particularly, he softens as a father to his daughter Louisa. When she confronts him with the severe shortcomings of his parenting methods, his remorse is sincere: ‘ “I have proved my - my system to myself, and I have rigidly administered it; and I must bear the responsibility of its failures. I only entreat you to believe, my favourite child, I have meant to do right” ’ (p224).

In *David Copperfield* (1849-50), Mr & Miss Murdstone are a mixture of satire and seriousness, 4 but there is never any question of our feeling any sympathy or understanding towards them. They also do not develop or soften throughout the novel. Peggotty and Aunt Betsy Trotwood, on the other hand (also *David Copperfield*), are sympathetic (albeit eccentric), while in *Oliver Twist*, alongside the comic Mr Bumble, we encounter two of Dickens’ more complex adults: Bill Sikes is primarily serious and frightening, while Fagin is primarily a comic caricature, but both arguably invite a small amount of sympathy. Fagin is a somewhat ‘rough and ready’ mother-figure to the boys. Though he obviously has ulterior motives, when they meet for the first time Fagin greets Oliver warmly and, in giving him food, drink and a seat by the fire (followed by a place to sleep), offers him more kindness than he has received before. Fagin’s relationship with Bill Sikes also incites some sympathy: he is bullied by him, and is clearly uncomfortable and fearful in Sikes’ presence (as is Nancy, who is also a sympathetic fallible adult).

---

4 In using the term ‘serious’, I am not referring to the characters’ own personality traits (though it may also apply to this), but rather to the way in which they are portrayed. In particular, it refers to their ability to provoke fear (as opposed to laughter) in both the reader and other characters. The point in this particular example is that some characters may provoke both reactions.
Sikes is far more unpleasant, and his cruel bullying culminates in his murder of Nancy (chapter forty-seven). Ironically, however, it is this event which also reveals a small glimmer of humanity in him:

He had not moved; he had been afraid to stir....Once he threw a rug over [her body]; but it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him, than to see them glaring upwards....He struck a light, kindled a fire, and thrust the club into it. There was hair upon the end, which blazed and shrunk into a light cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney. Even that frightened him, sturdy as he was...........

(p442)

In children’s literature, the serious fallible adult, particularly those with whom we may be able to sympathise, has certainly developed extremely slowly (even more so than the satirised adult, and that too was a very gradual process). There are some early examples: the uncle in Catherine Sinclair’s *Holiday House* (1839), the White Knight in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1872) and possibly Long John Silver in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883). These early examples, however, are extremely rare.

Thus the mid-nineteenth century, particularly the 1860s, saw some significant changes. However, to return to Grylls’ point regarding this, it is important to note his use of the word ‘occasionally’. K.P. Smith uses the same word in her discussion of early twentieth century children’s literature as ‘occasionally holding guardians up to ridicule or portraying them as evil care givers’ (Smith 1993: 216-17) (my emphasis). Well into the twentieth century, the fallible adult was still a rarity.

On the whole, early twentieth century children’s books, while avoiding harsh and authoritarian adults, tended to opt for rose-tinted visions instead. Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) is perhaps unusual in this respect. This novel features an array of very different fallible adults: Mrs Medlock and the doctor are gently mocked, while Mary’s parents are pretty much condemned. More important is Colin’s father (Mary’s uncle) who is not only flawed but is ultimately shown to be forgivable and redeemable:
sympathy is very much encouraged towards the end. It could be argued that the saintly Mrs Sowerby counteracts this, by setting up an ideal of adult perfection and therefore suggesting that adults can, and perhaps should, attain this. However, Mrs Sowerby's magical qualities are very much linked to spiritual and mystical matters, with a strong suggestion that everyone has this potential: significantly, twelve-year old Dickon is on a par with his mother in this respect. Whichever way one looks at this particular matter, Hodgson Burnett's novel was certainly rare at this time for its sensitive depictions of human adults.

During the first half of the twentieth century it seems that it was no longer fashionable or appropriate to portray authoritarian or completely infallible adults, but nor was it acceptable to undermine adult authority too explicitly. This may explain why adult characters were frequently avoided, or kept very much in the background. This accords with the general escapism which was widespread in children's literature at this time. J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911) has quite significant adult fallibility. Hook is a comic villain whose fear of the crocodile is presented humorously. However, there are occasional moments when his character is revealed to be quite complex, and deserving of sympathy. In one chapter, we are told that he suffers from terrible loneliness, and is a victim of the conditioning he was subjected to at public school ("The Pirate Ship" pp140-148). The children's father is also significant, and again is portrayed with some sympathy as well as humour. However, he features only at the beginning and end of the novel: typically for this era, the children's adventure happens away from their parents, and away from most adults.

---

5 See chapter six for a fuller elaboration of this.

6 Peter Pan's story originally appeared inside a novel for adults, *The Little White Bird* in 1902. The story of Peter Pan was then extracted from the novel, and turned into a play. 1906 saw the publication of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* - this was the exact version taken from *The Little White Bird*. In 1911, *Peter and Wendy* was published - this was the novel which is now widely known as *Peter Pan*. For this reason, any references throughout the thesis to Barrie's novel cite it as *Peter Pan* (1911).
Some writers found other ways to tiptoe around this issue, rather than confront it fully as many of today's writers do. Edith Nesbit featured many fallible adults but, controversially, it was usually only lower-class adults who were attacked and demystified in this way, whereas Hodgson Burnett was exactly the opposite, though perhaps somewhat sentimental in her portrayal of the lower-classes. Nesbit seemed to assume a middle-class audience, and must have felt it was 'safe' to attack lower-class adults, while leaving middle-class infallibility intact. In this, she was extremely self-contradictory, as she was also known for her humanitarian and socialist values.

Other writers used animals to represent adults, and so could undermine their authority in an indirect manner. This is the case in A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books (1926; 1928): Owl, Eeyore, Rabbit and Kanga all have typically adult personalities. Christopher Robin can also be seen in this way - though a child, he is in an adult role to the animals, especially Pooh. Milne can thus make fun of adult traits and behaviour in a subtle, indirect manner. The same can be said of Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) in which Mole, Rat, Badger and Toad each represent not only different adult personalities, but different facets of society. Grahame’s satire therefore has a broader focus than the mocking of mere individuals.

Thus, adult fallibility was beginning to creep into early twentieth century children's books, but only in a tentative and minor way. Egoff believes that, despite some exceptions, when it came to depicting adult-child relationships, 'Society's basic and traditional assumptions about the young were simply too strongly held, and most of these persisted right up into the 1950s' (Egoff 1981: 32).

The huge increase in fallible adults in children's literature in the post-1960s era corresponds with wider social changes. Decreasing respect for authorities is often known as the 'decline of deference': the changing adult-child relationship, particularly

---

7 There is no specific source for this expression; rather it has crept into general usage in the English language over the last few decades.
the removal of adults from their former pedestal, is, therefore, one aspect of a much wider social transformation. Stuart Hall, quoted in the Introductory chapter (pp2-3), cites television as an important part of these changes. Television over the last few decades has been pervaded by satire, and one of the most famous and significant examples of this is ITV’s Spitting Image, which ran from 1984 to 1992. This programme could be seen as Roald Dahl for adults:

*Spitting Image* was roundly condemned for its lampooning of the Royal family: the Queen was portrayed as a harried housewife, beset by randy, dullard children and screaming grandkids....The Conservative leadership was a constant target: Margaret Thatcher’s puppet was a needle-nosed Reagan groupie who consulted with Hitler on immigration policy....

(‘Spitting Image’ http://www.museum.tv/archives)

Despite criticism, *Spitting Image* was watched by twelve million viewers, and won an International Emmy for ‘Outstanding Popular Arts’ programme in the 1985-6 season. Since this programme, many other satirical shows have followed, and continue in popularity: the most popular at present is probably *Have I Got News For You* (BBC2).

A much more serious example is the recent events surrounding the war launched on Iraq by the USA and Britain. The extensive criticism of President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, by the public, the media and official investigations, contrasts heavily with the patriotism and united front evident throughout World Wars I and II. The husband of Margaret Hassan, a British woman taken hostage in Iraq in autumn 2004, felt free to make explicit personal criticisms of the way the situation had been handled by Tony Blair, while similar comments were made by the family of hostage Kenneth Bigley. Opinions may vary on controversial topics such as these but, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, no-one disputes the right of the public and the media to judge authorities and speak freely.
The decline of deference extends to whole systems and traditions as well as individuals: the traditional British social hierarchy is part of this. A secret Whitehall list, leaked in December 2003 revealed that, over the last few decades, ‘More than three hundred pop singers, actors, writers, TV stars and painters ⁸ have turned down knighthoods and OBEs’ (Hardy: 22 Dec. 2003). Some of these celebrities discussed their reasons with the media:

Film director Ken Loach turned down an OBE in 1977. He said: “As a republican I can’t accept anything from the Queen. It represents the apex of the class system with inherited wealth and all that entails.” Empire of the Sun author JG Ballard rejected a CBE this year because of the “preposterous charade” of the system. He said: “It makes us a laughing stock and encourages deference to the crown.”

(ibid)

In children’s literature, an abundance of satirised adults have emerged in this era of the ‘decline of deference’ and, to refer back to the Grylls quotation on page one of this chapter, ‘malicious buffoons’ are no longer a rarity. As Tucker says in relation to post-1960s changes in children’s literature, ‘The decline of deference and the growth of satire in British culture...helped erode the establishment values once generally reflected by traditional casts of characters in children’s fiction....Adults, previously respected as part of the social status quo, now as often as not found themselves on the wrong side of juvenile ridicule. Respect for elders now had to be well and truly earned in children’s books.’ (Tucker & Reynolds 1998: 16).

**Bringing down the adult**

Dahl makes the most extensive use of the comic caricature, while Jones and Rowling have some examples, along with other more complex adults (the latter will be discussed in the following section). While Dickens’ *Holiday Romance* encourages adults to accept fairytales, Dahl’s *Revolting Rhymes* (1982b) and *Rhyme Stew* (1989) subvert and rewrite

---

⁸ Presumably ‘painters’ means artists.
traditional fairytales and make their anti-authoritarian tone even more extreme. Dahl takes the traditional fairytale and re-works it, to place even more exaggerated emphasis on satirising and bringing down the oppressive adult and empowering the child. His version of ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’ tells us that ‘The King had gone to pot so fast / His clothes came first, his people last....Oh what a beastly horrid King! / The people longed to do him in!’ (Rhyme Stew, pp33-4). The narrative tone of these tales focuses very much on the child’s viewpoint; this is particularly evident in Dahl’s version of ‘Cinderella’:

I guess you think you know this story.  
You don’t. The real one’s much more gory.  
The phoney one, the one you know,  
Was cooked up years and years ago,  
And made to sound all soft and sappy  
Just to keep the children happy.

(Revolting Rhymes9)

The narrator thus takes the child into his confidence, inviting an us-and-them mentality.

In George’s Marvellous Medicine (1981), the mother is portrayed fairly positively, but nonetheless her perspective is sometimes shown to be laughable. A fairly standard parental warning (‘“So be a good boy and don’t get up to mischief” ’(p1)) is shown from the child’s perspective by the narrator: ‘This was a silly thing to say to a small boy at any time. It immediately made him wonder what sort of mischief he might get up to’ (p1). The narrative viewpoint is therefore immediately aligned with the child’s viewpoint, by condoning (or at least not scolding) such mischief, and suggesting that the adult’s behaviour may even cause or at least worsen the child’s behaviour.

Dahl, therefore, is usually quite explicit in the way in which he undermines the adult and validates the child’s viewpoint. This extends to his use of macabre humour: ‘foul and filthy parents’; ‘His mother’s shrewd and shifty eyes’ (‘Hansel & Gretel’, Rhyme

---

9 This book does not contain page numbers (however, it is a picture book in which the relevant quotations can easily be located).
Satire in Jones and Rowling usually has a more ironic tone, but is equally effective in adopting the child’s perspective on oppressive adults. Jones’ *Black Maria* (1991) has a subtle, understated humour: ‘“When Lavinia’s here I always get her to turn the gas and electricity off at ten o’clock sharp,” Aunt Maria shouted. “But you can leave it on since you’re my visitors.” As a result of this, I am writing by candlelight’ (p17). Meanwhile, Rowling’s famous opening chapter uses quite crude irony, ensuring that even the youngest child-reader will understand that the Dursleys are to be scorned and laughed at: ‘Mr Dursley couldn’t bear people who dressed in funny clothes - the get-ups you saw on young people! He supposed this was some stupid new fashion’ (*Philosopher’s Stone* 1997 p8).

Making fun of physical appearance is often a fundamental part of these satirical representations, particularly when we are first introduced to the characters. If they are immediately shown to look ridiculous, there is little danger of them ever having any credibility:

> Mr Dursley... was a big beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache. Mrs Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck...

(*Philosopher’s Stone* p7)

[Aunt Marge] was very like Uncle Vernon: large, beefy and purple-faced, she even had a moustache, though not as bushy as his.

(*Prisoner of Azkaban* 1999 p22)

We have to hook [Aunt Maria] into a corset-thing which is like shiny pink armour, and you should just see her knickers.

(*Black Maria* p22)

Dahl also places a lot of emphasis on mocking physical appearance, but he often focuses particularly on physical size. In *Matilda* (1988) the depiction of Miss Trunchbull in particular subverts the idea that a difference in physical size gives power to the larger person, making size seem ludicrous and laughable, rather than intimidating:
Miss Trunchbull is ‘the head teacher, the boss, the supreme commander’ of Crunchem Hall Primary School; she is ‘a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster’ and a ‘great red-necked giant’ (pp60; 61; 83). Despite this, however, Miss Trunchbull’s physical size does give her power over the children, and this is one reason why some adults fear the child growing up. In Jones’ *Eight Days of Luke* (1975), the growing David realises that ‘he really was the same height as Cousin Ronald, and that made him feel much less frightened of him...’ (p31), while Dahl’s *George’s Marvellous Medicine* shows how Grandma is desperate to keep George ‘beneath her’ in the physical sense:

“You’re growing too fast. Boys who grow too fast become stupid and lazy.”
“But I can’t help it if I’m growing fast, Grandma,” George said.
“Of course you can,” she snapped. “Growing’s a nasty childish habit”...“It’s ridiculous,” she went on. “you’re nearly as tall as me already...[Chocolate] makes you grow the wrong way. Up instead of down....Never grow up,” she said. “Always down.”

(pp4-6)

However, the last point could also be Dahl’s voice, emphasising a Peter Pan-type distaste for adulthood.

It is not just appearance and physical power which are mocked; the assumed intellectual superiority and emotional maturity of adults are also frequently called into question. In Dahl, adult achievements and abilities, rather than being presented as something superior which children should aspire to, are ridiculed and derided. ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’ refers to ‘The brainy men so shrewd and sly’ and ‘The very brainiest man’ (*Rhyme Stew*, pp34;38), while Charlie Bucket’s golden ticket ‘was printed by some clever method’ (*C & C Factory* 1964 p68). In one episode in *Boy* (1984), the story-within-the-story is interrupted by constant repetitions of ‘Thwaites’s father had said’ (pp29-30), lest the reader should be tempted to take the tale as universal fact. Other terms are used to highlight the way in which this father attempts to manipulate his child’s thinking. Dahl informs us that ‘The father had given his young
son a lecture’ (p29): the use of ‘young’ emphasises the vulnerability of the child, while the term ‘lecture’ has extremely negative connotations. The contents of this ‘lecture’ have therefore lost any credibility they might otherwise have had.

Thus, adults are not necessarily possessors of superior wisdom, yet they may think that they are and this holds them up to ridicule all the more. Their emotional maturity is also questionable. In George’s Marvellous Medicine, we are told that Grandma ‘wanted to be the centre of attention’ and behaved badly when she realised that ‘nobody was taking the slightest notice of her’ (p69). Towards the end there is a suggestion that Grandma is jealous of George. Her behaviour is therefore more akin to that of sibling rivalry and spite than mature adult: ‘“Everything’s George’s round here!” shouted Grandma. “George’s this, George’s that! I’m fed up with it!”’ (pp95-7).

In Jones’ Black Maria, the title character’s harmful magical abilities make her extremely powerful, but nonetheless her devious manipulation of others shows her to be, not just selfish, but petty and immature:

The days have all gone the same way, starting with Mum leaping out of bed and waking me up in her hurry to get breakfast as soon as Aunt Maria begins thumping her stick on the floor. While I’m getting up, Aunt Maria is sounding off next door. “No, no, dear. It’s quite fun to eat runny eggs for a change - I usually tell Lavinia to do them for five and a half minutes, but it doesn’t matter a bit.” Today Mum must have got the egg right, because Aunt Maria was going on about “how interesting to eat flabby toast, dear.”

(pp21-2)

Despite the difference in style, this childishness (in the most negative sense of the word) is very similar to that of Grandma in George’s Marvellous Medicine. Whether the humour is macabre or understated, the child’s emotional maturity is shown to be superior, while those negative qualities so often associated with small children (being selfish, demanding and intolerant of changes in routine) are attributed to the adult. These examples show that adults, like children, find ways to control and manipulate
others, and to get their own way. Thus, the power of the adult is not absolute, and adults can be just as guilty as children of using underhand methods to gain power.

Mockery of adults usually focuses on individual characters, but sometimes there is a deeper dimension to it as well. Rowling’s depiction of the Dursleys is not only ironic, it also goes beyond individuals to mock social norms. Number Four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, is clearly deep in the heart of middle-class suburbia. As discussed earlier, Rowling’s use of irony ensures that we are always scorning the Dursleys, but it is also made clear that readers are meant to laugh at the social norms represented by this family, as well as the individuals themselves. This is achieved particularly through the continuous and ironic mocking of the word ‘normal’ and concepts associated with bourgeois ‘normality’: ‘Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much’; ‘Mr Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for work’; ‘Mr Dursley had a perfectly normal, owl-free morning. He yelled at five different people. He made several important telephone calls and shouted a bit more’; ‘Mrs Dursley had had a nice, normal day. She told him over dinner all about Mrs Next Door’s problems..’ (Philosopher’s Stone pp7-10).

Jones’ much earlier Eight Days of Luke also mocks bourgeois ‘respectability’, while even Dahl occasionally addresses social issues - particularly previously untouchable authority figures. Both James & the Giant Peach (1961) and Charlie & the Great Glass Elevator (1973) satirise the U.S. president and other American authorities, while British society (particularly the armed forces) is shown humorously in The BFG (1982). The Queen also features in this novel: she is depicted with a light-hearted respect, but nonetheless she is not shown as an awesome authority figure. These are never central characters but Dahl’s depiction of them does touch on broader social comment (and the general decline of deference) rather than simply mocking individuals. It should be pointed out that these authority figures are mocked in a gentle manner, as opposed to
characters like Miss Trunchbull who are harshly criticised, but nonetheless they are
firmly taken down from their pedestal:

“This could be a trick!” said the Head of the Fire Department.…. 
“They’ve probably got space guns!” muttered the Chief of Police. 
“But we’ve got to do something!” the Head of the Fire Department 
announced grimly. “About five million people are standing down 
there on the streets watching us.”

(J & GP p331)

It is also worth considering whether male and female adults are satirised equally, or if 
there are any divisions here. Rowling’s satire focuses far more on Mr Dursley than his 
wife, though she certainly does not escape. Jones’ Eight Days of Luke also places more 
emphasis on mocking Uncle Bernard and Cousin Ronald. This may be because, as we 
have seen, early novels such as The Fairchild Family often placed the father, as 
representative of God, on a higher pedestal than the mother: thus it seems inevitable that 
male characters may end up being satirised more harshly. The same is true of Mr 
Wormwood in Dahl’s Matilda, whose wife, despite being portrayed negatively, is very 
much in the background. These examples also suggest that abuse, and general harsh 
treatment, are assumed to be more the domain of men than women. Fine’s much more 
serious novel, The Tulip Touch (1996), also suggests this, and this will be discussed in 
the next section.

However, the point about Mr Wormwood is counteracted by Miss Trunchbull, who 
features in the same novel, while other Dahl novels also attack women. These are 
usually unmarried women who conform wholeheartedly to the stereotype of the manly 
and aggressive spinster: the above-mentioned Miss Trunchbull, and Aunt Sponge and 
Aunt Spiker. Interestingly, Rowling’s Aunt Marge is almost identical to these characters. 
Dahl’s The Witches (1983) is particularly problematic, and contains misogynistic 
comments:
A witch is always a woman. I do not wish to speak badly about women. Most women are lovely. But the fact remains that all witches are women. There is no such thing as a male witch.

(p3)

Jones’ *Black Maria* could be seen in the same light, since female witches cast their power over helpless men. However, this novel is more complex, does not contain explicitly misogynist comments and also includes both positive female characters and negative male characters (primarily Mig’s parents). *Black Maria* is also told from the viewpoint of Mig, who is critical of the sexist attitudes displayed by her aunt (see particularly pp11; 12). One could also defend Dahl by pointing out that the child-eating giants in *The BFG* all appear to be male, as are most of the authority figures who are (albeit more gently) mocked, as discussed above. *The Witches* also points out that ‘...a ghoul is always a male. So indeed is a barghest’. However, ‘neither of them is as dangerous as a REAL WITCH’ (p3).

If one surveys all the novels discussed in this thesis, there is on the whole a fairly equal mixture of male and female fallible adults. This also applies to the more serious and complex characters, discussed in the next section. In general, both the mother and the father have been taken down from their pedestal, as have other adults, including society’s authority figures. However, it is important to emphasise that Dahl, Rowling and Jones, like Dickens, only satirise oppressive adults who deserve it. The emphasis is on adults having to earn respect - those who earn it do get it. Dumbledore, Miss Honey, and Astrid are just a few of the adult characters who earn, and receive, respect. Dahl’s George, despite his rebellion against Grandma, obeys his parents because he respects them, and their rules are always for his benefit:

...he gazed longingly at the famous and dreaded medicine cupboard. But he didn’t go near it. It was the only thing in the entire house he was forbidden to touch. He had made solemn promises to his parents about this and he wasn’t going to break them.

(pp18-19)
As in Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*, the voice of the ‘good’ and respected adult is often used to condemn the ‘bad’ ones: the Weasleys condemn the Dursleys (*Goblet of Fire* 2000 pp46-7); George’s father condemns Grandma (pp69; 103); Mig’s mother criticises Aunt Maria (pp40-1). This not only validates the child’s viewpoint, but also makes clear that not all adults are bad. Dahl in particular emphasises that the truly appalling adults who appear so frequently in his novels are actually a rarity. George’s Grandma may be ‘a grizzly old grunion’, but ‘Most grandmothers are lovely, kind and helpful old ladies...’ (p2). *Matilda* also counteracts Miss Trunchbull by pointing out that:

\[
...\text{most headteachers are chosen because they possess a number of fine qualities. They understand children and they have the children’s best interests at heart....Miss Trunchbull possessed none of these qualities and how she ever got her present job was a mystery.}\]

(p76)

However, in Dahl in particular there is the problem of polarizing adults as one extreme or the other: Miss Honey counteracts Miss Trunchbull and Mr and Mrs Wormwood; the Bucket parents and Grandpa Joe counteract the parents of the spoilt children. Rowling and Jones, as we shall see in the next section, also include more complex adult characters - they are not always polarised as explicitly ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Another possible problem with the comic caricature is that these writers could be accused of trivialising serious issues in their humorous portrayals of child-abuse and general oppression. However, it is important to note that, although the oppressive adults are portrayed as comical and two-dimensional (the Dursleys, Miss Trunchbull, the Wormwoods, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker), the abused children are not: their suffering is shown to be real and serious. Dahl’s *Matilda* is, for the most part, humorous, but takes on a serious and disturbing tone when Miss Honey talks about the abuse she suffered as a child:
...the atmosphere in the tiny room...was vibrating with awkwardness and secrets...."What did she do to you?" Matilda asked. "I don't want to talk about it....But in the end I became so frightened of her I used to start shaking when she came into the room....she used to make me bath myself alone. And if she came up and thought I hadn't washed properly she would push my head under the water and hold it there...

(pp187-200)

This approach again has something in common with Dickens: he too made use of the comic grotesque and two-dimensional characters in his depictions of serious social issues, yet nonetheless was credited with helping to raise awareness of such issues. Fiedler believes that Dickens, amongst others, profoundly affected attitudes to childhood and 'modified the sensibility of [his] age, teaching adults to weep over the plight of the young' (1980: 149). Whether such a grand claim could be made about Dahl, Rowling and Jones is open to question – it is unlikely that we weep for Harry Potter as we did for Oliver Twist – but the point still stands that humour and serious issues are not necessarily mutually incompatible.

Fiedler's article goes on to analyse the traditional fairytale, and defends its combination of the fantastic and the domestic in a similar way:

To be sure, fairytales often, perhaps typically, encrypt or encode [family hostilities] by representing the Bad Father ...in the form of a giant or ogre, usually cannibalistic; while the Bad Mother...is figured forth as a stepmother or a witch.

(Fiedler 1980: 152)

Nonetheless, it is due to fairytales that this family hostility and violence 'was on record centuries before Freud....[The Fairy Tale's] essential subject is, in fact, what we have come to call "child abuse" and "child molestation," or rather the psychological roots of these...' (Fiedler 1980: 152). Fantastic and humorous literature does, therefore, often contain serious psychological realism alongside (or, rather, within) humour and comic caricatures.
Zipes discusses how oral folk tales, and the written fairytales they developed into, "presented the stark realities of power politics without disguising the violence and brutality of everyday life. Starvation of children, rape, corporal punishments, ruthless exploitation - these are some of the conditions which were so overwhelming that they demanded symbolic abstraction" (Zipes 1983: 8). Thus they portrayed brutal realities, but not in realistic form. In this way, folk tales and fairytales (and the fantastic literature which has inherited much from them) have more freedom to address brutal issues, by depicting them in a non-realistic manner. In children's literature, serious issues are thus defused of anxiety for the child reader. Jones' essay in Foundation discusses the way in which fantasy gives distance:

The fact that it has been put in terms of magic (or impossibility) has distanced the problem (which may actually be one painfully near to most children, like secret fears or racial difference) so that it can be walked around, followed through and, if possible, solved in some way.

(Jones 1997: 12)

Michelle Landsberg points out that "When you stop to analyze why a funny book provokes laughter from many children of very different tastes, you almost always find that there's an unstated theme in the book that is common to the deepest experience of childhood...anxiety" (cited in Tucker & Gamble 2001: 87). Bringing laughter into a difficult (particularly an oppressive) situation can therefore diminish fear and provide a subsequent feeling of empowerment. The general purpose of such an approach seems to be to exorcise the fears and frustrations of the child reader; allowing them to laugh at adults and to feel superior in a way they cannot do without retribution in real life.

In Dahl's George's Marvellous Medicine, Grandma's torments seem to represent the helpless and fearful position of all children: "It doesn't matter how far you run...you won't ever get away..." (p11). The Witches makes the point in a much more frightening manner: 'A REAL WITCH hates children with a red-hot sizzling hatred....Very carefully a victim is chosen. Then the witch stalks the wretched child like
a hunter stalking a little bird in the forest...’ (pp1-2). This suggests the seriousness behind the humour. The oppressive adults may be exaggerated but, in real life, they may actually appear this frightening to a small child. Thus the larger-than-life depictions of such adults reflect the enormity of the fears of children. Consequently, we are made aware of the need to give vent to such feelings, even if it is merely indulging in a fantasy. Though the protagonists do frequently take action, it seems that the exorcism of the feelings is more important than action - thus laughing at an oppressor, even if only privately, is a way of dealing with such feelings without necessarily needing to act. In particular, laughter may be the best response for those who are unable to take action, as is the case for most real children: humour is therefore the most effective ‘weapon’ for those who are relatively powerless in actuality.

Rowling’s ‘Boggart’ spell expresses this explicitly. The Boggart is a shape-shifter which, as Professor Lupin explains, takes the shape of ‘ ‘...whatever each of us most fears’’. The spell for overpowering the Boggart is to imagine it in a ridiculous form and then laugh at it: ‘ ‘You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is laughter....I would like all of you to take a moment now to think of the thing that scares you most, and imagine how you might force it to look comical....” ’ (Prisoner of Azkaban pp101-3). This is exactly what Dahl does on behalf of children.

Diana Wynne Jones says that an important part of her books is the exploration of ‘the quite incommunicable fears children have’. In discussing her own childhood, she points out that ‘humour is essential when things get wild. Oddly, the most insanely funny things were nearly always part of something intensely tragic....and I came to the conclusion that the two states are, in fact, closely related and that fantasy - the times things go wild - is the connecting factor’ (Jones 1997: 6; 9).

Inglis shares Jones’ belief that tragedy and comedy are inseparable. Not only this, but ‘To see the comedy [in tragedy] is to live through some of the same disorders as before,
but with a more serene and tranquil eye for their misrule and subversion' (Inglis 1981: 305). Thus laughter can preserve sanity. Inglis believes that most people probably see their lives as both tragic and comic, ‘But in suggesting, with a proper tact, that children learn to see the shapes of comedy and tragedy as connecting and giving meaning to the ceaseless motion of experience, we might refer again to the title phrase’¹⁰ (Inglis 1981: 305).

Inglis goes on to discuss how not only joy, but also freedom and liberation, can result from laughter:

...laughter and a love of life may be said to be necessarily connected....A laughing man is a free man...a laughter-maintaining language holds back the forces of darkness and depression, and keeps a large space open for those great names - joy, freedom, happiness and so forth.

(Inglis 1981: 306)

‘I’m a human being’¹¹: coming to terms with adult fallibility

Despite the ongoing popularity of the comic caricature, what is even more significant about post-1960s children’s literature is the emergence of sympathy towards adults; the beginnings of an acceptance that adults are ‘human’. The introduction to this chapter showed how some earlier texts occasionally encouraged sympathy towards fallible adults, but these were extremely rare before 1960. K.P. Smith confirms that portrayals of the sympathetic fallible adult are relatively new in children’s literature:

---

¹⁰ Inglis is here referring to his own title, *The Promise of Happiness* (1981), and so implies that children will find happiness through understanding the connection between tragedy and comedy.

¹¹ Quotation from Fine’s *Madame Doubtfire* (1987 p131)
The contemporary fantasist does not view adults as infallible human beings. While the somewhat blissful adult ignorance seen so often in early twentieth-century fantasy is not a major characteristic of contemporary works, neither do adults regain their early didactic stance of total control and flawless character. Adults with whom we are encouraged by the author to feel empathy are shown to be natural human beings capable of wisdom as well as error. Individuals appear more human and more realistic as a result. They are not paragons but people.

(K.P. Smith 1993: 371)

As with many of Smith’s points on fantasy, I would add that the above applies to the majority of recent children’s literature, rather than being exclusive to fantasy texts.

It seems that serious depictions of ‘human adults’ are perhaps seen as far more revolutionary than the comic caricature, who can be isolated as a rarity and removed from reality. Thus, while satirised adults have been developing gradually since Victorian times, the complex and sympathetic fallible adult has, with occasional exceptions, only really begun to develop in the post-1960s era. The difference, then, is between mocking-demystification and sympathetic-demystification.

Again this corresponds with wider social changes. The decline of deference was discussed earlier in the chapter, but it has developed into something more complex than simply criticising and / or laughing at authorities. Gradually (as in children’s literature) some sympathy for authorities has begun to emerge in Western society. Criticism and ridicule certainly continue (as we have seen), but alongside this there is evidence of an increasing acceptance that authority-figures are simply human. This sympathetic attitude does not extend to extreme situations, as we have seen in the current situation with Tony Blair and George W. Bush; thus, there is always a point at which fallibility becomes unacceptable and beyond forgiveness and understanding (in this case, authorising the killing of innocent people without, it appears, justified cause). Nonetheless, within reason, authorities are allowed to be human more than in previous eras. The late Princess Diana is probably one of the most poignant examples here:
declared the ‘people’s princess’ posthumously, she was loved for her fallibility and vulnerability, in contrast to other members of the Royal family who have always maintained an elevated and distant public image. As Anthony Holden says, the public admired Diana’s ‘readiness to reveal her own vulnerability, her own human frailties, moving millions to empathise with her as with no other royal in memory. She, unlike the rest of them, was “real” ’ (Holden: 10 June 2001).

In parenting, the last few decades have witnessed a gradual acceptance that parents, too, are human and allowed to make mistakes; chapter one discussed this in terms of the now very popular concept of ‘good-enough parenting’. Dahl and Rowling occasionally feature the sympathetic fallible adult, whereas Jones and, even more so, Fine feature this issue frequently and explore it more fully, as we shall see. The most obvious examples are those whose fallibility makes them endearing. The ultimate fallible-but-loveable adult is probably Rowling’s Hagrid. His big heart and childlike nature make him extremely endearing to Harry and his friends and the reader. Nonetheless, he is clumsy and incompetent, and his good intentions almost always cause trouble. In Prisoner of Azkaban he is given a position of responsibility, teaching Care of Magical Creatures, but disaster strikes when he introduces the children to a dangerous creature: ‘“School gov’nors have bin told, o’ course....They reckon I started too big. Shoulda left Hippogriffs fer later....’s all my fault” ’ (p92). The planned execution of Buckbeak the Hippogriff incites a role-reversal (discussed in chapter two, p104) in which Hagrid’s grief and remorse generate an adult-like compassion in Harry: ‘Hagrid was not crying, nor did he throw himself upon their necks. He looked like a man who did not know where he was or what to do. This helplessness was worse to watch than tears’ (p240).

In Dahl’s Matilda, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, Miss Honey, though extremely virtuous, is refreshingly honest with the protagonist regarding her abusive childhood, and the fears and other emotional scars which still haunt her as an adult. This
is a rare episode of seriousness in Dahl. Willy Wonka’s fallibility, on the other hand, is more humorous, though he is not satirised. In GGE, he makes some hair-raising mistakes, but these are part of his endearing enthusiasm and spirit of adventure:

“What if they capture us?” said Mrs Bucket.
“What if my beard were made of green spinach?” cried Mr Wonka.
“Bunkum and tummyrot! You’ll never get anywhere if you go about what-iffing like that. Would Columbus have discovered America if he’d said ‘What if I sink on the way over?’... We want no what-iffers here, right, Charlie? Off we go, then...”

(pp29-30)

Dahl’s most poignant depiction of sympathetic adult fallibility is in Danny, the Champion of the World (1975). Some adults in the novel are two-dimensional comic caricatures, but Danny’s father is, unusually for Dahl, quite complex: he is one of the few adults who is not polarised as either bad or perfect. The back cover of Danny expresses the sentiment of sympathetic adult fallibility most aptly:

Danny thinks the world of his father, but imagine his surprise when he finds out he’s been breaking the law! Even grown-ups bend the rules sometimes, but Danny knows his father is still good, kind and clever and full of exciting ideas.

The first few chapters, depicting Danny’s father as he appears to his son in early childhood, set him up as a superhero:

Most wonderful of all was the feeling that when I went to sleep, my father would still be there, very close to me, sitting in the chair by the fire, or lying in the bunk above my own. My father, without a doubt, was the most marvellous and exciting father any boy ever had.

(pp7-8)

This makes the revelation of his fallibility as much of a shock for the reader as for Danny. The reader must therefore journey with the protagonist as he comes to terms with what he learns: ‘You will learn as you get older, just as I learned that autumn, that no father is perfect. Grown-ups are complicated creatures, full of quirks and secrets’ (p25). Consequently, Danny contains far more depth and moral ambiguity than other Dahl novels. As in theories of good-enough parenting, readers are being shown that
‘good’ does not have to equal ‘perfect’ (and perhaps, within reason, various flaws contribute to a character’s lovability, both by the child-characters and readers).

Teachers (or those in teaching roles) are often shown to be flawed, yet still admirable and likeable. In Rowling’s *The Order of the Phoenix* (2003), it is significant that even the ever-wise Dumbledore makes a mistake (discussed more fully in chapter five), and this perhaps reveals a marked difference between Rowling and some of her earlier influences. Sarah Fiona Winters (placing Harry Potter firmly within the traditions of children’s detective, adventure and school stories) links Rowling’s series to Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857). One of several parallels is the way in which Dumbledore owes ‘something to Dr Arnold....School stories often set up the headmaster as a benevolent figure who compensates for incompetent or nasty teachers’ (Winters 2002: 82). Winters also sees Jones’ Chrestomanci in this light, but realises that ‘Jones complicates the genre....Chrestomanci does not appear as an obvious refuge to the harried children....While Chrestomanci always does, in the end, save the day, he is not omnipotent, omniscient, or even unfailingly benevolent: he does not, in short, occupy the godlike heights where Dr Arnold and Dumbledore are to be found’ (ibid p82).

While Winters’ points about Jones’ Chrestomanci are certainly accurate, Dumbledore’s mistake in *The Order of the Phoenix* (not written at the time of Winters’ essay) shows him, too, as a more modern, fallible wise teacher. The contradiction in terms is deliberate, for this is precisely the point that these writers seem to be making: just as one can be good without being perfect, so one can be both wise and fallible. Dumbledore, Chrestomanci and even the more comical Willy Wonka are all wise teachers, but they all (just about) have fallibility. Fine’s *Flour Babies* (1992), meanwhile, extends sympathy and admiration to teachers as a whole, though the tone does become somewhat preachy:
...staring at Rick Tullis's niggardly and mean-spirited scribblings, Simon saw for the first time why teachers showed such scorn for those who did as little as possible. He understood why one class after another was shot through with their howls of exasperation and anguish....Suddenly it all meant something to Simon. He was struck by the sheer grit of teachers. Their stout hearts. Their unflagging fixity of purpose. Determinedly they soldiered on, term after term, trying to make their pupils give of their very best. And with what results? With what thanks?

(pp69-70)

Some of Fine's other novels (for example Goggle Eyes (1989), which shows Kitty trying to come to terms with her new stepfather) show child characters mocking adult characters: Kitty names Gerald 'goggle eyes' because of the way he looks at her mother. However, the difference between this and a Dahl-esque approach is that the narrator does not encourage the reader to join in, and Kitty usually gets into trouble if she expresses her views out loud: '...sure enough, there he was, goggling at her. When Granny catches anyone staring, she says to them tartly: “Had your eyeful yet?” But Mum’s forbidden me and Jude to say that any more, and I’d already been warned about being polite' (p32). Kitty is trying to exorcise her frustrations in the way that Dahl’s and Rowling’s readers are allowed to, but she must get beyond her desire to ridicule Gerald for he, unlike the Dursleys, Miss Trunchbull and others, has feelings and can be seen sympathetically and even endearingly. Kitty consequently journeys from mocking him (Dahl-style) to realising his likeability.

Most importantly, we are not usually encouraged to condemn these particular characters for their fallibility. It could be argued that Dumbledore’s mistake, like Hagrid’s, endears him to us more. In particular, what makes him appear all the more admirable is the fact that he has the humility and, some would say, strength to admit his mistake, not just to himself, but also to Harry, his protégé (Order of the Phoenix pp727-8). Similarly, Goggle Eyes’ Gerald also admits to being boring (p127). This perhaps is the difference between the fallible adult with whom we sympathise (or, at least, whom...
we do not condemn), and the fallible adult who invites only ridicule or condemnation: the former does not pretend to be infallible, while the latter hides behind a veneer which invites narrator and reader to knock it down - this is embodied most explicitly in the Dursleys’ facade of respectability. In Jones’ *Fire & Hemlock* (1985), Thomas’ initially endearing fallibility becomes more serious later in the novel, but he is ultimately redeemed at the end, and this is mainly because of his humility and self-awareness (pp392-3).

Another consideration is whether the adults depicted have ‘ordinary’ flaws or more serious ones. It would appear that truly unacceptable and potentially dangerous behaviour in adults is usually tackled only in fantasy texts, which use humour and / or magic to defuse the situations of anxiety for child-readers. Tulip’s father, who is guilty of serious abuse in Fine’s novel (*The Tulip Touch*), is a rare exception but it is significant that, despite the story’s emphasis on the effects of his behaviour on Tulip, the man himself rarely features and so we never actually witness his abusive treatment of his daughter. This would still be considered unacceptable, even in an era in which social realism for children has more freedom to tackle old taboos.

However, once again the genre divisions are not clear-cut. Jones, despite some unacceptable-but-humorous adult characters, appears to concentrate far more on ordinary and sometimes forgivable adult flaws, and tends to portray them realistically and seriously. In this she not only ‘complicates the genre’ of children’s adventure and detective stories (Winters 2002: 82), but also complicates the divide between fantasy and realism. Meanwhile Fine, despite being constrained by the limits of realist fiction, does push these boundaries quite far, not only in terms of the abusive Mr Pierce, but also in terms of what might be seen as understandable and forgivable adult fallibility.

Thus, in Fine and Jones, what type of adult behaviour constitutes ‘good enough’ and what is regarded as not ‘good enough’? How serious are the flaws of adult characters,
and are readers encouraged to forgive and understand or not? Another consideration is whether these more serious depictions also use humour and (in Jones’ case) fantasy to defuse situations of anxiety - these elements are certainly not exclusive to the comic caricature. In other words, how far can today’s writers go in depicting (realistic) adult fallibility, and what techniques are used to reassure the reader?

Chapter two addressed the fallibility of the family, particularly the way in which Fine and Jones explore the break-up of the traditional family. Some of these families will now be examined more closely, with regard to the fallibility of individual adults. Fine’s *Flour Babies* and Jones’ *Black Maria* both show children being raised by single mothers after the fathers have not only left, but also cut off all contact with their children. Chapter two has already pointed out Mig’s father’s inability to deal with family life.

Mig learns that there was never any secure ‘safety net’ from her father:

> “Just before you were born, Mig, I fell downstairs. *All* the way down. I was terrified in case you’d been harmed. I screamed for Greg. He came and he looked, and he said, ‘That was a stupid thing to do,’ and he went away again....that’s what he’s like, Mig.....”

(p136)

When Mig finds her father after thinking he had been killed in an accident, he has no concern at all for the trauma his children have been through: ‘“...is that why you’re here?”’ he said in the same sarcastic way. “Soul-searching, happy-ending-seeking Mig.”....I didn’t even mention Chris to Dad. I knew he’d just cut off, then get angry and throw me out of the car’ (pp132; 136). Thus, even in traumatic and life-threatening situations, Greg has no support to give.

In Fine’s *Flour Babies*, we are told that Simon’s father was also unable to cope with the responsibility of parenthood. This father had no obvious faults: as Simon puts it in his diary, ‘“It’s just that he didn’t stay” ’ (p74). For Simon there is never any explanation, but after years of torment he comes to the conclusion that his father must have ‘realized almost right away that he wasn’t up to the job....“Some people are good
at looking after things. Some people aren't....He couldn't handle it, that's obvious. Maybe some people can't'''' (pp127;129).

This is potentially very frightening for both the child character and the child reader, as it is made clear that some parents (in this case - though not always - the fathers) have no ability to give their children what they need, and simply run away. These parents, in great contrast to those in pre-1960s children's literature, are too self-centred to care about their offspring; they do not even seem to have any awareness of their emotional or practical responsibilities towards their children.

However, reassurance is provided in the form of two very competent single mothers. Neither mother is by any means flawless - they both get irritable and flustered, and Mig refers to her mother as a 'fairly human saint' (p64). Nonetheless, the fallibility of these two mothers is well within the bounds of acceptability. For Simon, the more he comes to terms with his father's inability to cope, the more he admires his mother's ability to survive and endure, even though she is not without her faults. In Black Maria, Mig discusses her admiration of her mother, shortly before Betty admits to some of her flaws (pp40-1): this clearly makes the point that 'good' people also have shortcomings. Betty has a healthy self-awareness and self-acceptance, which she uses to help her daughter deal with her own feelings: ' 'People do have savage feelings, Mig.' ''But it's not right to have savage feelings,'' I gulped. "No, but everyone does," said Mum' (p40).

Ultimately, both these mothers love their children, understand their responsibility to provide emotional support and are able to put the needs of their children before their own.12 These children have encountered quite extreme adult fallibility in their fathers, but they are still safely in the hands of an adult who is more than able to cope. Simon is also, like Tom in Kingsley's The Water Babies, put in the morally superior position of

---

12 Again it should be emphasised that (as discussed in the previous section) these novels as a whole do not criticise men more than women, or vice versa. The two examples above simply happen to conform to the same pattern.
learning to forgive his father (or, in Tom’s case, his father-figure). Even today this is still quite revolutionary, and very empowering for the child.

However, as we know, Fine in particular shows traditional families to be equally fallible. Even adults who live in a traditional way are flawed - it is not exclusive to those ‘bad’ adults who get divorced or desert their children. In *The Stone Menagerie* (1980) and *The Granny Project* (1983) the parents are together, but family battles (parent-parent and parent-child) are no less frequent than in broken and unconventional families (as chapter two discussed). In both these novels the mothers in particular are quite harsh and domineering, while the fathers are more ineffectual and in the background. In *The Stone Menagerie* Ally’s mother has a strong and self-righteous presence which he finds oppressive. Throughout the novel Ally is struggling to find his own values and identity, but his mother’s desire to be right and in control hinders this.13

*The Stone Menagerie* is one of Fine’s earlier novels, and Nicholas Tucker notes the differences between these and the later ones: in her earlier work ‘Fine is following a longer tradition…within which positive child characters are shown as constantly up against unreasonably restrictive parents….We are still some way from the more subtle stories of Fine’s middle period’ (2001: 56-7).

*The Stone Menagerie* certainly has less humour than Fine’s later work. It condemns the mother quite harshly and sides mainly with the child, whereas her later novels are often more ambiguous. However, even this novel does show some vulnerability and redeeming features in the mother. We are told that she ‘was kind’ in looking after her mentally ill sister, visiting weekly and trying her best (p36). This last point is particularly emphasised - she may not get things right, but she *tries*. Ally’s relationship with her is not all bad: some days they get along, ‘But on [other days] he felt she built cages around him, then handed him buns through the bars’ (p9). This image, though

13Chapter six discusses in more detail Ally’s journey towards inner strength and empowerment.
obviously existing only in Ally’s mind, is not dissimilar to Dahl. Dahl often takes the exaggerated view as it appears to the mind of a child and depicts it as actually happening. Fine, on the other hand, makes it clear that this is the child’s own view, and shows understanding rather than fully endorsing it. Thus, even in her earlier work, Fine does not adopt the child’s-eye-view to quite the extreme extent that Dahl does. *The Stone Menagerie* also shows that Ally, particularly as he enters adolescence, is no saint, and does play at least some small part in the conflict.

Nonetheless, there is a change in Fine’s later work, and Tucker cites *The Granny Project* as the first of the later novels (2001: 58-60). There is certainly more ambiguity and sympathy for the parents than there is in *The Stone Menagerie*. Natasha and Henry are dealing with a very stressful situation (caring for a demanding elderly grandmother and making decisions about nursing homes) and the children do not - until the end - appreciate this. It is never clear-cut whose ‘side’ we should be on: both the parents and their four children are equally flawed and have difficulty appreciating each other’s point of view.

Natasha’s attitude towards her children often seems harsh. She is described on the first page as ‘distant and contemptuous’ while the family doctor feels that she ‘acted as though [her children] were nothing to do with her, some horrible mistake…’ (p7). However, there are two elements which relieve tension for readers. The first is Fine’s use of humour (which is barely existent in *The Stone Menagerie*), and the second is the occasional displays of affection from Natasha to her children, most notably when Nicholas fakes a nightmare and, later, when Granny dies. These moments are all the more poignant because they contrast so strongly with Natasha’s usual harshness:

The fact that Nicholas is faking the nightmare in order to manipulate his parents makes Natasha's tenderness more heart-rending, and contributes to the moral ambiguity of the novel.

Later, when Granny dies, Natasha 'went quietly around the house, from bedroom to bedroom, switching the alarms on all the clocks to off, regarding each colourful, living, breathing mound of duvet with the same wonder she'd felt when each of them was born' (p115). This confirms that, despite her tempestuous and sometimes insensitive nature, Natasha is basically a 'good' person who truly loves her children. One of her notorious Russian proverbs confirms that her love for her children endures through traumatic times: 'Love is not a potato. You cannot throw it out of the window' (p62).

During one scene in *The Granny Project*, Ivan has tested his parents' patience to such an extent that both (particularly Henry) feel a brief desire to physically hit their son: 'At the faint jibe, Henry's hand clenched into a fist...."I could just beat him up, Natasha. I'd enjoy that." "You hold him. I will beat him up"' (p62). Tucker (2001: 59) wonders if they are talking hypothetically or literally at this point, but it seems probable that Fine is making a distinction here between feelings and actions. I do not believe that we are meant to condemn the Harris parents for having a momentary feeling of wanting to punch their son. What is important is that it *is* just a fleeting moment and they *do* restrain themselves, in contrast to *The Tulip Touch*'s Mr Pierce, who appears to feel this way continually and does actually act on his feelings.

Many child-rearing manuals (including Bettelheim, especially in chapter four, 'Their Reasons & Ours', and also Penelope Leach) preach continually about the importance of acknowledging the child's feelings, showing him that he is not a 'bad person' if he
sometimes feels angry or jealous. However, it could be argued that such manuals are doing precisely this damage to parents, inciting a sense of failure and self-condemnation if they do not feel a continual stream of empathy for their child’s feelings. This can be related to the above example in *The Granny Project*: Fine seems to explore the possibility that it is commonplace and even understandable for parents to experience such emotions - it is the manner of dealing with them which matters. The child may have a right to his feelings, but so too do the parents have a right to theirs.

Many of Fine’s novels show that the existence of strong negative emotions in adult-child relationships (on both sides) does not cancel out the possibility of equally strong positive ones. While Dahl counteracts oppressive adults with near-perfect ones, Fine shows that the extremes of positive and negative qualities can co-exist within one individual. *Madame Doubtfire* in particular shows the co-existence of love and anger in a parent. In a violent argument with his son, regarding the parents’ break-up, Daniel grabs him by the collar, slams him against a wall, and swears at him. However, a moment later:

Daniel spun around and, as he did so, caught a look of rising terror on his son’s face. Shocked to see how one short brush with a father’s considerably greater strength could drain away all a boy’s courage, he reached out to his son, setting himself to mend the rupture between them, and settle things for all of them.

The change from violent anger to immense remorse, love and concern is portrayed matter-of-factly - the reader is left feeling neither sentimental at the love, nor judgemental of the anger. The overall tone of the passage is simply that this is how real parents are - a mixture of both. There is also a sense, as there is in the previous example from *The Granny Project*, that both parent and child are to blame: the parent lost control, but the child’s behaviour enables us to understand why he did it. Tucker notes that, in Fine’s work, there is ‘little emphasis on personal sin’ and she does not judge her
characters harshly; she simply shows ‘that all human beings are imperfect’ (Tucker & Gamble 2001: 53-4).

Homan’s Child Sense also believes that, in moderation, such encounters with a parent’s fallibility can be beneficial to a child as, presumably, such literary portrayals can be beneficial to the child-reader:

The valuable discipline [ie teaching] the child may derive from such an encounter is the lesson that people are human and do react in a primitive way (sometimes). And this, too, is a profitable lesson to be learned, if it is not the only relationship you have with your child.

(Homan 1969: 27)

The majority of Fine’s novels, particularly the later ones, show exactly the type of relationship described by Homan: the children experience much negativity with their parents, but this is by no means the only relationship they have with each other. Fine thus reassures her readers with humour and moments of love amidst conflict. Jones’ Fire & Hemlock does not do this. Apart from Fine’s The Tulip Touch, Jones’ novel contains the most serious depiction of severe mistreatment of all the novels discussed in this thesis. Polly’s parents are guilty of severe neglect (enough to be classified as abuse, I think) and this aspect of the novel is depicted as serious social realism. The situation also worsens steadily: as the novel progresses, the love from Polly’s parents decreases and the neglect increases.

In contrast to the humility of the fallible-but-loveable adults discussed earlier, Polly’s mother Ivy continually blames others while both praising and victimising herself:
‘ “Well you know me - I’ve slaved and worked to make the house nice, gave up my job to have it all perfect…” ’ (p91). Both Ivy and her ex-husband Reg are similar to the parents in Fine’s Madame Doubtfire in that they continually blame each other, but Ivy takes this further. She maliciously blames her daughter when her new relationship fails, and subsequently throws her out:
"You've destroyed my happiness with David. You've made him secretive too. I can't have it Polly. You'll have to leave....It's my only chance of mending things with David...." "But Mum! Suppose Dad doesn't want me!" "Then you can both make the best of it," said Ivy, "You're not coming back here."

(Pp211; 216)

Polly's most frightening situation comes when she discovers that her father's new partner does not want her, and Reg will not risk the relationship for his daughter. She is thus alone and homeless:

[Polly] walked out to the middle of the bridge, under the great upside-down arch of the suspension cables....She leaned both arms on the chubby metal fence at the edge and looked down, dizzingly far, to the sinewy brown water of the Bristol Avon racing between thick mud banks below....There was a notice pasted up at the end of the bridge. SAMARITANS, it said....But Polly had no money to telephone....

(Pp225-6)

However, for Polly there are two rescuers (and so for the reader two elements of reassurance), one realistic and one fantastic: Granny, and the magical forces of 'Nowhere' (meaning the supernatural world). Just as Polly's situation becomes severe, there is a suggestion that it has been caused, not by her parents' utter selfishness, but by Mr Leroy's evil curses. Moments later, Polly finds herself guided by invisible and benevolent magical forces: by 'chance', or magic, she finds Tom, who returns her to her other rescuer, Granny.14

Fire & Hemlock may be a fantasy novel, but this does not detract from the serious and realistic portrayal of Polly's home life. Granny has been the loving, stable figure throughout Polly's turbulent childhood, and it is this character who counteracts the effects of Ivy's and Reg's behaviour, for Polly and the reader. Granny, too, is fallible: 'I'm not a saint, Polly. You'll have to learn that' . Yet sainthood is not necessary for 'Saint or not, Polly thought there was a kind of holy calm about Granny's house' (p94).

---

14 The magical forces of 'Nowhere' will be explored more fully in chapter six.
Once again, Granny represents the voice of the good adult condemning the bad ones, scolding both her son and daughter-in-law when necessary:

"Shut up!" said Granny. Her voice banged like someone hitting a biscuit tin. "Reg is always glad for someone to do his dirty work for him - I'll give you that, Ivy - but he didn't ask me to come. I told you, I just came for Polly. When I've got her, I'll go. But not until."

(p94)

Granny is able to assert herself in a way in which Polly, as the child who is meant to be respectful and obedient, is not able to. Jones therefore succeeds in depicting serious and disturbing adult fallibility, while also including a traditional and quite rose-tinted Granny. There is no exploration of what might happen to a child who does not have a convenient Granny waiting in the wings.

In most of these examples, the adults are shown to be weak, but not 'bad'. In Fire & Hemlock most of the adult characters are extremely weak, and consequently cling to others in an ordinary and supernatural sense (Mr Leroy to Thomas; Thomas to Polly; Reg to his new partner; Ivy to any man she can find). This is desperate neediness, whereby characters are draining each other, again psychologically and supernaturally. Polly's Granny is the only character who is strong enough to give, without needing anything back for herself. Polly appears to take after her, for she realises at the end of the novel that true strength is to let go. Through letting go, she ultimately gains - something her 'needy' mother never learns (pp384-393).

The ultimate in weakness is probably Tulip's mother who fails to protect her daughter from abuse because she is afraid. This can be seen as a serious flaw, which has horrific consequences, but she is not guilty of malice or any intended harm. This is another important distinction, that of intentional harm, or at least conscious neglect (Mr Pierce; the Dursleys; Miss Trunchbull; David's aunt & uncle) and that which is unintentional.

15 Chapter two (pp84-5) has already pointed out that Granny is a variation of the fairy godmother.
Even Polly eventually makes her peace with her mother, for she can see the vulnerable person beneath the selfish behaviour.

Mrs Pierce's fear of her husband links to another important issue: hierarchies and disharmony amongst adults. In Jones' *Black Maria*, the mother is controlled and manipulated by Aunt Maria, while *Eight Days of Luke* shows Astrid being bullied by the relatives just as much as the child David. Similarly, Dahl's Miss Trunchbull has power over the other teachers, especially Miss Honey, while Mrs Wormwood expresses extreme disillusionment with her husband: '...as she watched her skinny little husband skulking around the bedroom in his purple-striped pyjamas with a pork-pie hat on his head, she thought how stupid he looked. Hardly the kind of man a wife dreams about, she told herself' (*Matilda* p29).

However, it is not just about individuals: adults can also be controlled and intimidated by social forces. The other adults in *The Tulip Touch* fear and submit to social services rules. We are encouraged to condemn them for this, rather than forgive, but nonetheless all these adults are ordinary, and quite likeable, rather than 'bad guys' with no redeeming features. Social systems in magical worlds can be equally oppressive. In Rowling's *The Order of the Phoenix*, the Ministry of Magic (particularly their 'planted' teacher) has power over the other teachers at Hogwarts - particularly Trelawney and Hagrid. Even Dumbledore's power is not absolute, though he does have the gall to stand up to these authorities and tell them what he thinks of them.

Most of the novels show adults fighting with each other; adults having power over other adults (actual or psychological), and adults fearing other adults. This therefore complicates the adult-child hierarchy - child readers are being shown that it is not just a simple matter of adults overpowering children. Rather, hierarchies and power-games can operate in complex ways, and it is not just children who suffer oppression.
While the depiction of an adult being bullied by another adult is probably the ultimate in adult fallibility, the ultimate in child vulnerability is the naive child who has no awareness of the fallibility of adults. The child who is fooled into thinking that adults are infallible and always willing and able to provide wisdom and protection is a child in a vulnerable position who does not learn to think or act for him/herself. The child who knows and accepts that adults, even the good ones, have fallibility is one who learns to take the initiative (both mentally and physically) in order to protect him/herself. The work of all four writers could be seen to be showing children how important it is not to expect adults to be infallible. Most children would probably like a mother like Dickon's (Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*), but in reality this is unlikely to happen, and the realisation of this can be empowering. Even in the humorous texts, there appears to be a much more serious point behind it than merely creating laughter, or indulging children's feelings.

Winters points out that two of Jones' characters, Cat (*Charmed Life* 1977) and Christopher (*The Lives of Christopher Chant* 1988), are exploited, respectively, by Gwendolen and Uncle Ralph because of their naivety. It should be pointed out that Gwendolen is Cat's older sister and not actually an adult, but in their orphan status Gwendolen becomes Cat's mother substitute, and he is very dependent on her. Yet he suffers greatly for his inability to see through her: 'Cat must journey from innocence to experience, from amoral instinct to open-eyed morality. Like many of Jones' characters, he does not at first recognise evil when he sees it' (Winters 2002: 87).

We as readers are given 'clues' as to Gwendolen's true nature, long before Cat himself sees it: Winters refers to his attitude as 'wilful blindness' (Winters 2002: 87). Christopher is also 'vague and formless as a moral being, and his inability to see clearly enables his unscrupulous Uncle Ralph to get an early hold on him.... Christopher must actively form his character rather than be the passive pawn of Uncle Ralph...' (ibid p89).
Winters appears to judge Cat and Christopher quite harshly, but what she calls ‘wilful blindness’ (ibid p87) and being ‘frighteningly empty and amoral’ (ibid p89) could be seen as a reaction to their state of vulnerability. Christopher, desperate for a hero figure (or, at least, someone who is interested in him) in the face of cold and distant parents, is easily charmed and fooled by Uncle Ralph’s superficial charisma:

It was clear that Uncle Ralph had stepped in to save Mama from ruin, and this made him the first good man that Christopher had met. And on top of that, he was the only person outside the Anywheres who had bothered to speak to Christopher in that friendly man-to-man way.

(p22)

Cat is more obviously ‘needy’ and vulnerable - he is not charmed by a false hero figure as is Christopher, but needs to believe that Gwendolen will take care of him in order to give himself a sense of safety and security: ‘...perhaps Gwendolen would be back when he woke up, and already solving all his problems’ (Charmed Life p157). Yet it is this which makes him more vulnerable, and enables Gwendolen to exploit him. When Cat realises that Gwendolen has betrayed him, he ‘shut his eyes and tears ran out across both his ears. Now he knew how little Gwendolen cared about him, he was not sure he wanted any lives at all’ (Charmed Life p232). Yet shortly after this he summons the strength and skill to save both himself and Chrestomanci - something he undoubtedly would not have been able to do in his state of naive dependence on his older sister. It is only through awareness of adult fallibility (or, in this case, older sister-fallibility) that the child becomes stronger and less likely to be exploited.16

Conclusion

The comic caricature therefore continues in popularity, but alongside it the sympathetic and empathetic human adult has begun to emerge and flourish. This shows a move, in both society in general and children’s literature, from simply knocking down

16 Chapter six will explore the ways in which child characters use various kinds of magic to fully develop their own sense of empowerment.
authorities to begin to sympathise with those who are expected to assume positions of authority and bear the weight of others’ expectations. It could be argued that mocking-demystification (which, no matter how humorous, is a form of attack) is caused by expecting authorities to be infallible, and subsequently experiencing disillusionment and / or anger when their fallibility is revealed. Sympathetic-demystification, on the other hand, arises when one does not expect infallibility in the first place - thus it becomes easier to empathise and forgive rather than attack. This is the point which is eventually reached by *Flour Babies'* Simon, as he journeys from anger to understanding.

Particularly significant is the gradual move in child-care manuals from making parents feel inadequate, and expecting them to focus exclusively on the child’s feelings at the expense of their own, to sympathising with the struggling parent (good-enough parenting). While many childcare manuals now encourage parents not to have unrealistic expectations of themselves, sympathetic fallible adults in children’s books seem to encourage children, both characters and readers, not to have unrealistic expectations of their parents and other adults. Again, this change in the adult-child relationship is part of much wider social changes and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards authorities.

All depictions of fallible adults, therefore, demystify adult superiority, and may help children feel more reassured and less inferior regarding their own flaws and fears. Comic caricatures also give children the opportunity to indulge and exorcise their negative feelings towards adults, and to transmute fears. Sympathetic depictions may also encourage understanding and empathy in children (as David bonds with Astrid when he realises that she is bullied, and suffers, in the same way as him; the same is true of Matilda and Miss Honey).
It is also significant that Fine shows all adults to be fallible. In Jones and Rowling most adults have at least some fallibility, while in Dahl, despite huge attacks on various adults, ‘bad’ adults are usually rare ‘one-offs’ and, as the section on satire has pointed out, tend to be counteracted by near-perfect ones. An interesting point to make here is both the contrast and the parallels between Fine and Dahl. Dahl has had continuous popularity with child-readers, but has met with some hostility from adult critics who fear his revolutionary potential, as the Introductory chapter has pointed out. However, Fine’s depiction of adults (Natasha Harris; both parents in Madame Doubtfire; Tulip’s father and, perhaps more significantly, the well-intentioned but judgemental and ineffectual adults in the same novel) could be seen as criticising and demystifying adult authority in a far more profound and deep-rooted way than Miss Trunchbull or Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker. As such, her novels perhaps have far more potential to revolutionise the adult-child relationship than do Dahl’s comic caricatures. Yet it is Dahl’s fantasies of child power and adult comeuppance which have met with far more adult disapproval than Fine’s subtle but realistic dismantling of adult infallibility.

Presumably the reason is that Fine frequently invites sympathy, or at least ambivalence (the same is often true of Jones, and sometimes Rowling). Encouraging acceptance of adult fallibility in this way may even improve adult-child relationships. Depictions of complex and sympathetic fallible adults may actually be of practical use in real-life adult-child relationships (particularly the way in which Fine’s Kitty and Simon undergo a process of learning how to cope with ‘difficult’ adults), as opposed to an exorcism of frustrating feelings. It could be said that mocking-demystification reinforces the divide, while sympathetic-demystification creates possible bridges.

There is therefore a suggestion, particularly in the sympathetic depictions, that it should not just be a one-way process of adults understanding children. Chapter two showed the way in which children (particularly in the work of Fine and Jones) must
often learn to compromise, rather than expecting complete accommodation of their own needs. However, it seems that it is also clear that adults are not actually capable of providing absolute wisdom and protection, and this point comes through in both comic caricatures and sympathetic characters. It is not simply a matter of children letting go of the need to always have their own way, or trying to see alternative viewpoints, though this is obviously very much part of it. It also calls for a much broader acceptance of adult fallibility and vulnerability. Children who have this acceptance are, as we have seen, much less vulnerable - as long as they are exposed to positive qualities in adults as well as their flaws. For child characters and child readers (with the occasional exception), exposure to adult fallibility is usually balanced by some form of reassurance.
CHAPTER 4:
PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD I: ANGELS & DEVILS

What is a child?

Just what, after all, are we to make of children? This question is not new; indeed, from the earliest Socratic dialogues onwards social theorists have systematically endeavoured to constitute a view of the child that is compatible with their particular visions of social life. Since that initial Hellenic desire to seek out the origins of virtue in order to instil rhythm and harmony into the souls of the young, up until our contemporary pragmatic concerns with the efficacy of specific child-rearing practices, after centuries of debate, we still have not achieved any consensus over the issue of childhood.

(Jenks 1982: 9)

Most disciplines today agree that concepts of childhood are not fixed and absolute. For this understanding we are indebted to various people, most particularly Philippe Ariès. His *Centuries of Childhood* (1960) is usually seen as the first text which attempts to summarise attitudes towards and experiences of childhood over the last one thousand years or so. Ariès helped to create awareness of childhood and family as historical and social, rather than purely biological, and for this reason it is worth briefly reviewing his ideas and those of his critics. Stressing the interconnection between childhood and family, Ariès begins by acknowledging that many schools of thought deny that there is a ‘history of the family’ and instead believe that ‘historical differences are of little importance in comparison with the huge mass of what remains unchanged’. However, Ariès posits his argument in opposition to this:

On the other hand, the great demographic revolution in the West from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, has revealed to us considerable possibilities of change in structures hitherto believed to be invariable because they were biological.

(Ariès 1960: 7)

Most critics seem to interpret Ariès as saying that childhood was ‘discovered’ in the seventeenth century and that, before this, there was no awareness of ‘child’ as distinct
from 'adult'. However, I feel that he is tracing the gradual emergence of awareness of childhood (and the development of modern perceptions of it) from about the twelfth century onwards, rather than claiming that there was a sudden 'discovery' in the seventeenth century. He states that 'Medieval art until about the twelfth century did not know childhood or did not attempt to portray it' (1960: 31) (my emphasis), but goes on to show how awareness and modern perceptions of childhood developed, albeit very slowly, from this point onwards. This is not to deny that huge developments have taken place: Ariès acknowledges that there is undoubtedly a 'gulf which separates our concept of childhood from that which existed before the demographic revolution or its preceding stages'. However, 'On the other hand, there are grounds for surprise in the earliness of the idea of childhood' (1960: 37).

It can, therefore, be argued that Ariès views the seventeenth century as a time in which awareness of childhood significantly increased, rather than began entirely. However, there are other criticisms. Ariès is accused of nostalgia for the past by Grylls (1978); Hunt (1970); Stone (1981) and de Mause (1974) (though de Mause has an equally rose-tinted view of the present). He is also criticised for his methods of analysis: Stone elaborates on this problem and raises serious questions regarding Ariès' methodology, data and hypothesis (Stone 1981: 222-4).

However, despite the many valid criticisms of Ariès, Centuries of Childhood is still viewed as a brilliant seminal work:

Ariès’ book has had a dazzling success and has become the primum mobile of Western family history in the last two decades. As a pioneer work, erudite, imaginative, and inventive, it deserves all the praise and attention it has received. It is the kind of pathbreaking book no traditional historian could have written, and without it our culture would be the poorer.

(Stone 1981: 222)

---

1 Peter Fuller (1979) bases his criticism of Ariès on this interpretation.
Ariès’ greatest contribution is probably, as stated previously, in creating a now widely accepted awareness that perceptions of childhood change continually and so are based on the social and cultural far more than the biological. The particulars of his work may be open to dispute, but the general idea is rarely, if ever, questioned. In this, his introductory chapter seems to anticipate some of the criticism he was later to receive:

…it is not so much the family [and childhood] as a reality that is our subject here as the family [and childhood] as an idea...The point is that the ideas entertained about [family and parent-child] relations may be dissimilar at moments separated by lengthy periods of time.

(Ariès 1960: 7-8)

Ariès’ work is now, at the time of writing, almost half a century old, but it has played a significant role in a debate which continues in Western society today. As sociologists James et al say, this is an era in which certainties about ‘childhood and children’s social status are being radically undermined’ (James et al 1998: 3). However, it is not simply that perceptions of childhood change in each era, but that each society usually contains competing and contradictory views which are in tension with each other - something Ariès appears to neglect. In today’s Western society, ‘child’ and ‘childhood’, and all the accompanying issues, are constantly subjected to discussion and debate: as Victor Watson says, ‘there are no agreed versions of childhood’ (Watson 1992: 7).

Angels or devils?: parental attitudes

Of all the contradictory and competing views of childhood that have existed throughout history, one of the most significant is that of ‘Original Sin’ versus ‘Original Innocence’. Grylls refers to them as the ‘two perennial pictures of children’ (1978: 22), and these opposing views show how diverse perceptions of childhood can be. The nineteenth century in particular was a time in which there was a strong tension between

\[\text{Angels or devils?: parental attitudes}\]

2 A useful essay is Hugh Cunningham’s ‘Childhood Histories’ (2004) which summarises recent research on attitudes to childhood in the nineteenth century. Cunningham does not mention Ariès directly, but his summary confirms that Ariès’ initial ideas have generated ongoing research.
the two extremes: as Grylls explains, throughout ‘the nineteenth century, with evangelical morality and romantic aspiration, both of these propensities were present in a sharpened form’ (Grylls 1978: 24).³

In the twentieth century, however, there began to be more awareness of the child as a mixture of good and bad, rather than being one extreme or the other. Two significant (and interlinked) factors here are the two World Wars and the development of psychoanalysis (and related areas). The former generated an interest in negative tendencies in human nature, while the latter explored this. Urwin and Sharland see this particularly in terms of developments in the New Psychology which, they say, worked with some of Freud’s psychoanalytic concepts. Some areas, such as Freud’s notion of infantile sexuality, were queried or de-emphasised, but his ‘idea of “unconscious” or “deep” forces’ was accepted, and developed: on the whole, ‘the New Psychology opened the possibility that the will, the emotions, the passions were not simply fuel driving behaviour which was then to be controlled by conditioning [as behaviourists believed]; they were part and parcel of an individual psychology’ (Urwin & Sharland 1992: 183).

Urwin and Sharland confirm that these developments in psychology were linked to the aftermath of the First World War: for ‘liberals the New Psychology was of particular interest because it recognized human proclivities to violence and aggression. To a wider population its relevance was linked to the irrefutable evidence brought by the war that otherwise ordinary and normal people could break down under conditions of extreme stress and fear’ (Urwin & Sharland 1992: 183-4).

³ Boas (1966) and Coveney (1957/1967), along with Grylls (1978) provide fruitful analyses of the history of the discourses of Original Sin and Original Innocence. Original Sin obviously comes from Christianity, particularly, as Grylls notes, Calvinism, Puritanism and Methodism (1978: 24). However, by the late eighteenth century, this view was being challenged by those who believed in Original Innocence. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, though not the first to advocate Original Innocence, is usually credited with being the most influential proponent of this idea. This explains why the nineteenth century witnessed such a strong conflict between these two opposing views.
More recently, childcare writer Dr Christopher Green (discussed in detail in chapter one) is one of the most apt examples of today’s more widespread acceptance that the ‘average’ and ‘normal’ child is both adorable and horrible. Despite this, however, the angel-devil opposition was not entirely left behind in the nineteenth century, as we have seen in chapter one (and in my discussion of these attitudes I will use the terms ‘angelising’ and ‘demonising’). Today’s media frequently encourage sentimental reactions to images of childhood innocence. In 2002, there were two notorious child murder cases in Britain: Amanda Dowler (known as Milly), aged thirteen, and the double murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, both aged ten. It is interesting to contrast media and public reaction to each of these cases. Cute and appealing photos of the pre-pubescent Holly and Jessica elicited an extreme and quite self-indulgent wave of public emotion (comparable in intensity with the death of Diana, Princess of Wales), while the murder of the adolescent, but only slightly older, Milly received a much more controlled response. Without in any way wishing to belittle the horror of the murders, one can only assume that the images of Holly and Jessica conformed to mythical and sentimental views of childhood innocence: thus, the corruption and murder of this innocence seems all the more horrific. Milly, on the other hand, had reached the age of puberty and (presumably) sexual awareness, and so her death could not be sentimentalised in the same way.

Concepts of Original Sin are also still evident in today’s society. Contemporary sociologists James et al summarise the concept of ‘the evil child’, and see it as one of many different attitudes which is still in existence today. This attitude ‘assumes that evil, corruption and baseness are primary elements in the constitution of “the child” ’ (James et al 1998: 10). Jane Ribbens’ recent research found that some contemporary parents viewed their children in this way, although this is not to imply that such adults are necessarily abusive:
This imagery refers to the possibilities of children disrupting life with asocial tendencies, with hints of the possible unleashing of latent uncontrollable forces unless the child is shaped to fit into the social order.

(Ribbens 1995: 65)

Thus, such an attitude is not necessarily an outdated view. The examples in the work of Rowling and Dahl which will be examined could therefore be seen as an exaggeration of something which still appears to exist in contemporary parenting. This is not to suggest that such a view is necessarily the norm or dominant in contemporary society, since Ribbens' research cannot be seen as conclusive, and she also found examples of varying attitudes towards children. It does show, however, that not every contemporary Western parent pursues the liberal approach.

This demonising attitude is one in which the child is something to be feared. It is not just about protecting the child from itself; the child also represents 'a potential threat or challenge to social order and its reproduction' (James et al 1998: 9). Consequently, the adult must control and restrain the child in order to prevent disruption to the social order; the child must not be allowed to challenge the adult in any way.

In the work of Dahl and Rowling, there are various adult characters who embody this view of children - in particular, the Dursleys (in their treatment of Harry), the Wormwoods and Miss Trunchbull in Dahl's *Matilda* (1988), and Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker in Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (1961). These are adults who become defensive and fearful whenever they feel threatened by a child. David in Jones' *Eight Days of Luke* (1975) is also demonised by his guardians, Great Uncle Bernard and Great Aunt Dot, their son Ronald and, until her later transformation, Ronald's wife Astrid. Their behaviour is less extreme than that of the other adults mentioned above, but nonetheless they do seem to regard David as inherently bad.

One of the ways in which characters such as these attempt to restrain children is through verbal control. Whenever David expresses opinions which disagree with those
of his relatives or create any kind of inconvenience, he is swiftly silenced: ‘Aunt Dot swept his explanation aside and scolded him soundly....“When I want your opinion...I shall ask for it...” ’ (p19). Harry Potter, meanwhile, is forbidden to talk about anything which makes the Dursleys uncomfortable. In *Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) we are informed ‘Don’t ask questions - that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys’ (p20). It is clear that the Dursleys’ attempts at verbal control stem from fear, and this is particularly evident in Mr Dursley’s hysterical over-reaction to Harry’s mention of a dream with a flying motorbike:

“MOTORBIKES DON’T FLY!”....If there was one thing the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn’t, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon - they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas.

(*Philosopher’s Stone* p24)

Thus, questions, imagination and independent thinking in the child are all seen as ‘dangerous’ - something which makes the adult feel challenged and threatened, and hints at repressed ‘guilty secrets’ and fear of exposure. In *Eight Days of Luke*, David is intelligent and bold enough to understand and expose the truth. When he bluntly voices his relatives’ true feelings (‘..you don’t want me..” ’ (p30)) they react with a torrent of verbal abuse. However, as we are later informed, ‘The truth was that David’s announcement...had made them all feel very much ashamed, and they could not forgive him for it’ (p50).

For these adults, however, there is little (if any) self-analysis or attempt to understand why they have such strong and fearful reactions. In Rowling’s novels, Harry does of course have magical powers, and, in this sense, we can understand the Dursleys’ fear. However, the reader knows that he would never use these powers for any evil means, thus their fears are not justified. Nonetheless, they view him as inherently bad, and put great efforts into trying to restrain and eliminate this ‘badness’. This again echoes various definitions of the ‘evil child’ attitude. According to James et al, when children
are viewed as ‘demonic, harbourers of potentially dark forces’, these forces risk ‘being mobilized if, by dereliction or inattention, the adult world allows them to veer away from the “straight and narrow” path that civilization has bequeathed to them’ (James et al 1998: 10). This explains why the Dursleys give so much time and, albeit negative, attention to a child they cannot stand - they fear what he will do, to themselves and to society, if they do not keep a vigilant watch over him.

However, Rowling, Dahl and Jones subvert and mock this. The characters who embody the evil-child attitude are usually portrayed in a satirical, two-dimensional manner, and it is clear that we are never meant to sympathise with them or condone their behaviour (the exception is Jones’ Astrid who does later develop into a sympathetic character, as chapter two discussed). Not only this, the children who are viewed as inherently ‘bad’ by certain adult characters are shown to be predominantly good, wise and superior by the narrative tone, though they are by no means perfect.4 It is this goodness which exposes the ‘badness’ of the adults, and this is perhaps one of the reasons for their fearful and oppressive reactions.

The central character in Dahl’s Matilda has moral values and integrity which expose her father’s corrupt behaviour in his second-hand car business. His inability to acknowledge this results in an angry outburst, similar to those of Harry Potter’s uncle, which is directed at the source of his discomfort and repressed guilt:

Matilda, who had been listening closely, said, “But Daddy, that’s even more dishonest than the sawdust. It’s disgusting. You’re cheating people who trust you.” “If you don’t like it then don’t eat the food in this house,” the father said. “It’s bought with the profits.” “It’s dirty money,” Matilda said. “I hate it.” Two red spots appear on the father’s cheeks. “Who the heck do you think you are,” he shouted, “the Archbishop of Canterbury or something, preaching to me about honesty? You’re just an ignorant little squirt who hasn’t the foggiest idea what you’re talking about!”

(p19)

4 The characters of these children are explored more fully later in this chapter, in the section ‘Nature-Nurture: Victorian Angels?’
Matilda’s intelligence is also shown to be far superior to that of her father, and the realisation that she can do arithmetic much faster than him provokes a similar reaction (‘He seemed to stiffen. He became very quiet....The father’s face was beginning to go dark red’ (p48)), and ends with Mr Wormwood forbidding all conversation for the rest of the evening (pp47-9). However, one of Mr Wormwood’s strongest reactions is when he discovers Matilda reading a book - he not only takes it away from her, but rips it to pieces, with the same neurotic over-reaction we often witness in Mr Dursley. The narrator informs us that Mr Wormwood’s ‘anger was intensified because he saw her getting pleasure from something that was beyond his reach....How dare she, he seemed to be saying with each rip of a page, how dare she enjoy reading books when he couldn’t?’ (pp32-35). This reaction may also stem from the fact that Matilda is developing her knowledge through contact with something from the outside world, and consequently may form ideas and beliefs over which her father can have no control.

James et al believe that ‘Threaded through this discourse [of the evil child] is a concern that these evil children should avoid dangerous places, lest they fall into bad company, establish bad habits, develop idle hands; and be heard rather than just seen’ (James et al 1998: 11). It follows, then, that anything which the adults do not understand, and cannot access themselves, is classed as one of these ‘dangerous places’, whether that is a literal place or an intellectual or imaginative one. For Mr Wormwood, books are a dangerous place, while for the Dursleys it is the magical world. Both Matilda and Harry are consequently subjected to obsessive and sometimes violent (yet always futile) attempts to keep them away from anything which may give them power and knowledge.

The Dursleys’ fear of the magical world is something which runs throughout all the books. Even the mention of the word ‘magic’ is forbidden, and strikes great fear into them:
“WHAT HAVE I TOLD YOU” thundered his uncle, spraying spit over the table, “ABOUT SAYING THE M WORD IN OUR HOUSE...I WARNED YOU! I WILL NOT TOLERATE MENTION OF YOUR ABNORMALITY UNDER THIS ROOF!”

(Philosopher’s Stone pp7-8)

It could be argued that the magical world in the Harry Potter novels perhaps represents childhood itself; thus the Dursleys’ fear of it could be seen to represent the way in which adults who have the evil-child attitude fear (ordinary) children, with their potential to challenge and disrupt the lives and social order of adults.

For the Dursleys, then, verbal control is not enough. Harry must also be subjected to physical restraint so that the adults’ control (or attempt at it) is absolute. Initially, until the Dursleys’ fear forces them to change the situation, Harry lives in the cupboard under the stairs, so that he is physically separated from the rest of the family. In Chamber of Secrets (1998), one of the most striking examples of physical control is the way in which Harry is banished to his room during the Dursleys’ dinner party. This is Mr and Mrs Dursley’s most valued contact with the outside world - with potential clients whom they want to impress - and so depicts their participation in the social order (or, at least, their social order) at its fullest. Consequently, their desire to restrain Harry and keep him away is also at its most extreme. There is even a rehearsal in which Harry must recite his role: ‘“I’ll be in my room, making no noise and pretending I’m not there”’ (Chamber of Secrets p11).

Harry, therefore, is not allowed to infiltrate the Dursleys’ social world, for fear of what he will do to it. Yet this desire to keep him away from their world and their people is also coupled with the desire to keep Harry away from his world and his people. Just as Matilda’s father is afraid of what may happen if Matilda has contact with books, Mr and Mrs Dursley go to great lengths to physically separate Harry from the magical world. Again, there is a strong emphasis on the fear which motivates this behaviour. In Philosopher’s Stone, the letters from Hogwarts strike strong physical reactions into the
couple: Mr Dursley’s face ‘was the greyish white of old porridge’ while his wife speaks with a ‘quivering voice’ (Philosopher’s Stone pp30-31). The former’s fear is that the magical people might be ‘“Watching - spying ... following us....I’m not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn’t we swear when we took him in we’d stamp out that dangerous nonsense?”’ (Philosopher’s Stone p31).

The possibility of the magical world, and Harry’s contact with it, therefore makes his uncle and aunt feel out of control - they fear being invaded by something they do not understand and cannot restrain. This again suggests that the magical world may represent the world of childhood itself. Consequently, they are attempting to separate Harry from his true self and his true existence, out of fear that this may expose the weaknesses of their existence and sense of order. It is significant, of course, that Harry’s aunt and uncle embody the stereotypical ‘respectable’ middle-class lifestyle - the first chapter of the first book immediately makes this clear (as discussed in chapter three, p126).

Most significant, however, is that the Dursleys’ attempts to control Harry and prevent magical happenings are always mocked and always futile, just as Matilda always ‘wins’ the battles with her father and David frequently answers back and disagrees with his relatives’ reasoning. This perhaps suggests that the power of childhood itself cannot be restrained, and that attempts to do so will only increase its strength, just as an adolescent with oppressive parents will almost always develop the values and behaviour that the parents are trying to prevent. It is inevitable that these oppressive adults cannot keep their respective charges ‘down’ and, in ‘ordinary’ life, it is inevitable that the social order will change and evolve with each generation.

However, if the Dursleys fear childhood itself, why do they not view their own child, Dudley, as evil? With Dudley they take the opposite view - he is the idolised ‘angel’ child. We are told immediately at the beginning of Philosopher’s Stone that ‘The
Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere’ (Philosopher’s Stone p7). As he matures, Mrs Dursley refers to her large, aggressive and selfish son as ‘Dinky Duddydums’ (ibid p22) and ‘Ickle Dudleykins’ (ibid p29), always viewing him through ‘misty eyes’ (Chamber of Secrets p7).

The most obvious point to make here is that Dudley is of course their own son, while Harry is not only a nephew, but someone they did not want (Mrs Dursley also harboured great animosity towards her sister, Harry’s mother). However, sentimentalisation can also be seen as a more subtle form of oppression and control. Chapter two discussed various possible reasons for overindulging a child - selfish pleasure on the part of the parent; a misinterpretation or exaggeration of children’s rights. However, there is also another explanation, whereby the sentimental treatment of Dudley could be seen to stem from the same fear of disruption which causes the Dursleys’ harsh treatment of Harry.

Jacqueline Rose confirms that fear of childhood can lead as much to sentimentalisation as to harsh treatment. Original Innocence may have been part of an important ‘humanist protest on behalf of innocent childhood’ but it created a ‘falsification’ of the child’s nature which could be just as damaging as that of Original Sin (Coveney 1957/1967: 291). In other words, this again emphasises fear of the real nature of childhood: the sentimentalised child is not loved for itself, ‘warts and all’, but is loved only through this false image of its nature.

This idea of falsifying the child’s nature seems relevant to the Dursleys’ attitude towards their son. Dudley is not viewed as a separate individual, but as an extension of

---

5 Rose’s The Case of Peter Pan (1984) centres around this issue, though she concentrates predominantly on sexual issues. There is much validity in her argument, though I believe that fear of the child’s sexuality is merely part of a broader sense of threat. For example, Rose points out that the child’s ‘sexuality (bisexual, polymorphous, perverse) threatens our own at its very roots. Setting up the child as innocent is not, therefore, repressing its sexuality - it is above all holding off any possible challenge to our own’ (1984: 4). This is certainly a valid point, but rather than concentrate exclusively on sexuality, I would add that ‘setting up the child as innocent’ denies the presence of any trait which reminds adults of something in themselves with which they are not comfortable (Mr Dursley, as we have seen, feels threatened by the presence of imagination and independent thought, and I would not read anything sexual into this).
his parents’ egos (particularly Vernon’s). They want him to be a carbon-copy of
themselves in order to continue their way of living and reinforce the social order as they
know it. This embodies the if-you’re-ok-then-I’m-ok idea, and therefore shows
considerable insecurity on the part of the adults, in that they need their child to validate
their way of living.\(^6\)

It is significant that Mr Dursley shows the most admiration for his son whenever
Dudley behaves in a selfish, demanding and aggressive manner - that is, whenever
Dudley imitates his father’s behaviour, and shows signs of developing a similar
personality. Mr Dursley finds the young Dudley’s tantrums endearing, and responds
with a laughing ‘“Little tyke”’ (Philosopher’s Stone p8). Later, he is extremely proud
when his eleven year old son demands more than the thirty-seven presents he has been
given: ‘Uncle Vernon chuckled. “Little tyke wants his money’s worth, just like his
father. Atta boy, Dudley!” He ruffled Dudley’s hair’ (ibid p21) (my emphasis).

Two of the most prominent scenes with regard to this issue are the preparations for
Dudley’s new school in Philosopher’s Stone, and the dinner party in Chamber of
Secrets. In the former example, Dudley is dressed up in his new school uniform and
paraded around like a doll. It is the sight of his son in the school uniform that he himself
used to wear, set to follow an identical path to his own, that is for Mr Dursley ‘the
proudest moment of his life. Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she couldn’t believe
it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown up’ (Philosopher’s
Stone pp28-9).

In the dinner party episode in Chamber of Secrets, Dudley is not only wearing an
identical dinner jacket and bow-tie to his father, he is also trained to behave like a
puppet, with a set script to follow in order to impress his father’s clients. Every
movement and line of dialogue is rehearsed:

---

\(^6\) Chapter two (pp87-8) also discusses the way in which Mrs Dursley seeks *emotional* validation from her
son.
We should all be in position at eight o’clock...Dudley?” “I’ll be waiting to open the door.” Dudley put on a foul, simpering smile. “May I take your coats Mr and Mrs Mason?” “They’ll love him!” cried Aunt Petunia rapturously. “Excellent Dudley,” said Uncle Vernon.

(Chamber of Secrets p10)

It is clear that Dudley is aware that all this is artificial behaviour, yet this, it appears, is part of his parents’ conditioning - he is encouraged to adopt a false façade in order to further the family’s own interests. Dudley’s plans to grovel to the client confirm this: “We had to write an essay about our hero at school, Mr Mason, and I wrote about you” (Chamber of Secrets p11).

The Dursleys’ pride, therefore, is at its strongest when Dudley imitates their own behaviour, values and lifestyle: despite their apparent love and adoration of him, their approval is conditional. This shows the way in which angelising a child can be as much a form of control as demonising - it is subtle brainwashing through pampering, and bestowing affection and approval only when the child behaves in a carbon copy manner.

Chris Jenks discusses the way in which, throughout all the differing and changing views of childhood, there is always a:

...continuous paradox, albeit expressed in a variety of ways. Simply stated, the child is familiar to us and yet strange, he inhabits our world and yet seems to answer to another, he is essentially of ourselves and yet appears to display a different order of being: his serious purpose and our intentions towards him are meant to resolve that paradox by transforming him into an adult, like ourselves.

(Jenks 1982: 9)

The Dursleys’ angelising of their son thus suggests an attempt to repress and deny the ‘strangeness’ and otherness of the child and instead over-emphasise its ‘sameness’. An adult with such an attitude will inevitably focus on the child as a miniature or future adult (note the very adult role Dudley is given at the dinner party in Chamber of Secrets), rather than acknowledging the child as a child - a ‘different’ being from the adult. This therefore suggests pre-seventeenth century attitudes. Dudley may be
sentimentalised and, on the surface, appears to be treated very much as a child - his mother in particular ‘babies’ him. However, this sentimentalisation and conditional approval seem to be intended to repress and quash any strangeness or difference and, in effect, to deny the child as a child by focusing only on its ‘familiarity’ to adulthood. This idea - that is, that sentimentalising a child may also have links with the pre-seventeenth century child-as-miniature-adult attitude - also suggests that different perceptions of childhood may in fact be ‘tangled up’ with each other, rather than entirely separate views. It also makes sense to assume that increasing awareness of childhood may also go hand in hand with increasing attempts to deny it.

It seems particularly significant that both the Dursleys and the Wormwoods have two children in their care, with a different attitude towards each one. In Matilda, the brother, Michael, is not pampered to quite the same extent as Dudley, but he is treated much more kindly than Matilda, and it is clear that he is being moulded into a carbon-copy of his father, as is Dudley. In the scene in which Mr Wormwood discusses his second-hand car business, Matilda, as we have seen, shows superior intelligence to her father, and an ability to question his values and practices. Michael, on the other hand, is keen to learn his father’s trade and extremely impressed by his underhand and illegal ‘trade secrets’ (p19). Consequently, the father insults and then ignores Matilda, while turning all his attention to his adulating son:

“...You’re too stupid. But I don’t mind telling young Mike here about it seeing he’ll be joining me in the business one day.” Ignoring Matilda, he turned to his son and [explains in detail the various ways in which he ‘cons’ his customers]....“How?” young Michael asked, fascinated. He seemed to have inherited his father’s love of crookery.

(pp16-18)

It seems then, that the child will be ‘brainwashed’ if possible, but since Harry has magic powers and Matilda has gifted intelligence, the adults in each case seem to realise that this particular child is too intelligent and independent-thinking to be moulded in
such a way. Harry and Matilda have the ability to resist such oppressive control. With Harry, of course, the fact that he is the nephew and not the son of the Dursleys adds to their view that he is ‘different’ and an outsider - someone that they cannot mould into a carbon-copy of themselves. Consequently, both the Dursleys and the Wormwoods go to the other extreme and see Harry and Matilda as the ‘evil child’ who makes them feel afraid and threatened.

To return to Jenks’ discussion of the child as both familiar and strange, Harry and Matilda have an ‘otherness’ which is too strong to be repressed or denied by the adult. Thus, while Dudley and Michael are seen only as ‘familiar’, Harry and Matilda are seen only as ‘strange’, and all familiarity is denied. These are adults who cannot accept the paradox that the child has both otherness and familiarity to adulthood: for such an adult, otherness must be denied or, if this is not possible, it will be exaggerated and subjected to fear and restraint.

Paul Thompson’s ‘Transmissions between generations’ (1995) discusses his analyses of real-life families in late twentieth-century British society. He comes to the conclusion that most parents, whether intentionally or not, mould their children (or try to) into exact replicas of themselves, ensuring that they perpetuate their own social norms and lifestyle, even to the extent of preventing ‘social mobility’ and ‘promotion’:

Such patterns challenge conventional assumptions about the positive function of family influence in social mobility. On the contrary, it would seem that in the context of a relatively stable society such as twentieth-century Britain, the effect of family culture is conservative and protective rather than dynamic.

(Thompson 1995: 10)

Thompson believes that, in order to follow their own potential, children need to free themselves from family ties and parental smothering:

…it does appear that the loosening of family ties may often be an essential prelude to upward social mobility, either backed by family support or through lone determination….The ties may be loosened in a
number of ways: through migration, through being a small one-child family, or even through family breakdown.

(Thompson 1995: 11)

Thompson seems to be referring specifically to ‘upward social mobility’, but this phrase could be substituted for any kind of lifestyle, behaviour and values which differ from those of the parents.

The abused and neglected children, Harry, Matilda, James (J & GP) and David, loosen family ties (through Thompson’s last example, ‘family breakdown’) in order to fulfil their own inherent potential: wizarding potential for Harry, intellectual potential for Matilda, independence for James and David and emotional happiness for all four. All four would have been severely inhibited had they remained where they were. This may seem an obvious point to make - for a badly-treated child, loosening the family ties is of course an essential prerequisite to happiness and fulfilment. However, there is perhaps a suggestion that oppressive treatment, being demonised, can almost give the children an advantage here. Their unhappiness pushes them to evaluate the way they have been treated, thus they are more likely to escape, both physically and emotionally, the parental-moulding which smothers and restricts the pampered children. They can also leave the family home without consequence - they are not missed, nor do they yearn to return (although this last point is perhaps more a convenient plot device than anything else).

This is obviously a controversial point to make, and I am not in any way suggesting that these writers advocate abuse, or the demonising of children, as beneficial. However, as discussed in chapter two, they are perhaps showing the various ways in which spoiling and angelising a child can also cause severe damage. For the angelised child, the all-too-comfortable pull of idolisation and indulgence perhaps inhibits their ability to follow their own path and fulfil their own potential. This is something which often
features in traditional fairytales such as Cinderella: the rejected child usually achieves most in the end.

The Weasley family could be seen as an example of the ‘middle-ground’ - they are parents who see their children as a ‘normal’ combination of good and bad, rather than either extreme. Mrs Weasley in particular is kind and loving, but also realistic about her children’s flaws. The Weasley children vary in their aspirations and goals: there is much variety in the family, despite the uniform red hair. In Goblet of Fire (2000), the twins, Fred and George, begin to develop their own joke-shop business. Initially, there is much resistance from their mother about their intended career, as Ron and Ginny explain:

“Mum found this stack of order forms when she was cleaning Fred and George’s room,” Ron said quietly. “Great long price lists for stuff they’ve invented. Joke stuff, you know. Fake wands and trick sweets, loads of stuff. It was brilliant, I never knew they’d been inventing all that…”. “And then there was this big row,” Ginny said, “because Mum wants them to go into the Ministry of Magic like Dad, and they told her all they want to do is open a joke-shop.”

(Goblet of Fire p52)

However, there is a suggestion, I think, that the twins are secure enough within themselves to be able to follow their own path, and that this is something that will eventually be accepted by their mother. Their ambitions not only continue, but become increasingly serious: at the end of Goblet of Fire, Harry even donates his winnings towards their joke-shop (pp635-6). There is still a comment about keeping this secret from Mrs Weasley (p636), but all the children seem to view this in a light-hearted manner. This in turn suggests that the Weasley children know that, despite arguments and disagreements, they receive an underlying and unconditional love and approval from their parents. Consequently, they do not need to shape their dreams and ambitions in order to receive parental love - they have this love, no matter what.

It is of course necessary to mention that in the fifth novel, Order of the Phoenix (2003), Percy Weasley turns against his family in quite a malicious way. So, for Percy,
the assertion of individuality is taken to the extremes of betrayal of his family, and this
could be seen to undermine my argument about the Weasleys. However, it is more than
likely that, at some point towards the end of the series, Percy may repent and return to
his family. Though Percy is a young adult, his shame at his parents’ poverty, and desire
to create an identity separate from that of his family, could be seen as a somewhat
extreme version of adolescent angst and rebellion and, consequently, a temporary stage
rather than a permanent one.

There is little doubt that, should Percy genuinely wish to repent, the loving and
forgiving Weasley family would take back their prodigal son. Quite early in *Order of
the Phoenix*, Mrs Weasley expresses her distress and her desire to reconcile with her son,
while Sirius Black confirms that the situation is probably temporary by assuring Mrs
Weasley that Percy will ‘“come round”’ (p161). Mrs Weasley’s attitude could be seen
to embody that of ‘hate the sin, not the sinner’. With both Percy and the twins, she
disapproves of some of their behaviour and activities, but, even with Percy, she still
loves the person beneath the behaviour. This suggests her awareness that children (and
adults) are a mixture of positive and negative qualities, and that a person need not be
condemned as evil simply because of undesirable behaviour.

Percy’s behaviour also says something about the need to rebel and develop
individuality. There is presumably deliberate irony on Rowling’s part in showing that
the child who is most encouraged to follow his father’s profession is the one who rebels
quite dramatically, though not in the obvious sense of rejecting the profession, rather in
taking it too far. For many years Percy has repressed his own feelings in order to be
good and dutiful. His desire to rebel and assert his own identity, having been repressed,
eventually erupts in a powerful and dramatic way. In contrast, Percy’s siblings
(particularly the twins) rebel continuously in small ways; they are therefore unlikely
ever to turn against their parents because they are constantly exorcising these feelings,
in regular and small ways. The twins in particular are very confident about who they are - they know their own identity and consequently are comfortable with their family. Percy, on the other hand, must turn against and remove himself from his family until he finds his own identity. This supports the points made in chapter two that the Weasley family arguments are fairly ‘healthy’. Thus Percy’s refusal to engage in such arguments has severe long-term consequences.

There are many adults in the work of Fine and Jones who also view their children as realistic combinations of positive and negative qualities. Significantly, these families, like the Weasleys, are usually the same ones who entered into the discussion of the ups and downs of family life in chapter two. They are also adults who conform to the previous chapter’s concept of acceptable fallibility. The emphasis is therefore on accepting that individual children and adults, as well as the parenting process and family life as a whole, are a mixture of good and bad.

It is also important to note that, while those adults who polarise children as angels or devils are usually condemned by the narrative viewpoint (as we have seen earlier), those who accept children as a good-bad mixture are usually portrayed fairly positively. Thus, the narrative viewpoint is aligned with theirs, and readers are encouraged to share this view of the child characters, accepting them as flawed but loveable.

In Fine’s *Goggle Eyes* (1989), Kitty’s mother and new stepfather both show a clear awareness of Kitty’s less pleasant qualities (and so cannot be fooled, even when this is Kitty’s aim), yet simultaneously realise that these negative traits are merely part of Kitty and do not constitute the whole person. They consequently demonstrate an ability to discipline Kitty’s ‘bad’ behaviour while also encouraging her potentiality for goodness.
In one incident, in which Rosie and Gerald argue about the mess in Kitty’s room, Rosie shows that she is not naive about her daughter’s unhygienic tendencies, but does not let this blind her to Kitty’s positive qualities:

“Don’t tell me they [teenagers] all have floors thick with tangled electrical wires, and filthy dishes, and books in great untidy heaps!”....“For heaven’s sake, Gerald! Look at the planet we’re living on! Wars. Famine. Poverty....My Kitty spends her time coming with me to meetings, raising money by shaking collecting cans....What does it matter if her bedroom is knee deep in knickers?”

(pp54-5)

However, one does get the feeling that Rosie is trying to convince herself as much as Gerald.

Gerald is extremely astute in his dealings with Kitty, and this is evident from his first encounter with her. He is fully aware of Kitty’s hostility and potential for bad behaviour, but rather than demonise her, he behaves in a manner which minimises the possibilities for conflict and confrontation: Gerald ‘peered closely at a photo of me as a toddler. “What a face!....It looks as though it might be you.” Really cunning, right? He doesn’t actually ask if it’s me, and then he can’t look silly if I don’t answer’ (p23).

Through accepting Kitty’s negative qualities, and also understanding the causes of her hostility, Gerald is able to find constructive ways to deal with the situations which arise. He later admits that he always had faith that the two of them might form a more positive relationship: in discussing the way in which Kitty’s mother and sister appreciate his ‘ “old-fashioned virtues” ’, he adds that ‘ “I rather hoped that, one day, you might too” ’ (p127). Through seeing Kitty’s positive potential, Gerald consequently helps it to emerge.

The ability to realise (as Rosie and Gerald do) that there may be particular (and often understandable) reasons for bad behaviour is also something which distinguishes this type of adult from those who polarise children as angels or devils. If there is an external factor, this negates the possibility of inherent badness: the behaviour is therefore the
result of an interaction between the external and the internal. It is also crucial that the adult is able to relate to the way in which the external situation is triggering a reaction. In Jones' *Black Maria* (1991), Mig, her brother Chris and their mother are all subjected to bullying by Aunt Maria. As we have seen in chapter three, Mig's mother has self-awareness and the ability to be honest with herself and her children about her shortcomings. Consequently she is able to empathise with Chris's behaviour, and combines scolding with understanding. Through being aware of the *cause* of her children's disgruntlements, rather than perceiving inherent badness, she also knows when a positive action is more beneficial than punishment: '‘Chris and Mig, I’m going to make you a packed lunch and you’re going to go out for some fresh air. You’re to stay out all afternoon….Do me a favour and try and enjoy yourselves for a change”' (p42).

Adults who are able to accept and understand their children's negative traits are therefore more able to deal with such traits constructively. These adults do not sentimentalise their children or blind themselves to their shortcomings, nor do they overreact with harshness when they witness negative qualities and behaviour. This attitude is very similar to that of childcare writer Christopher Green (discussed in detail in chapter one) in accepting that a child has negative traits, while equally accepting that undesirable behaviour must be dealt with.

Chapter two discussed the way in which children (both real and fictional) are sometimes allowed to dominate and become head of the family. Parents who have a healthy acceptance of the child's flaws are usually able to prevent the child from overpowering them. The same chapter also discussed a scene from Jones' *Magicians of Caprona* (1980) in which the Montana children are asked to help with a family task (writing spells) (see chapter two, p94). The children's extremely exaggerated claims that they are being exploited are met with laughter by the adults. In such a situation,
sentimental adults might easily allow the children to manipulate them, while adults who
demonise their children might react oppressively to signs of disobedience and
independent thought. In contrast, the Montanas merely regard the children’s attempts at
manipulation with amusement: they deal firmly with the younger members of the family,
but do not make them feel ashamed of their behaviour. The Montanas are thus able to
maintain control in this situation; there is never any danger of the children
overpowering their elders, but neither are they oppressed. It is significant that adults
who do not fear children, and consequently do not have a desire for egotistical control,
usually do manage to maintain reasonable control most of the time.

However, even those parents who accept the child’s mixture of positive and negative
traits still often resist allowing the child’s individuality to develop. Mrs Weasley, as we
have seen, does wish her children to follow a ‘respectable’ path in life, while the
Montanas use their children to continue an age-old feud with the Petrocchi family, and
attempt to quash any signs that the children may not wish to support them in this. 7
However, these families, despite struggling with their children’s emerging individuality,
do at least attempt to accommodate it, rather than rigidly insisting on complete
conformity: the Montanas eventually accept their daughter’s marriage to a Petrocchi
man. This contrasts with Matilda’s parents who are more than happy to relinquish the
care of their daughter to Miss Honey; they do not like (and feel threatened by) Matilda,
and so reject her.

In Fine’s Goggle Eyes, Kitty’s political views are identical to those of her mother, and
she happily joins Rosie on anti-nuclear weapon protests. However, though Rosie is
sometimes self-righteous about her beliefs, it is significant that her new partner Gerald
holds strongly opposing views, and this indicates Rosie’s willingness to accept and
listen to different schools of thought. The novel as a whole gives the impression that a

7 Rosa’s romance with, and eventual marriage to, a Petrocchi man is discussed in more detail in chapter
five (p223-4).
dialectic of opposing views is important. The story centres on the way in which Kitty learns to accept Gerald and his differences, and she perhaps follows her mother's example in this.

Overall, none of the families express complete acceptance of individuality: more often than not, parents feel at least some sense of threat when their children show an interest in following different paths. However, the degree to which they feel threatened, and their ability to accommodate difference, varies amongst different families. For the most part, those adults who accept and constructively discipline their children’s shortcomings, while also being aware of their positive qualities, have more ability to allow, or at least to come to terms with, individuality.

**Nature-Nurture: ‘No-one is born evil’**

In Western society, increasing awareness of the ‘normality’ of negative traits has corresponded with a developing interest in the effects of upbringing and environmental factors. Thus, there has been a gradual development from awareness of childhood itself, to awareness of the child as a mixture of good and bad and, correspondingly, to increased emphasis on the (still unresolved) nature-nurture debate. This debate tends to focus particularly on the way in which negative tendencies can easily arise and strengthen if the upbringing is not handled carefully.

Grylls says that by 1900 the public were ready to accept the idea that the child’s character and behaviour are influenced by environmental factors. However, this ‘depended on a notion of parental responsibility little more than a century old’: Grylls believes that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the idea of upbringing being to blame for a wayward child would not have been accepted (Grylls 1978: 15). This

---

8 This quotation is from Fine's *The Tulip Touch* (1996) (p145; it also appears on the front and back covers).
highlights the significance of the Victorian era, with its emphasis on child welfare and the general vulnerability of the child (which in turn stemmed from the Romantics).

Childcare writer Frederick Truby King, writing in 1913, emphasises the way in which upbringing shapes character. Towards the end of his book, the section ‘Parenthood and Race Culture’ points out that, while the child is born with certain potential traits, environment (according to King) is by far the most influential factor in the development of these traits: ‘Heredity gives potentialities, environment develops these potentialities, and turns them to good or evil account’ (1913: 152).

John B. Watson, in 1928, ignores nature altogether: ‘children are made not born...’; ‘There are no instincts...’; ‘behaviourists believe that there is nothing from within to develop’ (Watson 1928: 12; 23; 25). Thus ‘failure to bring up a happy child, a well-adjusted child...falls upon the parents’ shoulders. The acceptance of this view makes child-rearing the most important of all social obligations’ (Watson 1928: 12). Watson cites the early twentieth century as a crucial time in child psychology (1928: 18): whatever one thinks of Watson’s own views, he is certainly right in this.

One particularly significant name in twentieth-century child psychology is Jean Piaget. Most of his work was written between the 1920s and 1950s (though his international influence was not widespread until the 1950s). He is most well known for his theories about the developmental stages of the child’s mind: according to Piaget, a child’s mind can only comprehend certain concepts when it is at the appropriate level of development (for example, abstract thinking is not thought to be possible until the formal operations stage, which begins at approximately eleven years). As Tucker says, Piaget realised that ‘children think in a way that is intrinsically different from adults’ (Tucker 1977: 71).

Piaget’s focus on the physiological development of the child’s mind therefore emphasises biological factors, and he has been criticised for being too prescriptive about

---

9 See particularly p104, where King discusses moral control (and the lack of).
what children are capable of at each stage of their development (this will be discussed later in this chapter). However, he used his theories about the structure of the child's mind in order to emphasise the importance of nurture: the child's upbringing and education must be tailored to meet his or her level of development, otherwise psychological damage can result, and educational progress may be hindered.

Social factors often influence psychological research: one particularly significant event was the evacuation of many British children in World War II. Research was conducted into its psychological effects, particularly the Cambridge Evacuation Survey, which was the combined work of a group of child psychologists and social workers. This research increased understanding of the psychological vulnerability of the child, and the importance of a secure, nurturing environment. Gamble points out that this 'awareness of the impact of infant-parent separation affected political reform in the 1940s' (in Tucker & Gamble 2001: 23). As chapter one discussed, social policies at this time regarding orphans and children in care began to reflect new ideas and stressed the importance of foster families or returning children to their natural families, as opposed to institutional care.

The 1960s saw the development of psychotherapy as an 'ordinary' middle-class activity, and this was probably at least partly due to the heightened awareness generated by the effects of evacuation. Thus, adults delving into their own childhoods became acutely aware of the importance of their own children's psychological and emotional development. It is significant that the flourishing childcare manual industry is not just about practical care of the child; there are many books which focus on the emotional and psychological aspects of childrearing.

---

10 Published in 1941 as The Cambridge Evacuation Survey: a wartime study in social welfare and education, edited by Susan Isaacs, Sibyl Clement Brown and Robert Henry Thouless.

11 Some recent titles include Raising Happy Children: what every child needs their parents to know (Dorothy Rowe et al 1999) and Helping Children to Build Self-Esteem (Deborah Plummer 2001). There are many other similar titles.
The increasing popularity of the childcare manual throughout the twentieth century therefore corresponded with increasing awareness of the effects of nurture. It is now taken for granted that parents must think carefully about how they treat their child, though the nature-nurture argument is still controversial, and there is no widespread agreement regarding which of the two has the stronger influence.

There are also some contradictions with regard to this matter, and representations of various 'bad' children in the texts (which range from spoilt children throwing tantrums to severely disturbed children attempting murder\(^{12}\)), are often problematic. Chapter two discussed the spoilt and overly-assertive child - the majority of these portrayals condemn such behaviour. Usually, there is a clear link between the behaviour of the parent and the behaviour of the child; thus, the child is not shown to be inherently bad, but to have become that way through indulgent parenting. In Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), there are several spoilt children, and the Oompa Loompas’ song makes it clear who is to blame:

\[
\text{...is it really right / That every single bit of blame / And all the scolding and all the shame / Should fall upon Veruca Salt / Is she the only one at fault? / For though she's spoiled and dreadfully so / A girl can't spoil herself you know / Who spoiled her then? Ah, who indeed? / Who pandered to her every need? / ....They are (and this is very sad) / Her loving parents, MUM and DAD.}
\]

(p146)

However, the spoilt children are not usually easy to sympathise with. This raises a contradiction, particularly in Dahl and Rowling: the spoilt children are always shown as a product of their upbringing rather than inherently bad, yet they are usually two-dimensional, humorous characters with whom we do not empathise. Comic effect thus takes priority over psychological complexity.

\(^{12}\text{The attempted murderers are Jones' Gwendolen (Charmed Life 1977) and Fine's Tulip (The Tulip Touch 1996)\)
There are, however, a few exceptions here. Jones’ ‘Carol Oneir’s Hundredth Dream’ 
(Mixed Magics 2000) places some emphasis on the damage done to the child. Carol has
a talent for magic dreams, and her mother is a combination of pushy stage-school
mother, fulfilling her own ambitions through Carol, and ‘needy-child’ who is
completely submissive to her daughter. When she is asked to leave Carol alone with
Chrestomanci, the mother responds with ‘“There’s no need for that, sir....I always go
everywhere with my darling. Carol knows I’ll sit quietly and not interrupt” ’ (p108).
Carol, like Dudley Dursley, is selfish, rude and arrogant, and so is not easy for the
reader to like, but we are given a brief glimpse into the insecurity which has been
caused by her mother. Some of the characters debate Carol’s single-minded ambition,
but Melville believes it is ‘“...not ambition exactly, sir. Say rather that Carol was
caught up in her success, and her Mama was caught up with her. It is not easy to stop
something when one’s Mama expects one to go on and on” ’ (p124).

One of Fine’s novels for younger readers, Charm School (1999) takes this further, and
this novel is probably the most successful of all the novels in this thesis in showing the
damage caused by overindulgence. Bonny is horrified when the absence of a babysitter
forces her mother to enroll her in a one-day course at ‘Charm School’. Initially, the
other girls are presented as stereotypical, two-dimensional spoilt children. Not only are
they spoilt, they are also extremely competitive regarding beauty and other ‘ladylike’
qualities; thus all manner of spiteful behaviour lies beneath the surface charm, as Bonny
discovers to her detriment:

“Hello Rosebud.”
The pretty vision turned around. “Who said that?”
“I did.”
“Why?”
Bonny stared. “Because I don’t know anyone here,” she said.
“And you just smiled at me.”
“I didn’t smile at you,” the pretty vision snapped. “I was just
practising being charming.”

(pp18-19)
However, through Bonny's eyes, these spoilt children are gradually given some depth. Bonny begins to notice signs of anxiety and insecurity amongst the girls, and realises that competing to win the 'Glistening Tiara' award prevents the possibility of enjoyable friendships, or of being oneself. Ultimately, she realises that they are all unhappy victims, while they in turn learn from her how to experience real pleasures:

...every single one of them knew that, but for one person, at this very moment they'd have been mincing up and down in their pretty frocks, trying to look beautiful enough to win the glistening tiara. And instead of bouncing up and down excitedly on their seats, as they were now... all but one of them would have gone home and sobbed into her pillows, feeling nothing but clumsy, or podgy or ugly.

(p182)

More disturbing than the spoilt child is the evil, or apparently evil, child. Rowling's Draco Malfoy displays evil tendencies. As with the various spoilt children, a clear link is made between his behaviour and his father's behaviour, though we never gain intimate access to family scenes. Again, however, we are rarely, if ever, encouraged to sympathise with Draco. However, the most problematic character in this respect is Jones' Gwendolen (Charmed Life 1977). Gwendolen is initially spoilt and demanding in the manner of Dudley et al, but her 'badness' eventually becomes so severe that she attempts the murder of her own brother. Unlike Draco, there is no explanation as to how she came to be this way: we know nothing about the (now deceased) parents, but if they were to blame, this is not suggested in any way. Various teachers have spoilt Gwendolen, wrongly believing she is supremely talented, and this has probably played some part, but these teachers are not her primary carers and have not featured extensively in her life. Gwendolen has no redeeming features, no vulnerability (not even Dudley's pathetic quality) and there are no opportunities to sympathise with her. Thus,

---

Incidentally, this approach calls to mind Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden (1911) which shows extensive sympathy towards both Mary and Colin. These spoilt children are depicted with complexity, rather than being two-dimensional caricatures. Given that sympathy towards spoilt children in children's books is rare even today, Hodgson Burnett's novel was certainly far ahead of its time.
the narrative viewpoint presents her as an evil child, in the tradition of Original Sin, and we are never given access to her inner thoughts and feelings.

Jones is perhaps putting plot device before other matters, but this apparent fluctuation between contemporary child empathy and the much older concept of inherent badness reflects fluctuations in today’s society. As we have seen earlier, both in this chapter and in chapter one, the discourse of Original Sin still has some resonance today, and Fine tackles this contradiction directly in *The Tulip Touch* (1996). This novel, as discussed in earlier chapters, was written in the wake of the Jamie Bulger murder by two ten-year-old boys, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables. In the reaction to the two ten-year-olds, one can see how the boys were labelled as inherently evil (as discussed in chapter one). It appears that, despite widespread awareness of the effects of upbringing, when society is actually confronted with the horrific results of upbringing-gone-wrong, it is easier and less frightening to revert to a more ‘primitive’ reaction (at the risk of being condescending) and blame it on inherent forces. This also enables society to isolate individual cases as ‘one-offs’ rather than acknowledging that abuse could easily create many more.

Fine appears to have written *The Tulip Touch* in an attempt to re-emphasise ‘nurture’ at a time when the pendulum was swinging back the other way. She believes, as she told Sue Lawley in a Radio Four interview, that ‘We all had a great social shock’ at this time, and that the situation fuelled an interest in ‘the darker side of childhood’. However, for Fine, the reaction of the media was a much greater shock than the murder itself: it suggested that ‘people really did not realise that people are not born one way or the other, they become one way or the other, and I wanted to show that’ (Fine 2001).

In *The Tulip Touch*, Natalie (the child narrator) and her mother both wonder whether Tulip is ‘mad’ or ‘bad’ (pp115; 136). This issue is debated by various characters when Tulip’s behaviour becomes extreme (knocking on the door of a bereaved mother and
asking if Muriel - the dead child - could come out for a walk), and the different opinions voiced echo the debate regarding Jamie Bulger’s killers:

“Wickedness!” Miss Ferguson was saying. “Pure wickedness!” “Nonsense,” said Mrs Pettifer. “The child is obviously deeply disturbed”... “Oh, really!” snapped Miss Ferguson. “It’s perfectly obvious that that Pierce girl is malevolent by nature.”

(p141)

The novel, however, comes down firmly on the side of ‘mad’ rather than ‘bad’, and shows us clearly how it has come about: as it says repeatedly on the front and back covers, ‘No one is born evil. No one’. This comment is voiced by Natalie’s father (p145), who also explains that ‘ “To really know right from wrong you need a certain emotional sympathy. And you only learn that from being treated properly yourself” ’ (pp145-6).

We do not witness Tulip’s abuse first-hand, but deduce what goes on as Natalie does: from Tulip’s behaviour. There are two scenes in particular which strongly imply, respectively, violence and sexual abuse. The first is when we get a rare glimpse of Tulip’s father: ‘...I heard a vicious bellow, and looked up to see Mr Pierce leaning out of his truck window. “Better get home before me, Tulip, or I’ll snatch you bald-headed!”... Tulip had already fled. I followed her as far as the corner, picking up things that spilled out of her schoolbag...’ (p44). Natalie is quick to make the link between Mr Pierce’s comment and ‘the odd things I’d heard her saying in our games. “I’ll peel you alive, like a banana!” “Smile at me wrong today, and I’ll crush you!”... Was it Tulip I’d been hearing, or her terrifying father?’ (p44).

The second most explicit hint, and probably the most chilling scene of all, is when Tulip takes a rabbit out of its hutch:

14 Interestingly, some of Tulip’s behaviour echoes descriptions of Mary Bell, particularly her gleeful delight in playing tricks on a bereaved mother (Bell did this to the mother of one of her victims). Readers are referred in particular to Shirley Lynn Scott’s article on the following website: http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious_murders/famous/bell
"Who’s a clever bunny? Who’s going to be a good girl? Who’s Tulip’s special one? She’s not going to make fuss, is she? Oh, no. She isn’t going to do that. Because she enjoys it really, doesn’t she? And if she starts struggling, she’ll get hurt.” She finished up so savagely that I knew I was watching something horrible, nothing to do with the rabbit she was holding, but darker, much darker, and hidden, and coming from deep inside Tulip.

(p83)

Both the above examples make a very explicit link between Tulip’s behaviour and the way she is being treated by her father: as Natalie’s father says, we can clearly see here that she was not born ‘evil’. Throughout the novel there are various suggestions of the child she could have been, which continue to negate the idea of Original Sin. Natalie muses over Tulip’s compulsive lying, and the way in which Tulip seems to have no idea that her lies are false and wrong: ‘In her eyes, it was the world that was wrong. If the world had only been right, if things had only fallen out the way they should, then she would never have had to lie, or steal, or be spiteful. If the world had only been right, she’d be a nice and good person - the girl she was inside, before it all went wrong, and she got spoiled all along with it’ (p105).

Despite the ever-increasing horrors of Tulip’s behaviour, there are occasional moments when we witness, not just her vulnerability, but ‘the girl she was inside’. The most significant is a scene which initially appears to show her destructive qualities, only to reveal just the opposite. When Natalie first encounters her new friend, Tulip is holding a kitten; the animal later disappears, and Natalie deduces that Mr Pierce must have drowned it. Only years later does she realise her mistake: ‘“You drowned that kitten, didn’t you?” ’ (p105). Initially, Tulip’s response is flippant, but the full story turns out to be more shocking than the initial revelation:
"...I always had to do it myself....So it would take less time....Dad wouldn’t take the time. He’d just shove them in a crock of water and slam the lid, and you could hear them scrabbling and pushing at the top. And it took forever."...All her cocky self-confidence had drained away. She said so sadly: “It took hours and hours....So ever since then I’ve always done it myself. Because it’s quicker.”

(pp106-7)

Tulip does, therefore, possess compassionate and virtuous qualities, but they are only able to surface in the most horrific circumstances. It seems significant that the kittens are probably the only beings who are more vulnerable and more horrifically treated than she is, and it is perhaps this which incites her pity. This may also explain her need to attack others: as far as she can see, everyone else is ‘above’ her in this respect.

Nonetheless, Fine does not seem to believe in Original Innocence either. Earlier in the novel, Tulip asks Natalie’s father about the worst thing he ever did as a child: he tells her that he once dropped and smashed his grandfather’s tortoise, and left it to die (pp18-19). The scene is notable, not only for the strange combination of both disturbing and compassionate qualities that we witness in Tulip (she displays a morbid fascination but also, again, discusses humane ways to put animals out of their misery), but also because it shows us that even ‘nice’, ‘normal’ Mr Barnes had destructive and devious qualities as a child (something Natalie later reflects on (p168) ). The suggestion is, perhaps, that we are all born with a combination of both virtuous and non-virtuous qualities and that upbringing, rather than entirely creating either one or the other, will ‘bring out’ and strengthen the former whilst diminishing the latter, or vice versa as the case may be. Natalie’s father and Tulip represent an example of each - they each started with a similar mixture of characteristics, but their upbringings have resulted in two very different people.

Fine also seems to be saying that recognition of the potential deviance in all of us is necessary in order to be able to sympathise with, and help, children like Tulip. In this respect, the novel can be seen as a criticism, not just of the demonising of Jamie
Bulger's killers, but also of mythical and sentimentalised images of Original Innocence. That is, excessive belief in Original Innocence means that any child who does not conform is automatically relegated to the realms of 'evil child'. This, as we have seen earlier, is exactly what happens to Harry Potter and Matilda.

It is for this reason, it seems, that sympathy is often kept at a distance, and Fine gives us a shrewd portrayal of the contradictory reactions of the adult characters, one in which most adult readers probably feel an uncomfortable recognition of themselves. After years of being controlled and bullied by Tulip, Natalie, who is still only in her early teens, finally manages to break free, only to find that her parents still want to invite Tulip for Christmas:

Inside, I was seething. So that was it! I'd fought so hard to get free, yet here were both of them quite ready to throw me back, just to ease their own guilty consciences....how could they feel Christmassy as usual, if Tulip wasn't there, to make them feel even more giving and generous...."Oh, yes. She has a pretty thin time of it at home. So we do try to give her at least one really special day."

(p129)

Natalie is very astute about the attitudes of her parents and other adults in their hotel. When the pianist discusses his 'soft spot' for Tulip, and declares that he misses her, Natalie craftily suggests that he visit her - he quickly changes the subject, and Natalie realises the responsibility that is being put on her: 'Why should they assume she was my job, always \textit{my} job? They all knew where she was....They all stood round the piano, so smug, so stuffed with food and so dolled up. What was so wrong with one of \textit{them} filling a hamper and taking it over? Or even bringing her back with them?' (p131).

They all care for Tulip as long as they do not have to assume responsibility for her, and can avoid facing up to the less desirable aspects of her personality. Fine discusses the overall tone of the novel:

I think what does come through is how many people have looked away, how many people have just pretended that it doesn't matter, and that is something I feel very strongly about. I feel that we are a society that
abandons an awful lot of children to an awful lot of stress and difficulty....and then, when one or two of them fall through the net, there’s nothing there to catch them when they fall, and when they’ve really fallen, we sit and blame them.

(Fine 2001)

This confirms that, despite a contemporary emphasis on the effects of upbringing, Western society is still guilty of nineteenth-century polarisations. The Tulip Touch suggests that many of today’s adults still want to believe that all children are inherently virtuous. It is thus easy to sympathise with an innocent angel who is being badly treated, and who is somewhere ‘over there’ in the distance. Fine shows how reactions become more complex, however, when that disturbed child crosses the boundaries into one’s own life and / or displays the monstrous tendencies that are actually perfectly understandable, given the circumstances. It is a significant achievement, then, that Fine creates a character who displays all those monstrous characteristics, yet may still engender sympathy in the reader.

**Nature - Nurture: Victorian angels?**

The abused and neglected children in the work of Dahl, Rowling and Jones, however (primarily Matilda, James, Harry Potter and David), can be seen in just the opposite light. These children appear to be Victorian ‘innocent angels’ who not only show no signs of disturbance but are also unusually mature and adult-like. These portrayals could therefore be seen as buying into the mythical views of Original Innocence: we can easily sympathise with these children because they are so likeable, and this is exactly the attitude with which Fine confronts us in The Tulip Touch.

However, there are two fundamental differences: firstly, most of these child characters are not entirely innocent; secondly, they are not usually passive victims (which contrasts with, for example, Dickens’ Oliver Twist and Little Nell). If we take ‘innocent’ to mean not just pure virtue, but also a state of naivety and not knowing, this does not apply to
most of these characters. Even those who are wholly virtuous (Dahl’s Charlie and James) are not naive: they are extremely ‘knowing’, particularly with regard to adult fallibility and the general unfairness of life (for Charlie, poverty, and for James, abuse). Chapter three pointed out that Jones’ Cat and Christopher are initially in a state of naivety which allows them to be exploited, but we witness them develop towards a state of ‘knowing’ which makes them stronger and wiser.

With the probable exception of the aforementioned Charlie and James, most of these characters also have various negative traits which infiltrate their general goodness. The fact that we are not encouraged to condemn them for this is due in part to the changing portrayals of adults (discussed in chapter three). If adults are infallibly wise and authoritative, a child who disobeys, or harbours negative feelings towards the adult, is automatically ‘bad’. Yet if the adults are shown to be flawed, the child’s disobedience, anger or resentment immediately becomes more understandable. It is often the combination of ‘knowingness’ and some tendency to negative traits which results in these children being quite proactive and assertive.

Jones’ David (Eight Days of Luke) is fully aware of the shortcomings of his guardians, and transforms his resentment into humorous games, though these are played out only in his own mind. Uncle Bernard and Astrid (long before she becomes David’s ally) are both hypochondriacs who compete with each other regarding who is suffering the most. David is astute enough not only to be able to realise that this is rather pathetic attention-seeking on the adults’ part, but also to be able to laugh at them, if only internally:

“I gasp for air all the time,” retorted Uncle Bernard, gently and sadly. “My lungs have been in a bad way for years.”
“Oh so have mine!” cried Astrid, not to be outdone.
At this stage in the contest, David had awarded Astrid four points, and Uncle Bernard three, with a bonus point to Uncle Bernard for never complaining.
(Uncle Bernard later scores a ‘further bonus point for martyrdom and self-sacrifice’ (p18)). Chapter three discussed the way in which the narrative viewpoint in many of these novels often exposes adult flaws by mocking them. In these moments, David is aligned with the narrator in being fully aware of adult fallibility and consequently transforming his spite and other negative feelings into laughter. The narrative view therefore not only sympathises with, but also applauds, these ‘negative’ traits in David.

However, perhaps the most poignant example here is Dahl’s Matilda. She is probably the most cunning, devious and sassy of all child heroines, yet she remains exactly this: a loveable heroine. The first chapter of Dahl’s novel introduces us to a little girl who is ‘extra-ordinary, and by that I mean sensitive and brilliant’ (p4), yet neglected and despised by parents who are oblivious to her positive qualities: ‘the parents looked upon Matilda as nothing more than a scab’ (p4). Our first look at Matilda’s behaviour is her relationship with Mrs Phelps the librarian, with whom Matilda is polite and quite angelic. She is therefore introduced to us as a loveable and endearing child.

Immediately after this, however, we witness Matilda with her parents, and it becomes clear that this is no ‘angel’, ready to be crushed and destroyed by oppression, but a tough and resilient child who is able to ‘hold her ground’ with her spiteful and childish father: ‘...you’re an ignorant little twit,” the father said. His speech was never very delicate but Matilda was used to it. She also knew that he liked to boast and she would egg him on shamelessly’ (p16) (Matilda then proceeds to tease and outwit her father). In her remaining time with her parents, Matilda engages in numerous acts of spite and revenge, all of which are comical to the reader. Thus, while Jones’ David harbours spite which is mainly internal, Matilda goes further and frequently takes action in order to bring light relief and a sense of power to her difficult life:

She resented being told constantly that she was ignorant and stupid when she wasn’t. The anger inside her went on boiling and boiling, and as she lay in bed that night she made a decision. She decided that every time her father or mother was beastly to her, she would get her
own back....A small victory or two would help her to tolerate their idiocies and would stop her from going crazy. You must remember that she was still hardly five years old and it is not easy for someone as small as that to score points against an all-powerful grown-up. Even so, she was determined to have a go.

Matilda, then, could not be described as innocent, while her attempts to give herself a feeling of power prevent her from being a passive victim. She possesses enough 'knowingness' and negative tendencies to enable her to respond to and repay the horrific treatment she receives at the hands of her parents. Nonetheless, the narrative viewpoint always presents her as good and loveable, and entirely justified in her behaviour, and Miss Honey confirms this: 'What a nice child she is, Miss Honey thought. I don't care what her father said about her, she seems very quiet and gentle to me. And not a bit stuck up in spite of her brilliance' (pp84-5).

Chapter three pointed out that only oppressive adults are mocked and satirised, and the same point can be made about Matilda and David: their spite is directed only towards adults who are shown to deserve it. Their negative thoughts and actions are therefore justified because they are continually provoked by adults with whom the reader is actively discouraged from sympathising. Harry Potter, however, is more complex than this. Harry certainly acts spitefully towards his unkind aunt and uncle, but his negative feelings are not only directed at the Dursleys. Throughout the novels, the likeable and virtuous Harry often experiences negative feelings, both 'ordinary' and intense. When he still (mistakenly) believes that Sirius Black betrayed his parents, a 'hatred such as he had never known before was coursing through Harry like poison' (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 1999 p158). In *Order of the Phoenix* Harry reveals himself to be very much the classic teenager in displaying angst, moodiness and anger. He even begins to resent Mrs Weasley's smothering (particularly p86), and also feels intense jealousy towards his dearest friends Ron and Hermione:
Harry screwed up his face and buried it in his hands. He could not lie to himself; if he had known the prefect badge was on its way, he would have expected it to come to him, not Ron. Did this make him as arrogant as Draco Malfoy? Did he really think himself superior to everyone else? Did he really believe he was better than Ron?

(p151)

Harry’s apparently negative traits, like those of many of the fallible adults discussed in the previous chapter, could also be said to make him all the more endearing and likeable, and easier for readers to relate to. His self-questioning here certainly links him to Dumbledore’s humility and self-awareness.

It is also significant that Harry’s heroic actions in each novel are often fuelled by negative feelings such as anger and disregard for rules and authorities:

“But Harry - what if your dream was - was just that, a dream?” Harry let out a roar of frustration. Hermione actually stepped back from him, looking alarmed. “You don’t get it!” Harry shouted at her, “I’m not having nightmares, I’m not just dreaming!....they’re REAL, Hermione - Sirius is trapped, I’ve seen him. Voldemort’s got him, and no one else knows, and that means we’re the only ones who can save him, and if you don’t want to do it, fine, but I’m going, understand?”

(Order of the Phoenix p647)

The traditional innocent, passive angel in the discourse of Original Innocence would certainly not have been capable of such feelings or actions. The link between ‘negative’ feelings and positive actions (or, at least, the ability to survive) therefore creates a moral ambiguity which complicates the divide between good and bad.

Victor Watson points out that ‘Even Dahl’s characters, though they are often straightforwardly sentimentalized victims, are rarely straightforwardly innocent....the creators of these fictional children have not been interested in innocence, they have been concerned with coping’ (Watson 1996: 5-6). Watson’s point about coping reiterates the second differentiation between Victorian angels and the abused child characters in

---

15 Watson is here referring to Dahl’s child characters; Kitty in Fine’s Goggle Eyes (1989); Lucy in C.S. Lewis’ Narnia series (1950-56) and others.
this thesis: these children are not passive victims; they are usually extremely proactive and they learn to cope and survive.

Watson’s point about children learning to cope includes characters in realist fiction. It is notable that, even in Fine’s work, with the exception of Tulip who (as we know) is crushed by severe trauma, most of the child characters display remarkable abilities. This is obviously not of the same type as the fantasy characters, but nonetheless these are children who, for the most part, transcend life’s traumas and, as Watson says, learn to cope: Kitty adjusts to her mother’s ever-changing partners, and learns to accept the man she initially hated; Natalie learns to cope with, and eventually free herself from, a severely disturbed friend; the Hilliard children (*Madame Doubtfire* 1987) come to terms with bitter warring between their estranged parents; Simon makes peace with the father who abandoned him.¹⁶ Overall, in both the fantasy and realist texts, the sophisticated abilities and psychological strength of these children ensure that they are not victims: they are more likely to arouse admiration than pity.

There is also another way to look at these sophisticated child characters: the texts are focusing on, and thus expanding, children’s potential, rather than viewing them as limited beings; stretching the boundaries of what we consider ‘normal’ child behaviour and capacity. Fantasy has always had more freedom to challenge readers in this way: K.P. Smith points out that, from the Victorian era onwards, the ‘fantasy novel became a concept that challenged the very hearts and minds of its audience’ (Smith 1993: 122). Realism, even when it presents us with characters who are expanding their capacities, usually does so in a fairly practical and concrete way, such as the way in which Fine’s Kitty and Simon learn to deal with the challenges in their lives. Fantasy, on the other hand, is more likely to challenge our ways of thinking; opening up questions rather than

¹⁶Chapter six will explore in detail the ways in which these children learn to cope and transcend life’s challenges.
providing solutions, though this is not to imply that provocativeness is *exclusive* to fantasy.

The strong, resilient and proactive child character undoubtedly has a literary heritage, most notably in fairytales (*Cinderella; Hansel and Gretel; Jack and the Beanstalk* to name but a few). Lewis Carroll’s Alice, though not abused, nevertheless deals with her traumatic adventure with pluck and courage. She is feisty and outspoken, daring to do what most real children, and many fictional children, at this time did not or could not do. K.P. Smith sees her as ‘quite opinionated and even critical when she enters Wonderland...Alice is the most precocious of enlightenment heroines’ (Smith 1993: 130) (Smith cites the period 1841-1899 as the ‘enlightenment era’ in children’s fantasy).

Watson also discusses Alice, along with other historical examples:

> Take Alice. She is certainly innocent, a good child. But it is clear that Lewis Carroll’s main purpose was to pay tribute to Alice’s *intelligence*, her sense of fun, her awareness of the ridiculous. He was not wishing to consecrate her as a model of redemptive innocence. And if we look at most of the influential works written for children subsequently - for example, the stories of E. Nesbit - we find that writers for children were as far as possible representing real children negotiating their lives in a world of adults....whether they employed play, humour or fantasy, I believe that children’s writers have assumed that their role was to *resist* sentimentalized portrayals of childhood. If we think of our own time, we find, I believe, that many recent and contemporary writers have continued realistically to present thoughtful children trying to work their way through childhood.

(Watson 1996: 5)

One might also add the title character of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) to Watson’s list, along with Kingsley’s Tom (*The Water Babies* 1863) as these resilient children transcend extreme trauma and adversity.

However, though the portrayal of the sophisticated child character clearly has a literary heritage, it also has particular poignancy today. K.P. Smith believes that, in the late twentieth century, ‘adults had come to realise...that children were (and had been for years) capable of more than they had ever been given credit’ (Smith 1993: 322). Fantasy
literature in particular began to engage with this increasing belief in the potential of the child:

Increasingly, children came to be viewed as fascinating human beings possessed of unusual potential to be both tapped and nurtured. The feeling of excitement caused by what was, in effect, the real discovery of the child as a being caught fire in the literary work. This feeling of excitement was fed by the constant flame of the fantastic imagination. Authors began to show incredible faith in what the child could do. Suddenly the young person was no longer a being happening across some unusual magical experience, but rather an initiator of action, a person possessed of unusual talent, ability and significantly, power.

(Smith 1993: 306-7)

The emotional maturity of these child characters, along with the fairytale elements and fantasies of child power are not, therefore, total fantasy as an exaggeration of the potential of the ‘ordinary’ child. Children are being shown boundless possibilities of what they can be, think and do, and so the emphasis is on positive self-fulfilling prophecies.

This idea (trying to think beyond what is considered to be normal behaviour and capacity) can be related to Jean Piaget, and various criticisms of him. There is no denying the profound - and positive - influence that Piaget’s work had. As Tucker says, it is ‘hard to overemphasise the importance of [Piaget’s] contribution to the concept of the child that has developed in [the twentieth] century’ (Tucker 1977: 70). Piaget built on and developed Rousseau’s much earlier realisation that childhood ‘has its own ways of seeing, thinking and feeling’ (1762/1911: 54), and so contributed greatly to our ability to empathise with children and care for them sensitively.

However, there has been much criticism of Piaget’s stages. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers claim that the danger of developmental theories such as Piaget’s is their scientific claim to be ‘the knowledges, and the only knowledges worth considering’. They therefore believe that ‘the developmentalist account of socialisation is both so

---

17 Matilda’s genius and supernatural powers; James living alone; Charlie inheriting the factory; Harry’s wizarding powers; David’s magical adventures.
captivating and so necessary to challenge' (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992: 6-7). Despite the positive influence of Piaget’s stages, they are also, as James et al say, ‘the most absolute, if materially reductive, image of childhood’ (James et al 1998: 17). The focus on hierarchical development can encourage the idea of children as ‘other’ and therefore inferior. Pilcher discusses the way in which ‘the assumption that children have an especial and particular nature’ leads to the belief that childhood ‘is characterized as a stage of incompetence and incompleteness, in comparison to adulthood. Children are seen to lack the capacities, skills and competencies of adults’ (Pilcher 1995: 41).

This outlook can consequently create negative self-fulfilling prophecies: if we assume that we know the limits of what a child can achieve at a certain stage, the child will also believe in its limitations.18 Perry Nodelman has strong opinions on Piaget and similar schools of thought:

Children become what we believe they are; assumptions about childhood have the potential to become self-fulfilling prophecies. The more we believe that children are limited in various ways, the more we deprive them of experiences that might make them less limited....far too many children learn to be exactly as limited as we expect them to be.

(Nodelman 1992/1996: 80)

Nodelman does actually criticise what he sees as unrealistic portrayals of abused children (ibid: 151), but I would argue that this somewhat contradicts his above points. Nodelman himself states that many child characters in children’s books ‘confirm adult assumptions about children: they are limited. The generic story often informs children that they are too limited to cope with the world on their own’ (ibid: 150). Thus, child characters who break through ‘normal’ limitations and display extraordinary abilities presumably do just the opposite. Lindow’s 1997 essay on Ursula Le Guin’s Wonderful Alexander (1994) discusses characters who survive against the odds. Her arguments apply equally to most of the fantasy characters in this thesis:

---

18 Harry Beilin points out that Piaget’s post-1975 work places less emphasis on stages, and shows awareness of the dangers of being too arbitrary (Beilin 1992: 85-131, particularly pp88-9).
Through the use of the fairytale format, she provides children with knowledge about real-life trauma and recovery while also providing distance and protection from the overwhelming evils that cause trauma. Her winged kittens become metaphors for that part of the child's soul that is able to fly away from abuse and transcend trauma......

(Lindow 1997: 38)

This point emphasises the way in which children's literature (throughout its history, one might add) often expresses great faith in the strength of the child's soul or spirit, in a way in which child psychology usually does not.

Bruno Bettelheim's analysis of fairytales (The Uses of Enchantment 1976) discusses this issue, supporting the idea that mature and transcendent child characters provide important reassurance and confidence-building to child readers: 'it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who...find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence' (Bettelheim 1976: 11). While Fine's The Tulip Touch portrays abuse for itself, Dahl, Rowling and Jones seem to be using abuse and abandonment (and various other difficulties and challenges) as vehicles through which to explore, in an exaggerated fashion, the emotions and challenges of the 'ordinary' child.

In Harry Potter, Matilda, James & The Giant Peach and Eight Days of Luke it is therefore likely that the 'ordinary' child reader will identify with the abused protagonists. In Fine's The Tulip Touch, however, this is unlikely - identification is more likely to be with Tulip's friend, Natalie, who does succeed in growing up and maturing. I would argue, then, that the aim of The Tulip Touch is to challenge the assumptions of both child and adult readers and to enable understanding of 'difficult' and traumatised children, rather than a full identification with Tulip. Sue Lawley asks Fine how the novel will 'help' readers: 'I suspect that what happens with fiction is that it increases the sense of the complexity of things and so it is very difficult [after reading

19 'Soul' and 'spirit' here refer to inner strength and the ability to survive, rather than the specifically religious sense of these terms.
a novel like this] to say “It is perfectly simple”’ (Fine 2001). Interestingly, this also links to my earlier point about fantasy opening up questions; thus, realism may also be provocative rather than conclusive, though obviously it still works within more restricted boundaries than fantasy.

Many adults in *The Tulip Touch* focus negatively on what Tulip is, not what she could be. Perhaps, in the work of the other three writers, children who transcend trauma can be seen as a rebuke to such adults who focus on what children cannot do, instead of seeing the inner potential. This potential, then, can be limited or destroyed by both well-meaning Piagetian-type adults, and by those who polarise children as angels or devils.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, Ariès, despite the controversies, has presented a strong and widely accepted case to suggest that in the past there did not, as far as we can tell, appear to be a clear awareness of ‘child’ as separate and distinct from ‘adult’. However, it seems that this was eventually followed by a swing to the other extreme whereby childhood became completely segregated from adulthood. This was epitomised in the nineteenth-century angel-devil opposition, subsequently embodied in the attitudes of characters such as Rowling’s Mr Dursley and Dahl’s Mr Wormwood (which suggests that this view of children still has at least some resonance today). Both attitudes, as we have seen, represent a fear of childhood and a sense of the child as an alien being with disruptive potential who must be controlled and / or moulded into a carbon-copy of the adult as a matter of some urgency.

This contrasts with the attitudes of the Weasleys and various adults in Fine and Jones who view their children as a mixture of both good and bad and often reflect the saying ‘Hate the sin, not the sinner’ in their treatment of their children. This suggests less fear of the child and consequently little need either to romanticise or demonise their
offspring. These adults appear to accept that children are children, and will not think or behave as adults, yet they do not go to the extremes of seeing the child as an alien being.

Fine’s *The Tulip Touch* appears to condemn the advocates of both Original Innocence and Original Sin, and shows how a belief in the mythical images of the former can easily cause an adult to condemn a non-angelic child as a harbourer of the latter. This novel makes clear that ‘No one is born evil’ (p145) and that it is nurture which determines the child’s character more than inherent tendencies. Thus, while critical of the rose-tinted images of Original Innocence, Fine nonetheless makes clear the vulnerability of the child and the need for a sensitive and loving treatment by the adult. Again, childhood must be acknowledged, but without the fear which leads to various different forms of oppression.

Dahl, Rowling and Jones, however, could be criticised for their portrayals of Matilda, James, Charlie, Harry Potter and David. These are children who are growing up in traumatic circumstances, including orphanhood, abuse and dire poverty, and yet show little signs of psychological damage. On the contrary, these children have wisdom and maturity beyond that of most adults, and so could be seen to embody the mythical images of Original Innocence. However, these children are not usually entirely innocent or passive victims: they have a reasonable amount of negative traits, and also a quality of knowingness and an ability to take action. Not only this, these texts are also making a point about the inner potential of the child. While Fine’s *The Tulip Touch* shows what happens to a child whose potential (particularly her potential for goodness) is crushed, Dahl, Rowling and Jones favour the other, more optimistic, side of the coin by showing readers (child and adult) the heights that a child’s abilities can soar to. Thus there is a suggestion that, despite the need to acknowledge childhood as different from adulthood, this should be combined with a continual focus on the potential, rather than the limits, of the child in order to prevent negative self-fulfilling prophecies.
CHAPTER 5:
PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD II: DEVELOPING POTENTIAL

Tests and trials

...any proposal that aims at self-determination for children must adjust itself to the fact that the achievement of autonomy is a gradual process...

(Blustein 1982: 10)

The sophisticated child characters, despite their positive qualities, are not usually shown to be fully developed before we meet them. On the contrary, the four writers in their different ways portray all the child characters undergoing a variety of journeys and adventures which 'stretch' them. K.P. Smith observes how, in the Victorian era, 'The use of the test or trial to ensure the fortitude or capabilities of the child was to become a necessary ingredient of fantasy literature....the need to “test” found its way into the literature and served as another way of ensuring “deserving” qualities in the child and also preparing him or her to become a strong adult' (Smith 1993: 136). Some notable examples from the last two centuries include R. L. Stevenson’s Treasure Island (1883), Carroll’s Alice novels (1865; 1872) and C.S. Lewis’ Narnia series (1950-6).

This feature can be seen to be still very much in existence in today’s children’s literature: Smith later comments on the way in which late twentieth-century attitudes to children have developed these Victorian ideas and subsequently influenced children’s literature²⁰:

Though [the child] may have difficulties along the way, or have faith in him or herself or others shaken at some point, the child is now perfectly capable of prevailing, and in many instances is totally and emotionally caught up in a purposeful quest....The dynamic child takes chances and is given a greater zest for living in doing so.

(Smith 1993: 307)

²⁰ Smith is also correct in pointing out that there was a 'break' in this pattern in the early twentieth century, during which tests and trials in children’s literature became less demanding. This is 'indicative of the spirit of the early twentieth century, which did not emphasise involvement of the child in serious dilemmas' (1993: 227).
However, while Smith sees this as specific to fantasy, I would argue that, in different ways, realist writers may also make use of it. All four writers, as we shall see, employ various different types of quest, test and trial to enable their child characters to mature and develop their potential (as Rousseau says, ‘We begin to learn when we begin to live; our education begins with ourselves’ (1762/1911: 9)).

Charlie undergoes an exciting adventure in the first of the two novels about him (C & C Factory 1964), but here there is more emphasis on what is happening to him and what is going on around him. It is in the sequel, The Great Glass Elevator (1973), that Charlie is more active and we witness the development of his skills and abilities. Throughout the two novels, Charlie develops from a quiet, poverty-stricken little boy, whose greatest wish is to have a bar of chocolate, to a space-exploring factory owner who tackles ‘Vermicious Knids’ and helps to rescue both the Spacehotel staff and his grandparents from terrible fates: ‘“Charlie!” cried Mr Wonka, grasping him by the hand. “What would we do without you? You’re brilliant!” ’ (GGE p189).

James’ adventure (J & GP 1961) has similarities with Charlie’s, in that he develops numerous skills (flying a giant peach across the Atlantic, while tending to his sometimes infantile insect friends en route), and also confidence in his abilities. In both cases, however, despite the emphasis on growing and learning, this growing-up process happens within just a few days. Rowling and Jones, in contrast, place more emphasis on the gradual process of development – Harry Potter and the Chrestomanci novels are series, not one-off novels. Consequently, they have far more time and space in which to depict their protagonists’ maturation (especially Rowling’s series, which progresses sequentially from year to year). Not only this, but in the case of Charlie and James, despite the emergence of confidence, the focus is more on external abilities. Rowling and Jones, as we shall see, combine this with more detailed psychological development.
For the first eleven years of his life, Harry is not only ordinary, but made to feel inferior. Even when he discovers his wizarding powers, it is always clear that these abilities must be learned and developed gradually; as Hagrid tells Harry on their first shopping trip: ‘“...yeh couldn’t work any of them curses yet, yeh’ll need a lot more study before yeh get to that level”’ (Philosopher’s Stone 1997 p62). Later, Hagrid reassures Harry: ‘“Don’t you worry, Harry. You’ll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you’ll be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it’s hard”’ (Philosopher’s Stone p66). Jones’ Cat, who features in several novels, is, like Harry, destined for great things. He too sometimes lacks confidence, and fears having too many challenges too soon:

I *hate* responsibility! As he fled invisibly back to the playroom, he thought. Why *me*?

(Mixed Magics 2000 p42)

...he used to watch this Chrestomanci rather anxiously in case Chrestomanci showed signs of losing his last two lives and thrusting Cat into all the huge responsibility of looking after the magic in this world.

(Mixed Magics pp44-5)

The potential is there, but it does not emerge instantly or fully-fledged; it is a *process* which requires patience and perseverance, and may incite much frustration and fear en route.

Both boys undergo progressive change and development. When Harry first arrives at Hogwarts and awaits the Sorting Hat, he ‘didn’t feel brave or quick-witted or any of it at the moment. If only the hat had mentioned a house for people who felt a bit queasy, that would have been the one for him’ (Philosopher’s Stone p89). By the end of the second book, however (Chamber of Secrets 1998), this queasy person ‘offers himself in death for the benefit of his community’ (De Rosa 2003: 182). Similarly, in the fourth book, Goblet of Fire (2000), Cedric lists the reasons why Harry should win the Triwizard Cup:
"You should win. That's twice you've saved my neck in there....You told me about the drag...ns....You stayed behind to get all the hostages..." (pp549-50). Harry is not only brave and talented, however, but also humble, with a sense of fair play which forces him to insist that he and Cedric share the Cup.

How, then, does Harry undergo, as De Rosa says, 'the change in identity from an unwanted and disempowered nephew to a potentially powerful wizard' (2003: 173)? It is worth pointing out that Harry actually undergoes a process of development and maturation rather than a complete 'change in identity'. Frequently, unsophisticated 'childlike' qualities develop into mature and sophisticated ones. In Philosopher's Stone, when Harry realises that the 'grubby little package from vault seven hundred and thirteen' in Gringotts is now at Hogwarts and being guarded by a three-headed dog, both he and Ron display childlike curiosity: 'they spent a lot of time wondering what could possibly need such heavy protection' (pp120;121). Eventually, however, this childlike curiosity develops into a mature and sophisticated ability to work out what is going on. Not only this, but Harry also moves from a titillating self-interest, to a realisation of danger and a desire to save himself from Voldemort (p190), and eventually to an unselfish and self-sacrificing concern to save Hogwarts and the entire magical world from evil forces:

"SO WHAT?" Harry shouted. "Don't you understand? If Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort's coming back!....There won't be any Hogwarts left to get expelled from! He'll flatten it, or turn it into a school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn't matter any more, can't you see? D'you think he'll leave you and your families alone if Gryffindor win the House Cup?....I'm never going over to the Dark Side! I'm going through that trapdoor tonight and nothing you two say is going to stop me!"

(Philosopher's Stone pp196-7)

Despite the unfailing support of Ron and Hermione, the realisation of responsibility and the need to act, rather than merely speculate and get excited, is far more acute in Harry than his friends: 'Maybe it was because they hadn't seen what Harry had seen in
the Forest, or because they didn’t have scars burning on their foreheads, but Ron and Hermione didn’t seem as worried... The idea of Voldemort certainly scared them, but he didn’t keep visiting them in dreams...' (Philosopher’s Stone p191). Rowling’s protagonist is a combination of ‘learner’ and archetypal ‘chosen one’: as the story of his parents’ death emphasises, it is always clear that he is special and possesses talent superior to that of his peers, but he is also recognisably human and requires a process of maturation in order to realise his potential.

This point applies equally to Jones’ Cat. He too is both special and human. While Harry grows up initially knowing nothing of the magical world, Cat, in contrast, is fully aware of it but has not managed even the simplest spells (unaware at this point that his sister is siphoning his powers): ‘‘I can’t do it,’’ Cat explained. ‘‘Spells just don’t work for me....I couldn’t even turn buttons into gold. And that was simple’’’ (Charmed Life 1977 p84). Initially Cat must be forced to try: when Chrestomanci and Saunders insist that he undoes one of his sister’s spells, he finds ‘to his astonishment’ that it works (ibid p137).

Like Harry, Cat must be subjected, not only to magic school, but to terrifying challenges in order for his abilities to emerge. When the Nostrum brothers attack, demanding to know ‘‘Why shouldn’t we go out and conquer other worlds? Why shouldn’t we be as wicked as we want?’’ (Charmed Life p223), it is the resultant fear which triggers Cat’s powers: ‘Cat was so terrified that he somehow managed to break the spell’ (ibid p225). Like Harry Potter, it takes a frightening encounter with the forces of evil magic for the even more powerful forces of good magic to emerge in the protagonist. This need for a challenge is echoed by Polly (Jones’ Fire and Hemlock 1985): ‘it’s not just strength that heroes need. They need courage and good skills and timing. They need something to make the adrenaline flow’ (p102).
It is significant that Harry and Cat are almost always scared and uncertain. They are not by no means flawless heroes, but they push through their fears and do what they have to do. K.P. Smith sees this as typical of the late twentieth century ‘dynamic’ fantasy characters:

Dynamic characters are often confronted with the prospect of dealing with their own personal fears in the face of the required and desired alternative of bravery. The presence and recognition of fear assists in making the character believable. The dynamic hero has the added burden of trying to resolve this in terms of bravery, for the very role of being “chosen” for the task makes him special. But “special” children are still able to experience fear.

(Smith 1993: 324)

This is perhaps one of the most notable differences between Harry and Cat on one hand and Dahl’s Charlie and James on the other - the latter two do not experience fear in the same way or, if they do, it is not revealed to the reader quite so explicitly. Their characters consequently have less depth and complexity.

Harry’s quests in particular are always a struggle, both physically and psychologically, but always end in triumph, though sometimes at a cost. His fears and uncertainties undoubtedly encourage reader-identification - Harry is not simply an inherent hero, but someone who can encourage readers to overcome their own fears and develop various skills and abilities. As De Rosa says: ‘...readers can leave their secure “homes” and journey with Harry as he struggles [my emphasis] to learn about himself, his position in the world, and the world about him. On this journey together, young readers and their heroic protagonist can face the dark, difficult trials necessary to survive in an adult world, whether wizardly or Muggle, and gain new insights....’ (De Rosa 2003: 183).

It is not only the process of actual journeys and adventures which is important, but also the psychological journeys. There are various characters who do not actually travel anywhere, but nonetheless journey psychologically. Matilda, as we know, has gifted intelligence which shows itself early in her life, but she still undergoes a process of
developing this intelligence and the psychological strength that appears to accompany it: ‘By the time she was three, Matilda had taught herself to read by studying newspapers and magazines...At the age of four she could read fast and well and she naturally began hankering after books’ *(Matilda* 1988 p5). Mind-expansion through books, therefore, is Matilda’s first journey: ‘The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives’ (p16) (though the narrator does become rather preachy about the benefits of reading; see also *C & C Factory* pp169-172).

Jones’ Tonino (*Magicians of Caprona* 1980) also finds that books play an important part in helping him through growing-up traumas, though, in both cases, this may also be a form of self-advertising on the part of the authors. For Tonino, reading provides comfort, confidence and an introduction to other ways of living. He ‘continued to be slow at learning spells and not particularly quick at school’ but nonetheless ‘reading a book soon became an enchantment above any spell. He could never get enough of it’. Born in a world where magic is the norm, Tonino expands his mind by immersing himself in adventures where other skills must be used: ‘...the best book would be about the unimaginable situation where there were no spells. For Tonino preferred fantasy. In his favourite books, people had wild adventures with no magic to help or hinder them’ (pp30-1).

For Matilda, books also ‘give her a view of life that [her parents] had never seen’ (p23) and begin to give her the ability not only to transcend the psychological effects of her abuse, but also to see clearly that it is her parents who are to blame, not herself. Though Matilda is always presented as gifted and unusual (unlike Charlie, whose wisdom and maturity are attributed to all children (*C & CF* pp56-7)), the narrator nonetheless gives quite explicit encouragement to the child reader to journey, psychologically, with the protagonist: ‘Most children in Matilda’s place would have burst into tears. She didn’t do this. She sat there very still and white and thoughtful. She seemed to know that neither
crying nor sulking ever got anyone anywhere’ (p35). There is, again, a slight tendency to preach, but nonetheless the aim seems to be to encourage readers to discover the power of their ‘wonderfully subtle mind[s]’ as Matilda does (p35).

The majority of Fine’s novels also concentrate on developing the power of the mind through psychological tests and journeys rather than literal ones. Just as Matilda learns how to free herself, psychologically, from her parents’ oppressive behaviour, *The Tulip Touch*’s (1996) Natalie undergoes a similar process in freeing herself from the psychological hold that Tulip has over her. For Natalie this involves re-claiming her own power. Though the novel stresses its criticism of adults who do not do enough to help Tulip, Natalie also realises that allowing Tulip to ‘guilt-trip’ her, and so have complete power and control over her, is not beneficial for either of them.

This is not, however, an easy process and it takes Natalie several years of self-analysis: ‘So was it pity drew me back? Time and again, I’d almost gather up the strength to break away, and something would happen to stop me in my tracks’ (p103). Natalie eventually begins to realise that, much as she pities her friend, Tulip’s power over her will drag *her* down, rather than help Tulip up. As ‘slowly, slowly, I came to my full senses at last’ (p114) Natalie’s experiences over several years give her the psychological strength and maturity to save herself. However, it is not just the process of reaching this decision which is slow and gradual; so, too, is the recovery period afterwards:

> It was like coming out of hospital. You don’t get straight back into being yourself. It takes a little time. And just as someone with a broken foot gingerly tests it each morning to see how much pressure it can take, I stretched things a little further every day.

(p121)

Natalie’s advice to herself here echoes that of Hagrid, reassuring Harry that the potential (whether it be magical, physical, psychological or any other) is there, but it must be developed slowly.
While characters such as Harry Potter, Charlie and James are pursuing more obvious adventures, there are, therefore, many characters, in both the fantasy and realist texts, who undergo psychological journeys without necessarily engaging in a physical adventure. They all, in their different ways, experience (and learn and grow from) the trials and quests discussed by K.P. Smith, and invite readers to ‘travel’ with them. All four writers therefore show great faith in the sophisticated potential of the child, and this highlights the way in which both fantasy and realism can engage with similar issues, and express similar attitudes in different ways.

This idea of children undergoing various adventures and challenges through which they ‘cut their teeth’ and begin to grow up suggests that these novels could be a form of bildungsroman for children. I would agree with Buckley, who believes that the term bildungsroman ‘escapes precise definition’, but uses it to refer to the following types of novel: ‘the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation, even the life-novel’ (1974: vii-viii). My own understanding, as it applies to these children’s books, is that the term bildungsroman need not apply exclusively to novels in which the protagonists are fully matured at the end. Rather, it can refer to stories in which the central character undergoes a learning experience, or more than one, through which he or she emerges with both strength and wisdom and, consequently, a greatly enhanced ability to cope with life’s challenges. Watson and Meek’s Coming of Age in Children’s Literature (2002) discusses similar ideas in terms of the ‘maturation novel’. Maturation is often shown to be a continuous process ‘that consists of living and learning as you live, so that you can live better’ (2002: 121).

This point could be applied to many of the most significant children’s books over the last two hundred years: for instance, the Alice novels (1865; 1872) and The Water Babies (1863) show child characters increasing in strength and wisdom. However, it seems to be a particular feature of post-1960s children’s literature to show that
childhood can be difficult and traumatic, and this contrasts with previous eras, most significantly the early twentieth century. Child protagonists in the Victorian era were given some freedom to explore and experience challenges, but children’s stories from the turn of the century until about the 1960s are set in:

....a world of delight and innocence, which is described lovingly and nostalgically....Childhood, it seems was the best of all possible states. This is the literary world of Edith Nesbit, Arthur Ransome, Eleanor Estes, Lois Lenski, Noel Streatfield, Lucy Boston, William Mayne, and many others.

(Egoff 1980: 417)

Egoff’s arguments about late twentieth-century realism for children apply equally to the fantasy texts in this thesis: ‘the children in children’s books nowadays face real dangers and childhood is no longer synonymous with “the happy time”. A second corollary is a fascination with “growing up”. Growing up now tends to be visualized as a testing of soul and spirit, to be worked out through emotional “rites of passage”…’ (Egoff 1981: 41). In a later chapter, Egoff goes on to make similar points about fantasy, particularly with regard to child protagonists who are ‘chosen’ for special tasks and have little choice in the matter: ‘It seems therefore that the carefree quality which one associates with children is frequently negated....The children are not engaged in a happy, sunny adventure, but in a “game of dark” ’ (1981: 96-7).

Maria Nikolajeva confirms that, in the work of Jones, ‘Childhood and adolescence are not safe and stable places, contrary to the Romantic, idealizing view of the innocent child’ (Nikolajeva 2002: 31). However, it must again be emphasised that, though these writers contrast strongly with their early twentieth-century counterparts in showing the challenges and traumas of childhood, this is not done with pessimism. Apart from Fine’s Tulip, these children have the ability, not only to survive, but to learn and develop through life’s challenges: this clarifies the point made in chapter four that they are not victims.
Freedom versus Guidance

However, despite these novels' belief in the sophisticated potential of children and the undertaking of difficult actual and psychological adventures, the children are rarely shown to manage entirely alone. Chapter two looked at the necessity for adult support; it is now worth examining exactly what type of guidance they get and how it helps them (or does not, as the case may be). In particular, it is important to consider how adult characters negotiate the balance between freedom and guidance. Though this is very much a contemporary issue, it is also something which has been debated for centuries.

Both Locke and Rousseau advocated a middle-ground between the two extremes of absolute freedom and excessive control. For Locke, maintaining this balance between freedom and authority was the central part of his philosophy of education:

To avoid the danger that is on either hand is the great art; and he that has found a way to keep up a child's spirit easy, active and free and yet at the same time to restrain him from many things he has a mind to, and to draw him to things that are uneasy to him, he, I say, that knows how to reconcile these seeming contradictions has in my opinion got the true secret of education.

(1693/1996: 33)

Rousseau emphasises a certain amount of freedom, self-reliance and first-hand experience: the tutor 'must not give precepts, but must let the scholar find them out for himself' (1762/1911:19). Allowing the child a good deal of experience means that 'my pupil will hurt himself oftener than yours, but he will always be merry', and also strong and self-reliant (ibid: 42). However, complete freedom is not in the child's best interests: Rousseau's aim, like Locke's, is for 'well-regulated liberty' (my emphasis) (ibid: 56).21

The argument regarding how much freedom and how much guidance children should have continues today, as we have seen in chapter one, particularly with regard to increasing child liberation and reactions against it. Blustein, writing in the early 1980s, stresses that the development of self-determination and autonomy is a gradual process.

21 I am aware that there are also many differences in the philosophies of Locke and Rousseau, but in terms of the issues I am discussing, they make similar points.
He also points out that ‘the ideal of autonomy [is not] promoted by giving children of all ages the right to be free of all adult control’ (Blustein 1982: 10). Thus, just as chapter two showed that overindulgence can be damaging to children, so excessive freedom is also not in their best interests.

K.P. Smith discusses the way in which contemporary children’s books, even fantasy ones, usually show children receiving adult assistance. This is in order to achieve an impression of necessary realism:

Contemporary authors do offer characters some assistance in overcoming danger, though it is expected that the initiative should come from the child. Assistance is necessary not only for the ultimate accomplishment of goals, but also because the frustration in achieving these goals is so overpowering. It would, in effect, be unrealistic of authors to expect children to complete missions (particularly in stories where missions are extremely difficult) without aid.

(Smith 1993: 320-1)

Dahl’s James is probably the child who has the most freedom and the least guidance, but even he does not manage entirely alone. James’ first adult guide is the old man who gives him a bag of magic ‘green things’ so that ‘“marvellous things will start happening to you, fabulous, unbelievable things - and you will never be miserable again in your life. Because you are miserable, aren’t you?....I know all about it!” ’ (p207). The old man certainly combines freedom with guidance: James is left to use the magic ‘things’ alone, and initially makes a mistake, though in the long run this is not detrimental. It is, however, the old man who decides, for whatever reason, that James is ready for this responsibility and the adventure that goes with it.

James does not, therefore, initiate his own adventure and growing-up process, nor does he end it alone: the Mayor of New York and ‘all the important people of the City’ (p340) welcome him to New York, rescue the giant peach and set up James’ new home (chapter 39). Dahl’s Charlie, however, receives considerably more support than James. The first few chapters of C & C Factory establish that Charlie’s family is supportive.
and loving; despite this, however, they are not overprotective. Charlie’s parents and grandparents encourage him in his quest to win a golden ticket; they want him to have this adventure: ‘All the parents and grandparents in the room were actually just as tense and excited as Charlie was, although they were pretending to be very calm’ (p41). They not only encourage adventure, but actually share his excitement. This is particularly true of Grandpa Joe, who informs Charlie that ‘“I’m just as keen as you are to find that ticket!” ’ (p50); later the sheer joy that Grandpa Joe feels when Charlie does win the ticket enables him to walk for the first time in twenty years (p66).

This is a family who not only do not hold Charlie back, but actively encourage him on the road of exploration and adventure. This is confirmed at the end of the first novel and the beginning of the sequel when they allow Charlie to inherit the factory. Nonetheless, this encouragement does not mean that they let Charlie explore and develop alone: Grandpa Joe accompanies him to the factory, while the whole family travel together in the Great Glass Elevator.

Of course, as well as his family, Charlie’s adventures are always in the hands of Willy Wonka. There are remarkable similarities between Wonka, Jones’ Chrestomanci and Rowling’s Dumbledore: in their own individual ways, they are all variations of the ‘wise wizard’, as we have seen in chapter three, providing guidance and protection yet also allowing the children to undertake adventures and learning experiences. Our first introduction to Willy Wonka is Grandpa Joe’s discussion of his amazing inventions (C & C Factory pp20-1), which immediately establish him as out of the ordinary. This is confirmed when we actually meet him: ‘And oh, how clever he looked! How quick and sharp and full of life!’ (p78). Like Grandpa Joe, Wonka wants the chosen children to experience ‘mystic and marvellous surprises that will entrance, delight, intrigue, astonish and perplex you beyond measure’ (p69). Nonetheless, he is in control of what they will experience, and it is only by his permission that the adventure begins at all.
Throughout this first *Charlie* novel, Willy Wonka’s control is always apparent, and he delights in it:

“Row on!” shouted Mr Wonka, jumping up and waving his stick in the air. “Full speed ahead!” And with the Oompa-Loompas rowing faster than ever, the boat shot into the pitch-dark tunnel....[Wonka] seemed to love the sensation of whizzing through a white tunnel in a pink boat on a chocolate river, and he clapped his hands and laughed and kept glancing at his passengers to see if they were enjoying it as much as he.

(p108)

He also reveals information only when he wants to: ‘ “There’s no time to answer to silly questions!” ’ (p110) (and has a convenient selective deafness). The film in particular stresses the way in which Wonka deliberately does not *force* the children to do what he wants, but waits to see what their own response is: the film character frequently *asks* the children not to do certain things, but in a quiet, understated manner which is not accompanied by any action (Stuart 1971). This is not weakness on Wonka’s part, but a deliberately designed test, carried out with humorous detachment: as he says in the novel, ‘ “Well, well, well...two naughty little children gone. Three good little children left...” ’ (p128). When three become one, ‘Mr Wonka suddenly exploded with excitement. “But my dear boy,” he cried out, “that means you’ve won!” ’ (p173) and so confirms his test.

In terms of developing potential, Wonka appears to be discovering what type of potential each child has, or does not have, and whether or not it does develop appropriately in these circumstances. It should also be pointed out that the other children, rather than being inherently ‘not good enough’, have had their potential quite literally spoilt by their overindulgent parents. Charlie is the only one who still has the appropriate qualities eventually to be able to take over the factory. Wonka states at the end of the first novel that these qualities include innocent openmindedness, and the *willingness* to learn, develop and be guided (which is what the spoilt children lack), rather then someone who assumes that they have already ‘arrived’ and know it all.
already: ‘ “I don’t want a grown-up person at all. A grown-up won’t listen to me; he
won’t learn....So I have to have a child. I want a good, sensible loving child....” ’ (p183).
The journey itself is therefore essential, as is the appropriate balance of freedom and
guidance: the rest of Charlie’s family ‘ “can all help to run [the factory] until Charlie is
old enough to do it himself!” ’ (p184).

In Jones’ Charmed Life (amongst other Jones novels), Chrestomanci and his assistant
Mr Saunders are also very much in control of the children’s pace of learning:

“There’s one absolute rule in this Castle....No witchcraft of any kind is
to be practised by children unless Michael Saunders is here to
supervise you.”

(Charmed Life p52)

“I’ll have to get the Examining Board to revise their Elementary
Magic Courses,” Chrestomanci called... “to include more theory. These
hedge-wizards push their good pupils straight onto advanced work
without any proper grounding at all.”

(ibid p82)

(this prefigures some of the rules at Hogwarts).

The arrogant child - Cat’s sister, Gwendolen - is, like C & C Factory’s spoilt children,
not willing to accept guidance and teaching and so finds herself subjected to a harsher
control. This is carried out with a humorous detachment which echoes that of Willy
Wonka and, in both cases, emphasises the adult’s feeling of control:

“I’m getting rather sick of Chrestomanci forbidding things,” said
Gwendolen. “It’s time someone taught him a lesson.”

(ibid p63)

“It’s a pity,” said Chrestomanci, “that you were taught by a hedge-
wizard. You’ll have to unlearn such a lot. And it’s a pity that I’ve no
right to open your letters. I hope you don’t get too many, or my
conscience will give me no peace.” “You intend to go on!” Gwendolen
said. “Then watch out. I warn you!” “That is very considerate of you,”
said Chrestomanci. “I like to be warned.”

(ibid p86)
In contrast Cat, like Charlie, proves himself most open to this adult guidance: ‘Cat was impressed [by the disciplining of Gwendolen]. He suspected that Mr Saunders was a rather powerful magician’ (ibid p56). Cat trusts the teaching and guidance of Chrestomanci and Saunders and, consequently, is able to be trusted by them. On the whole, while Gwendolen is subjected to more and more prohibitions, Cat, for the most part, is welcomed into Chrestomanci’s world and invited to learn and discover: ‘Oh hallo,’ [Chrestomanci] said.... ‘Like to come up and have a look at Michael’s workshop?’ .... “Hallo Eric,” [Mr Saunders] said. “Have a look round....Would you like to learn what all this is about?”’ (ibid pp82; 83).

Both Cat and Charlie subsequently begin to develop a different relationship with their ‘teachers’. In The Great Glass Elevator, now that Charlie has passed the prerequisite ‘test’ and proved himself willing to learn and be guided, Wonka relaxes his control and allows Charlie more freedom and autonomy. Charlie, who is overawed and reasonably quiet in the first novel, asks more questions in the sequel, and Wonka gives him far more detailed information as to how things work and what is going on. This knowledge, combined with Wonka’s faith in the boy’s potential, gives Charlie more power and less dependence, so that eventually it becomes a process of teamwork between the two (and sometimes Grandpa Joe). There is a sharp contrast between this teamwork and the situation in the first novel, where the children and their parents must follow Wonka and are very much kept in a state of dependence.

Cat is also being trained eventually to take over Chrestomanci’s position and he, too, becomes more than just a trainee. When Chrestomanci’s powers are temporarily overridden, it is he who requires Cat’s help:

“Cat,” said Chrestomanci... “Cat, I know how you’re feeling....But you are an enchanter. I suspect that you’re a stronger enchanter than I am when you set your mind to it. Could you use some of your magic, before someone catches poor Fiddle? Please. As a great favour.”

(Charmed Life pp232-3)
Despite his powers, Cat still requires encouragement and instruction from Chrestomanci in order to be able to use them, and eventually the two work together, as do Charlie and Wonka.

Dumbledore’s care of Harry is more all-encompassing than either Wonka or Chrestomanci, and begins in Harry’s infancy when his parents are killed. Our first introduction to Harry, before he even enters the story, is through Dumbledore, who makes the decisions regarding what is best for the newly orphaned child: staying in the wizard world and growing up with his fame “would be enough to turn any boy’s head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won’t even remember! Can’t you see how much better off he’ll be, growing up away from all that before he’s ready to take it?” (Philosopher’s Stone pp15-16). Dumbledore’s adult wisdom and maturity decide what is best for the child’s development, and this is to continue throughout Harry’s life, though he is not, as we have seen in chapter three, entirely infallible.

It is clear, however, that there are different types of adult. In Philosopher’s Stone, during the several months in which Harry, Ron and Hermione are trying to solve the mystery of the stone, Hagrid frequently warns them that they are “meddlin’ in things that don’ concern yeh. It’s dangerous. You forget that dog, an’ you forget what it’s guardin’...” (p142). The children, however, take no notice. The process of discovery, and of their own growing-up journey, therefore involves not just independence but also rebelliousness. They do not, however, disobey Dumbledore, and it seems unlikely that they ever would.

It seems that, for Rowling, only a certain type of adult is able to take charge of what is best for the children. Hagrid, though loveable, does not fit this description, and his bumbling nature is emphasised by the fact that, each time he warns the children to leave the stone alone, he accidentally gives them further information which increases their
interest. The children seem to know instinctively which adults know what is best for them, and which make mistakes and can therefore be disobeyed. It is also important to point out here that Harry also frequently disobeys the Dursleys. Thus, adults are not inherently entitled (or able) to provide the right kind of safety net, and there are various reasons why some cannot (malice and well-intentioned incompetence being two examples). It could also be seen as quite revolutionary that the children are given the power to judge the adults and choose who they listen to (which also allows child readers to judge these characters in the same way).

Perhaps one of our first signs that Dumbledore is an adult who usually knows what Harry needs is his initially anonymous Christmas gift to Harry: his (Harry’s) father’s invisibility cloak, with a note which states ‘It is time it was returned to you. Use it well’ (Philosopher’s Stone p148). The final line echoes continuously throughout Harry’s mind (Philosopher’s Stone pp150-1); Dumbledore is not, therefore, simply acting to protect Harry, but giving him the means to protect himself. This first novel continues with a process by which Dumbledore subtly lets Harry know what items and skills will be of use to him when he faces Voldemort, without Harry’s having any awareness of what is going on. As well as the invisibility cloak, Dumbledore also explains how the Mirror of Erised works: ‘“If you ever do run across it, you will now be prepared”’ (p157). This, it seems, is Dumbledore’s role: to give Harry the freedom and independence to explore and develop and undertake various tasks by himself, but always with the underlying safety net of Dumbledore’s support and wisdom.

Matilda’s Miss Honey, though not a ‘wise wizard’ character as such, takes a similar stance towards her pupils. She is not able to provide absolute protection from Miss Trunchbull, as Dumbledore cannot provide absolute protection from Voldemort, but she equips her pupils with necessary pieces of advice to help them protect themselves as much as possible:
“Let me for your own good tell you something about Miss Trunchbull. She insists upon strict discipline throughout the school, and if you take my advice you will do your very best to behave yourselves in her presence...I myself,” Miss Honey went on, “want to help you to learn as much as possible while you are in this class....it will make things easier for you later on.”

(p63)

The aim, then, is to help children psychologically as well as practically. De Rosa refers to Dumbledore as a ‘mentor’ (2003: 176; 177) who helps Harry with insight and understanding (ibid 177). De Rosa is here referring specifically to the way Dumbledore helps Harry come to terms with his grief regarding his parents, but the idea can be applied more broadly. Physically, Dumbledore features only occasionally in the novels (something I myself did not fully appreciate until I saw the film), but when Harry does encounter him he provides emotional support and wisdom which pervade Harry’s mind and provide invaluable help long after the encounter has passed. Once again, the emphasis is on helping Harry help himself, practically, mentally and emotionally: small ‘doses’ of Dumbledore aid Harry’s development towards independence, rather than creating dependence.

This is something which has featured in children’s literature before the current era: Mrs Sowerby’s advice in Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden (1911) is spasmodic, as is Christopher Robin’s help in A.A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh books (1926; 1928). In J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit (1937) Gandalf also helps Bilbo Baggins before disappearing for a while. However, Egoff believes this is particularly typical of fantasy in the late twentieth century: frequently there is a ‘surrogate parent figure’ but ‘this dependency is not overdone. Once the young protagonists have been instructed in the needs of the quest, they must complete it on their own’ (Egoff 1981: 97).

De Rosa also discusses the ways in which Rowling both conforms to and subverts traditional initiation patterns in literature. One typical feature is the sometimes distressing move from the safety of the home environment to ‘enter an unknown and
often threatening environment that no longer shields the initiate from life’s harsh realities. By having Harry leave the Dursleys to live at Hogwarts and / or with the Weasley family, Rowling inverts the traditional paradigm as she introduces Harry to the domestic safety and childhood nurture that life with the Dursleys precluded’ (De Rosa 2003: 165).

I would argue that, in doing this, Rowling is suggesting that the ‘safety-net’ of ‘domestic safety and childhood nurture’ is a necessary prerequisite to exploration and eventual independence. Thus it is precisely because Harry moves away from an abusive environment to the nurturing Hogwarts that he is then able to mature and develop, and undertake challenging and dangerous tasks. In this environment, he knows that he is free to ‘grow’, safe in the knowledge of an underlying support:

Harry’s heart did a somersault.
"Dumbledore?"...There was no mistaking that silver beard. Harry could have laughed out loud with relief. There was simply no way that Snape would dare to try and hurt him if Dumbledore was watching.

(Philosopher’s Stone p163)

Harry turned to look where Neville was staring. Directly above them, framed in the doorway from the Brain Room, stood Albus Dumbledore, his wand aloft, his face white and furious. Harry felt a kind of electric charge surge through every particle of his body - they were saved.

(Order of the Phoenix 2003 p710)

As Blustein says, ‘It is only when children’s welfare-rights [the right to be cared for] have been secured and respected that their option-rights [the right to freedom of action] can be meaningfully asserted and exercised’ (Blustein 1982: 10).

In the same way, it could be argued that a child such as Fine’s Tulip is perpetually ‘stuck’ in childhood trauma because the lack of ‘domestic safety and childhood nurture’ denies her the confidence and ability to move forward and develop. For Harry, on the other hand, there is a pattern throughout the novels whereby his ability to stand up to the Dursleys steadily increases each year: this confidence is undoubtedly connected to the
increasing nurture and security he receives at Hogwarts, and also from the Weasleys. In Dahl’s *Matilda*, too, the love and care that Matilda receives from Miss Honey corresponds with an increasing resistance to her parents’ oppressive treatment of her and, eventually, the confidence to leave them.

However, in Rowling’s *Order of the Phoenix*, our perspective on Dumbledore may change slightly. He not only makes a mistake, which costs Sirius his life, but admits that the reason for this mistake was his love for Harry, and desire to keep protecting him:

“I cared about you too much,” said Dumbledore simply. “I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who love to act.”

*(Order of the Phoenix p739)*

Thus, Harry is now fifteen (nearly sixteen by the end of this novel), and needed to know exactly what was going on. Dumbledore’s desire to keep him as an innocent child ends up being a grave and fatal mistake. For the first time, Dumbledore has overprotected Harry: consequently, Harry did not have the necessary knowledge and information when he needed it. This, as well as stressing Dumbledore’s ‘human-ness’ (discussed in chapter three), emphasises the importance of helping the child or teenager help himself, and letting him grow up. The growing child / teenager, in both literary and real situations, will be exposed to increasing challenges and dangers, whether the parent or guardian likes it or not. The best course of action, therefore, is to prepare them for what will inevitably come.

Willy Wonka also makes mistakes, particularly in the sequel. These mistakes, as we have seen in chapter three, stem from a child-like overexcitement (a little like Hagrid’s) rather than love but, in both cases, it is an excess of emotion which causes the problem. This emphasises the need for self-control on the part of the adult. The difference is that, while Dumbledore’s mistake (overprotectiveness) has grave consequences, Willy
Wonka's mistakes (which we might term underprotectiveness) enable Charlie to come into his own. Both Harry and Charlie have begun to grow up and they are now ready for less guidance and more exposure.

J.K. Rowling confirmed in a recent interview with Jeremy Paxman that she thinks it is very important for children and child characters to be allowed to grow up. The Peter-Pan attitude, in contrast, is something she finds disturbing, and not in children's best interests: 'I find it quite sinister, looking back at the Famous Five books, for example: I think they had twenty-one adventures; they never had a hormonal impulse...'. Paxman points out that this is 'the usual pattern of children's books, isn't it? I think Swallows & Amazons was the same. Children never age'. Rowling agrees, pointing out that the ultimate example is of course Peter Pan, but again states that 'I find that very sinister' (BBC2, 19 June 2003). Rowling does not follow Fine in giving us a horrifyingly 'realistic' portrait of an abused child, but she does understand the importance of allowing the child to move into adolescence and adulthood.

Fine's Goggle Eyes (1989) also shows the way in which sentimental and self-indulgent emotion on the part of the adult can hinder the child's potential. Chapter four discussed the way in which sentimentalisation can quash individuality, but it can also inhibit the child's development of confidence and competence. There are various incidents in which the slightly more detached approach of Gerald (the mother's new partner) succeeds in developing the potential of Kitty and Jude more effectively than their mother's more sentimental attitude. Kitty clarifies quite early on that her mother wants to cling to the idea that she (Kitty) is an eternal child: '[Mum] doesn't like anyone to suggest...that, one day, I might be old enough to go to a pub without being sent home to bed. For someone to imply ...that I might be on the verge of growing out of fizzy lemonade, well, that was more than she could handle' (p26).

---

22 Chapter four pointed out that Rosie (Kitty's and Jude's mother) does not polarise her children as angels or demons. However, she does occasionally 'baby' the younger child in particular.
The first time Gerald is left alone with the girls, he suggests that Jude does the washing up, fully aware that she is capable of this task: ‘“She’s got arms, hasn’t she? She can reach in the sink?”’ He rejects the idea that being the youngest should free her from such responsibilities and, though Kitty agrees, she tells us that ‘at this point, Jude always puts on her pathetic waif face, and Mum goes all riddled with guilt and says something like: “Oh, well. Maybe tomorrow. But I’ll take a turn for her tonight since she’s not very good at it”’ (pp121-2). Gerald, however, is ‘immune to the pathetic little waif face’ (p122) and focuses instead on Jude’s capability and his own responsibility to help her realise it. Consequently, Jude not only does as she is told, but ends up ‘grinning proudly’ and willingly agreeing to do more (p124).

This emphasises, not only that the child cannot realise her potential without the adult’s help, but that it requires considerable emotional control on the part of the latter. It also supports Nodelman’s point that children fulfil our expectations of them, whether positive or negative (discussed in chapter four, p197). Ribbens’ research - on real-life situations - found that some mothers realised the importance of thinking beyond their spontaneous emotions: ‘the mother may feel she must control her own feelings and emotions to produce good mothering. Thus [one mother] believed that at times she herself should not act on her emotional feelings as a mother, but should consciously seek to develop other ways of behaving with her children’ (for the child’s own good) (Ribbens 1995: 71).

Jones’ Magicians of Caprona shows us that an excess of overprotectiveness can be caused by other reasons as well as sentimentality. All the Montana children are ‘protected’ from the rival family (the Petrocchis): ‘Their children are sent to different schools and warned never, ever to exchange a word with a child from the other house’ (p8). The Montanas’ attempts to protect their eldest daughter from the Petrocchis would, had they been successful, have denied Rosa the love of her life (a Petrocchi man). This
may be caused in part by wanting to ‘baby’ her, but it is also due very much to their own self-interest (continuing the feud) disguised as protection for Rosa. Rosa, like Harry Potter with Hagrid and the Dursleys, seems to know instinctively that her family’s judgement is incorrect, and that it is right for her to override their protectiveness and assert herself: ‘When the argument raged loudest, [Rosa] would shake the blond hair on her shoulders and smile. “To listen to you all,” she said, “anyone would think I have no say in the matter at all. It’s really funny”’ (p34). Thus, Rosa too is given the power to judge the adults and decide what she will and will not respond to. She does, however, initially keep her choice secret, until Chrestomanci declares the real reason for the family’s so-called protectiveness: ‘“The young ones of both families are luckily less bigoted than the rest of you....I’d hoped someone would see reason.”’ (pp247; 248) (this also suggests the Romantic / Original Innocence view of superior wisdom in the children).

Rosa’s family, however, are similar to Dumbledore in that, with Chrestomanci’s help, they do eventually realise their mistake and learn from it. This emphasises that adults, too, must undergo a learning process, and that learning how to help may often be a course of trial and error. It is also, like the child’s maturation, a continuous process: there is no one ‘right’ mode of help which, once discovered, can be held onto. Rather, the adult must grow with the child and adjust the type of guidance accordingly.

In Fine’s The Granny Project (1983), this trial and error process on both sides is very apparent. However, this novel also stresses that, despite the need for relinquishing or reducing control when appropriate, equally, too much freedom too soon is detrimental. It is also made clear that it is beneficial for freedom-hungry children to learn this. The Harris children want to stop Granny being put into a home, and initially engage in manipulative scheming to get their way. Eventually the parents step back and allow the children complete freedom to care for Granny as they wish; in so doing, they must put
aside any protective feelings in order to teach their children this important lesson. Ivan, Sophie and their two younger siblings quickly learn that this autonomy actually leads to an unbelievable amount of work and unwanted responsibility. As their mother informs them:

"The cleaning, shopping, feeding, cup fetching and television changing, the bed stripping and lausnering and cleaning the lavatory...the medicine giving and escorting her to the bathroom, mending her clothes, fetching her pension...listening to her worries, arranging the doctor’s visits, being here with her after school and in the evenings and weekends and holidays...consoling her when her friends die, reminding her to eat...."

(pp65-6)

The children survive for only a short period of time before they become stretched and burdened beyond their abilities and are unable to cope. Not only this, but their previously self-righteous affection for Granny quickly diminishes: ‘“I’m not giving up another thing this week,” Sophie said. “I’ve already done more than my fair share.”.... “If I have to take her one more cup of Ovaltine, I shall spit in it first.” “These sheets stink,” Nicholas complained. “This is the fourth load I’ve done since Monday” ’ (p84). Their temporary encounter with the world of adult ‘freedom’ is not a pleasant experience, and eventually causes Ivan to fall ill, and they are keen to return to a state of at least partial adult responsibility. They do, before Granny’s death, agree a compromise which still gives the children some shared responsibility, but not the full burden of it.

The experiences of the Harris children can be linked to Harry Hendrick’s analysis of some of the child liberationists who began to emerge in the 1960s:

The essence of the liberationist case was (and is) that children were discriminated against, unreasonably segregated from the adult world, and confined to “childishness”. The important rights were seen to be those involving access to wage labour, voting, travel, property ownership, choice of guardians and sexual freedoms.

(Hendrick 1997: 97)

As The Granny Project has demonstrated, to give children absolute freedom such as
this is to burden them with absolute responsibility for themselves, and possibly for others. Giving children the ‘right’ to vote certainly burdens them with the responsibility of playing a part in the welfare of society as a whole. Blustein, as we have seen, believes that welfare-rights must come before option-rights. Extreme liberationists, then, wish to grant children option-rights while denying them the necessary prerequisite of welfare-rights. Such ‘liberated’ children, while being granted their so-called rights, are deprived of their needs. This attitude could be seen as a return to pre-seventeenth century attitudes, whereby children are viewed as miniature adults, without recognition of ‘childhood ways of seeing, thinking and feeling’ (Rousseau 1762/1911: 54).

Scheper-Hughes and Sargent discuss the way in which extreme child liberation and premature autonomy can be linked to the child-as-miniature-adult attitude. They discuss the tragic case of seven year old Jessica Dubroff, who died in 1996 when her single-engine Cessna plane crashed, ‘interrupting a record-setting attempt by a child to fly across the United States’. According to Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, ‘Jessica was redefined as a nonchild and her premature death made acceptable in terms of core American adult values of autonomy and choice’ (1998: 13). Comments made by Jessica’s mother and a family friend suggest an inability to see her as a child:

A family friend remarked that “Jessica was seven going on twenty”, a typical remark voiced by progressive parents in the United States. In fact, Jessica was only seven going on eight. Her unnecessary death suggests the extent to which there is something wrong with the rights discourse when it is applied to young children. Suddenly, they are transformed into socially competent adult actors.

(1998: 13)

This also calls to mind the discussion in chapter four of the way in which Dudley is ‘trained’ for the dinner party. Scheper-Hughes and Sargent also point out that Jessica was living out ‘a parental fantasy’ (1998:13). This indicates quite a complex link between excessive children’s rights, child-as-miniature-adult and child-as-parental-accessory. All of the above suggest some form of exploitation, whether through lack of
protection or through actively using the child for something which benefits or pleases the adult. This shows an inability to recognise the child’s real needs.

Blustein stresses that, though children need ‘opportunities to experiment and to make decisions,’ this must be within ‘well-defined limits’ (Blustein 1982: 133). It should always be remembered that children need a certain amount of protection for both survival and development, for ‘if children were treated as mature and autonomous persons, they could not survive, let alone prosper’ (Blustein 1982: 134) This point is particularly apt in the wake of Jessica’s story, above.

Thus, the adult has the power to choose whether to encourage or limit the child’s potential, as do authors of children’s fiction, in the way they choose to portray childhood. The child’s abilities and knowledge can be expanded and, subsequently, so can our perceptions of childhood. However, this can only be done with the help of adults, and hindrance can be caused equally by too much or too little guidance and protection.

The adult-within-the-child and the child-within-the-adult

The idea of bringing out qualities and tendencies which already exist within the child conforms to James et al’s definition of ‘The Immanent Child’, one of various concepts of childhood which they still believe to be in existence today, and one which is based on the ideas of Locke and Rousseau:

Rousseau’s child is thus immanent in as much as it is inherently charged with reason, reason which will develop given the appropriate environment. Locke’s child is immanent in that it has mental processes and perception and, if we provide the appropriate environment, we can elicit [these qualities].

(James et al 1998: 16-17)

James et al also point out that Locke’s ideas form the basis of the child-centred learning which is central to today’s education (James et al 1998: 16-17).
Locke stresses that adults should adapt their approach according to the child’s unique temperament (‘native propensities’), for ‘after all is done, the bias will always hang on that side that nature first placed it’ (1693/1996: 76). The child, therefore, is not a complete ‘blank page’: though Locke stresses that education and upbringing are supremely important, the adult must also respect the child’s inherent qualities. He does, therefore, view it as a combination of nature and nurture. Jeffreys believes that the ‘blank page’ analogy is an overstatement on Locke’s part, for ‘Locke was not wholly empirical any more than Plato was wholly the reverse’ (Jeffreys 1967: 47).

Rousseau also believed that certain qualities and tendencies are already there, but require nurturing and appropriate experience:

Plants are fashioned by cultivation, man by education. If a man were born tall and strong, his size and strength would be of no good to him till he had learnt to use them....education comes to us from nature, from men or from things. The inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature, the use we learn to make of this growth is the education of men, what we gain by our experience of our surroundings is the education of things.

(1762/1911: 6)

Rousseau also adds that ‘all three modes of education must work together’ (ibid: 6).

Coleridge advocated a similar attitude 23: ‘...all true and living knowledge [must] proceed from within; that it may be trained, supported, fed, excited, but can never be infused or impressed...’ (ed. Coburn 1951: 76). Coleridge also pointed out the definition of ‘education’: ‘...to educe, to call forth; as the blossom is educed from the bud, the vital excellencies are within..’ (ed. Coburn 1951: 84). Education and child-rearing should, therefore, always be about bringing out the inner potential that is already there. 24

---

23 Coveney points out that Coleridge ‘had little time for the negative education of Rousseau’ (1957/1967: 87). While Rousseau and Coleridge each believed in bringing out the inner potential, Coleridge advocated more intervention and interaction with the child than did Rousseau.

24 This, of course, was Piaget’s aim: to help parents and educators work with what is already there, as it is ready to develop. The points made in chapter four with regard to criticisms of Piaget refer to the way in which his formal stages of development can become too ‘tight’ and prescriptive and thus create negative
James et al’s term ‘immanent’ is the crucial point here. The Dursleys try to mould Dudley into a blueprint of what they would like him to be, and they impose this blueprint on him from the outside. In contrast, this attitude (embodied by all four writers) is about respecting who and what the child is, and bringing out the potential and abilities which lie within. The aim for Locke and Rousseau is to help the child become the best that he can be, as opposed to becoming the best that someone else would like him to be.

I would argue, then, that all four writers to some extent avoid the following two extremes: firstly, seeing the child as a miniature adult and thus not recognising childhood; secondly, recognising childhood, but consequently seeing the child as an inferior, limited being. This is undoubtedly a fine line to tread without appearing contradictory, and even Locke and Rousseau probably do not avoid the latter. Perhaps it is better to say that Dahl, Rowling, Fine and Jones attempt to avoid both extremes. Their work can therefore be seen to value both what children are in the present and what they could be in the future. Thus, to rephrase Rousseau’s expression, the ways of childhood are acknowledged, but without a sense of superiority or negative and limiting self-fulfilling prophecies.

It is also not just about valuing both the present and the future, but also showing the ongoing connection between what is there now and what will be there in the future. The emphasis, it seems, is on eventually creating an adult who is still ‘in touch’ with their inner child, for want of a less clichéd expression. Dumbledore, as we know, is wise and talented; he also maintains a certain mystique, revealing very little about his inner nature. Nonetheless, he has not lost his capacity for fun and silliness: ‘“Bertie Bott’s Every-Flavour Beans! I was unfortunate enough in my youth to come across a vomit-
flavoured one...but I think I’ll be safe with a nice toffee, don’t you...Alas! Earwax!"  

(Philosopher’s Stone pp217-18).

Hagrid, meanwhile, seems to be the most obvious example here:

Hagrid’s coat seemed to be made of nothing but pockets - bunches of keys, slug pellets, balls of string, mint humbugs, tea-bags....

(Philosopher’s Stone p49)

Hagrid was standing there, grinning at Harry and pointing at two large ice-cream cones to show he couldn’t come in.

(ibid p60)

However, Hagrid is slightly problematic in this respect for, despite his endearing and loveable childlike qualities, he is quite frequently shown to be irresponsible. Just as Mr Dursley could be criticised for not having enough ‘inner child’, Hagrid could be criticised for having too much. Though he is preferable by far to Dursley, Hagrid is not actually the ideal, it seems. This emphasises that, despite the importance of maintaining the inner child, the growing-up process must still take place.

Willy Wonka, as we have seen earlier, has similarities with Hagrid: ‘he was hopping about among the saucepans like a child among his Christmas presents, not knowing which thing to look at first’ (C & C Factory p112). In some ways he appears to have a similar irresponsibility, and so could be seen as another character who has too much ‘childhood’ and not enough ‘adulthood’: in the sequel in particular he puts the family in danger several times. However, the difference is that Wonka’s happy and excitable nature gives the appearance of irresponsibility, while he actually seems to be very much in control, and very intelligent, most of the time. 25 Wonka, it must be remembered, has been running a profoundly successful business for many years, while maintaining a childlike love of what he does. This, it seems, is a more successful balance of adulthood and childhood than is present in Hagrid.

25 The film in particular emphasises this (Stuart 1971)
In Jones’ *Fire & Hemlock*, Thomas Lynn is also, in the early part of the novel at least, a fairly successful child-like adult. Polly quickly discovers that the two of them have much in common. His home differs sharply from those of other adults she knows: ‘Polly thought Mr Lynn’s flat was the most utterly comfortable place she had ever been in. It had nothing grand about it, like Hunsdon House, nor was it pretty, like home. Things lay about in it...and it was not nearly as clean as Granny’s. In fact, the bathroom was distinctly the way Polly always got into trouble for leaving bathrooms in’ (p76). Yet Thomas avoids the irresponsibility which plagues Hagrid, for he knows when to take the child-role, and when to take the adult role: when a runaway horse is causing chaos, Thomas captures it, yet does so in a childlike and comical manner. Consequently, he is the responsible adult who saves the day, but maintains his bond with Polly (pp82-7).

Another less obvious example here is Kitty’s mother, Rosie Killin (Fine’s *Goggle Eyes*). She is, in many ways, very much the ‘sensible mother’: Gerald occasionally accuses her of irresponsibility, but the overall narrative tone does not accord with this. She is not, therefore, as obviously child-like as some of the other characters discussed. However, it is worth analysing her passionate social ideals, which are something she is prepared to be jailed for:

> [Gerald] said she stood there...telling the whole court about the paint peeling off the walls in her hospital, and babies brought in grey-faced from coughing in damp rooms....And how the sheer waste of it breaks her heart. So many people struggling night and day to care for those they love against tremendous odds....And if things don’t change [said Mum], more and more people are going to come to believe the way they’re living isn’t worth protecting.

(pp150-1)

This could be seen as typical ‘adult-like’ social concern, and in many ways it is. However, Rosie’s attitudes are also informed and enhanced by an ability to hold onto what are commonly perceived as ‘child-like’ ways of thinking, such as an appreciation
of the simple and joyous things in life. The same development appears to be taking
place in Kitty. She too appreciates simple pleasures:

Sometimes when I go leaping and hopping down the street, and the
air’s crisp and sharp, and the leaves crackle under my feet, and the sun
slides out from behind clouds like shining silver, I think that Gerald
can’t ever have felt this happy, not even when he was young. For if he
had, he’d surely make more of an effort now to help us save the lovely
little green planet we’re living on, so that others can take their turn for
ever and ever.

(p152)

Kitty’s ‘joie de vivre’, rather than being something she is growing out of, is actually a
quality that is growing with her, and gradually developing into the same passionate
social ideals held by her mother. Rosie’s adulthood is enhanced by her connection with
childhood, and we can imagine the adult Kitty in the same way. Chapter four discussed
the mature, adult-like qualities of Charlie, James, Matilda, Harry Potter and David. Yet
it is also possible to imagine these children, like Kitty, as actual adults who have fully
matured and yet maintained their childlike wonder and imagination. Depictions of
adult-like children and child-like adults thus clearly suggest that childhood and
adulthood need not be fully segregated. Interestingly, at the end of Carroll’s Alice’s
Adventures in Wonderland, Alice’s sister imagines the grown-up Alice in just this way:

...she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in
the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep,
through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her
childhood: and how she would gather about her other little children,
and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps
even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago: and how she would
feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their
simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer
days.

(p134)

Children’s writer Ursula Le Guin praises children’s librarians; her description could
be said to epitomise the child-like adult:
...they have not denied their own childhood. They believe that maturity is not an outgrowing, but a growing-up; that an adult is not a dead child, but a child who survived. They believe that all the best faculties of a mature human being exist in the child, and that if these faculties are encouraged in youth they will act well and wisely in the adult, but if they are repressed and denied in the child they will stunt and cripple the adult personality.

(Le Guin 1975: 91-2)

The attitude negated by Le Guin (that maturity is an outgrowing; an adult is a dead child) was, as has been suggested earlier, widely prevalent in early twentieth-century children’s books. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911) epitomises the separation of childhood and adulthood which created a nostalgic mourning for lost childhood qualities: ‘All children, except one, grow up…. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end’ (p.1). Egoff confirms that the ‘complete separation of childhood and adulthood, crystallized in Edwardian thought, led to an idealisation of the young’. Egoff also adds that though, historically, the Edwardian period ended in 1910, ‘in terms of the public image of children’s books’ it continued into the 1930s (Egoff 1981: 7). One might also add that the huge number of young lives cut short in the two World Wars added to this idealisation.

However, nostalgia is not the only attitude which suggests a segregation of childhood and adulthood. Chapter four discussed the way in which fear of childhood leads to both idealisation and harsh control. Mr Dursley, as we have seen, is one of Le Guin’s ‘stunted and crippled’ adults, terrified of childhood and determined to quash its existence in himself and others, and in this he echoes Dickens’ Gradgrind (*Hard Times* 1854). Such an attitude separates childhood and adulthood just as divisively as Peter Pan-type nostalgia: both suggest that, as the child crosses the boundaries into adulthood, certain qualities will be left behind. The difference is whether this is to be welcomed or regretted.
Pilcher, writing in 1995, believes that today there is still a widespread belief that ‘the positive qualities that children do possess as physiologically immature beings, such as health, vitality, energy, and enthusiasm, are sentimentalized and seen as something they will “grow out” of...’ (1995: 35). In contrast, however, the attitude in which Le Guin delights, and which I believe is embodied in the work of Dahl, Rowling, Fine and Jones, is one which suggests developing childhood qualities and taking them into adulthood, rather than leaving them behind and consequently fearing or mourning them. It is often argued, as we have seen earlier in the discussion of Piaget,\(^{26}\) that modern interest in child psychology has increased the sense of separation between childhood and adulthood.\(^{27}\) However, these writers suggest the idea of an adult-child continuum, an organic whole, rather than two separate states of being.

Inglis observes that Dickens delighted in adults who maintained their child-like qualities. *David Copperfield* (1849-50) articulates this explicitly:

> I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it...I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.

(p61)

Despite the difference between early twentieth-century writers and those writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the latter are, therefore, by no means the first to suggest an adult-child continuum. Nonetheless, it is only in the post-1960s era that such an idea has begun to make headway in children's books. Before the

---

\(^{26}\) See chapter four

\(^{27}\) See particularly Pilcher 1995: 31-51 (which summarises the views of various sociologists), and also Marina Warner 1994: 35; 42.
acceptance of adult fallibility, and the removal of adults from their authoritative pedestal, the child-like adult\textsuperscript{28} in children's books was rare.

Particularly significant here are Jones' Chrestomanci series and Rowling's Harry Potter series. In \textit{The Lives of Christopher Chant} (1988), we go back in time and meet Chrestomanci (who appears in other novels as an adult) as a child. Readers who have read the whole series will therefore see Chrestomanci as an organic whole, as it were, rather than just 'an adult'. The idea of an adult-child continuum is therefore emphasised, as it is in the Harry Potter novels. Rowling's decision to age Harry one year in each succeeding novel is unusual in children's literature and prevents readers from being able to 'fix' Harry at any one point in time. Thus, the 'gap' between childhood and adulthood, so typical of early twentieth century children's literature, is decreased, without denying the particular needs of the child.

This idea has many implications for the relationship between adults and children. In the novels, the child-like adults often enjoy emotionally healthy and joyful relationships with their young friends or relatives. One of the reasons for this is perhaps because such adults allow children to put them back in touch with their own childlike qualities. They are therefore reminded that they are not merely 'an adult', cut off from childhood, as J.M. Barrie seemed to believe, but a fully developed being who is still connected to childhood (both their own and that of the child they are with). Adults such as Mr Dursley resist this: for such an adult, the presence of childhood confronts them with things about themselves which, as Le Guin observes, they have repressed and do not want to face up to. They have therefore been made to feel ashamed of their childlike qualities.

Alternatively, some of Fine's adults (the Harris parents in \textit{The Granny Project}; the Hilliard parents in \textit{Madame Doubtfire} 1987) are equally disconnected from childhood,

\textsuperscript{28} Here, the expression 'child-like adult' is used positively, to suggest adults, such as those described by Dickens, who have maintained this healthy connection to their inner child.
but for different reasons. They do not appear afraid of childhood as Dursley does, but instead have let themselves become crushed by the harsh realities of everyday life. As such, they have lost their ability to see the world through child-like eyes, and this sometimes makes them insensitive to their children’s feelings and ways of thinking. The difference here is that Fine also allows us to feel sympathy for these adults, unlike Rowling’s depiction of Dursley.

However, for those adults who have not closed off their connection to childhood, a relationship with a child is rejuvenating and liberating. Not only are these adults able to enjoy their ‘inner child’ for themselves, but their ability to think on the child’s wavelength creates empathy with the child and an ability to share feelings and experiences. Dahl’s Grandpa Joe appears to have fully retained his connection with childhood:

“It makes me quite ill to think about it,” said Grandma Josephine.
“Nonsense!” cried Grandpa Joe. “Wouldn’t it be something, Charlie, to open a bar of chocolate and see a golden ticket glistening inside!”

(C & C Factory p32)

They looked at each other and both started giggling nervously. “Mind you,” said Grandpa Joe, “there is just that tiny chance that it might be the one, don’t you agree?”....They both stared at what lay beneath. It was a bar of chocolate - nothing more. All at once, they both saw the funny side of the whole thing, and burst into peals of laughter.

(ibid pp51-2)

Polly and Thomas Lynn also share the ability to see things differently:

The sun reached the dry pool. For just a flickering part of a second, some trick of light filled the pool deep with transparent water. The sun made bright, curved wrinkles on the bottom, and the leaves, Polly could have sworn, instead of rolling on the bottom were, just for an instant, floating, green and growing....Mr Lynn saw it too.

(Fire & Hemlock p30)

However, Thomas is slightly out of practice and needs Polly to reintroduce him to childhood: “It’s years since I did any [make-believe]. Besides you, I’m the learner. I’d
really much prefer to be a trainee-hero too. Couldn’t I be? You could happen to be there when I kill my first giant - and perhaps it could be thanks to you that I didn’t get squashed flat by him” ’ (pp30-1). Later, Thomas’s downfall is partly to do with the way in which he becomes dependent on Polly to help him, rather than fully rediscovering his own imagination.

More often than not, the child-like adults in the novels are not the parents: the parent’s responsibility over the child is usually an inevitable source of conflict which inhibits a joyful friendship. However, there are exceptions: Kitty’s mother, as we have seen, and, even more so, the father in Dahl’s Danny (1975). Danny’s father is a loving and (fairly) responsible parent who has not lost his capacity for fun, which in turn gives him great empathy with his son’s mind. The two of them engage in many games and projects, in which not only the activity, but also the emotions are shared. Exclamation marks litter the speech of the father as much as the son:

“She’s nearly ready!” my father said. “Can you feel her floating?”
“Yes!” I said. “Yes! Shall we let her go?”
“Not yet! ... Wait a bit longer! ... Wait until she’s tugging to fly away!”
“She’s tugging now!” I said. “Right!” he cried. “Let her go!”
Slowly, majestically, and in absolute silence, our wonderful balloon began to rise into the night sky....My father was nearly as excited as I was.

(p21)

A ‘blind’ reading of the dialogue alone would make it difficult to distinguish who was who; thus they are on the same wavelength. This bond is what later enables Danny’s father to confess to his son about his less legitimate activities: ‘ “I am going to let you in on the deepest, darkest secret of my whole life” ’ (p29). The father’s ability to share in his son’s childhood also enables Danny to share in his father’s adulthood: again, this shows Danny’s adult-like qualities as well as his father’s child-like ones.

Hollindale (who prefers the term ‘childness’ to childlike) discusses, in relation to Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale, how an adult and a child can have a shared experience...
of childhood and childhood. Florizel and Polixenes share ‘childness’, but in different ways:

For the boy it is the presentness of his condition; for Polixenes it is participant reconstruction, made up from observation, and play, and memory, and values and hopes which he invests in childhood and the future represented by his son. Childness, the shared quality of being a child, is shared ground, though differently experienced and understood, between adult and child.

(Hollindale 1997: 47)

This is, therefore, ‘the magical process of secular redemption through children’ (Hollindale 1997: 47). Ironically, in *Fire and Hemlock*, the adult Polly has to ‘re-generate’ herself, but she does succeed in this: ‘...as a young adult, she only sees the superficial reality, not hidden truths. By the very end of the novel, however, Polly has learned to see both realistically and imaginatively, to accept the whole truth, not just part of it’ (Hixon 2002: 104).

**Conclusion**

All the ‘high-achieving’ child characters are shown to undergo a slow and gradual process of development - their inherent abilities are there, but emerge slowly. This, of course, was Piaget’s point, as discussed in chapter four, but the danger of a Piagetian approach, as we have seen, is when it is taken to the extremes of underestimating and therefore limiting the child’s potential, particularly his / her resilience and ability to ‘blossom’ in difficult circumstances. All four writers therefore show the importance of a careful balance of both freedom and guidance from the adult. No child is able to develop his / her potential without adult help (which is Tulip’s fate), yet the adult must know when to step back and allow the child to explore and experience, as Rousseau says, ‘well-regulated liberty’ (1762/1911: 56).

Thus, the child is a child and needs adults in order to develop and flourish. However, this not only requires an adult who will focus on positive potential and allow controlled
freedom, but also one who, unlike Dursley or Wormwood, is not afraid of childhood.

Chapter four discussed the way in which polarising children as angels or devils is
caused by fear; this fear comes about when childhood and adulthood are segregated and
the child is viewed as an alien other. Adults who have maintained a healthy connection
to their own ‘inner child’ do not view children as alien or Other. Consequently, they do
not fear children, and have no egotistical desire to control them, other than by
employing guidance and restraint which is in the child’s best interests. Only this type of
adult can form a healthy and joyful relationship with a child.

Concern for the child and its needs does not, therefore, mean that there must be an
absolute separation between childhood and adulthood: on the contrary, the more adults
recognise the child in themselves, the more they can empathise with children and get
closer to their real needs. By focusing on both the child’s future potential and the adult’s
inner child, these authors suggest the possibility of a shared bond which prevents
excessive segregation, fear, alienisation and sentimentalisation: all of which represent,
or lead to, the need to control. Such a relationship enables the child both to be and
become.
CHAPTER 6:
MAGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Magic: from fairytales to Narnia

The previous chapter showed how a happy and fulfilling relationship can blossom between a child and an adult who has not lost contact with childhood. However in all the texts, as has been evident throughout the thesis, these adults are outnumbered by those with whom the children experience conflict and power struggles. The section on satire in chapter three showed the way in which Dahl, Rowling and Jones follow Dickens and others in making use of fairytale discourse in their portrayals of oppressive adults. However, part of this fairytale discourse is not just mocking and satirising the oppressors, but also frequently overthrowing them and allowing the oppressed to ‘win’. Magic and the supernatural often correspond with laughter in this type of empowerment, although, as we shall see, some texts show magical forces to be more complex and ambiguous than this.

Zipes, as chapter three discussed, points out that fairytales, and the oral folktales from which they originated, have always centred on issues of power and oppression. This includes fulfilling the fantasies of the downtrodden. As such, ‘ordinary’ people, most notably peasants, were particularly drawn to them: ‘the oral folk tales were those symbolic acts in which they enunciated their aspirations and projected the magic possibility in an assortment of imaginative ways so that anyone could become a knight in shining armour or a lovely princess’ (Zipes 1983: 8). As we have seen earlier,¹ as children’s writers made use of fairytale discourse, class struggles were replaced by or supplemented with adult-child power struggles.

Defeating the oppressor and empowering the oppressed, particularly through the supernatural, is a form of wish-fulfilment, and opinions vary as to whether or not this is ‘healthy’. Zipes discusses Ernst Bloch’s essay ‘Karl Marx and Humanity: the material

¹ Readers are referred back to the Introductory chapter.
of hope', from Bloch’s *On Karl Marx,* focusing particularly on Bloch’s ‘concept of “home” as [a] constitutive element of the liberating impulse behind the fantastic projections in fairy tales’ (Zipes 1983: 173). Bloch acknowledges that stagnant dreaming is not usually productive, but ‘...if it becomes a dreaming ahead, then its cause appears quite different and excitingly alive’ (Bloch 1968/1971: 30-31). There is, according to Bloch, always a part of us which refuses to accept what is, and this voice perhaps needs to be given some expression: ‘It is the way of the world to counsel men to adjust to the world’s pressures, and they have learned this lesson; only their wishes and dreams will not hearken to it’ (Bloch 1968/1971: 31). Here, ‘men’ and ‘world’s pressures’ could easily be replaced with ‘children’ and ‘adults’ pressures’. Bloch believes that, in this respect, all people are ‘futuristic’:

...they think they deserve a better life (even though this may be pictured in a banal and egoistic way), and regard the inadequacy of their lot as a *barrier,* and not just as the way of the world. To this extent, the most private and ignorant wishful thinking is to be preferred to any mindless goose-stepping; for wishful thinking is capable of revolutionary awareness...

(Bloch 1968/1971: 31)

Bloch seems to be suggesting that wishful thinking can be a way of keeping one’s creative and imaginative powers alive, and so gives a sense of empowerment, though he does not actually use this word. It seems that it is liberating to maintain visions of what could be (or should be), rather than being swallowed up by what is. For Bloch, ‘home’ is this utopian vision, as Zipes summarises: ‘Philosophically speaking, then, *the real return home...is a move forward to what has been repressed and never fulfilled.*’ The pattern in most fairytales involves the reconstitution of home on a new plane, and this accounts for the power of its appeal to both children and adults’ (Zipes 1983: 176).

Bloch believes that ‘dreamlessness’ is associated with ‘standing still’ (Bloch 1968/1971: 31) and, presumably, stagnation. Diana Wynne Jones, in an essay in

---

Foundation, also points out that fantasy and day-dreaming are not just forms of wishful thinking or escapism. On the contrary, fantasising can be very practical:

There is an extension of this fun-function. We also enjoy day-dreaming - fantasising, as they call it. In some day-dreams, our problems are simply miraculously solved. Here, we recognised the problem and lowered the level of pain from it. Nobody solved anything while worrying and hurting. That is one part of fantasising. The other part is the actual practising of situations in our heads. Reading a book constructed on these lines is only an augmented form of this. Both prepare you for a version of the situation in actuality.

(Jones 1997: 14)

Throughout the history of children's literature, there have been various child-characters who have been empowered partly or predominantly through magic, particularly in the early twentieth century. The title character of J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan (1911) is often seen as the ultimate empowered child, and in many ways he is. However, in this novel, magic and child-empowerment appear to be either one extreme or the other: children are either empowered with magic to the extent of being removed from the family home and having absolute independence and even anarchy, or they must relinquish all this to return to the security of parental care. They must choose between the two: Peter chooses magical autonomy, while Wendy and her brothers ultimately relinquish magical power for home and family. For Wendy, John and Michael it is a brief fantasy and adventure from which they must return, though each new generation continues the temporary visits to Neverland. It is well known that children's literature at this time was often escapist, and Wendy and her siblings simply have a brief respite from ordinary life and adult control, while Peter makes huge sacrifices in order to make the adventure permanent.

The whole idea of magical, empowered children is also undermined by the desire for a mother. Peter defensively insists on not needing one (pp25-6), but it is he who asks Wendy to be their mother and says that he needs her (p74) and even Hook echoes this
This raises the question of whether or not Peter is actually a tragic character, hardened by pain and loneliness; readers may pity rather than applaud him.

The character of Peter is not wholly positive: he is arrogant, impish and cruel, and readers are not entirely aligned with his viewpoint. It is also significant that his power over the other children in Neverland is all-consuming, to the point of oppressiveness. Peter, it seems, has simply taken over the role of oppressive parent, as Napoleon claimed to be liberating the masses, only to become the new dictator:

Feeling that Peter was on his way back, the Neverland had again woken into life....In his absence things are usually quiet on the island. The fairies take an hour longer in the morning, the beasts attend to their young, the redskins feed heavily for six days and nights, and when pirates and lost boys meet they merely bite their thumbs at each other. But with the coming of Peter, who hates lethargy, they are under way again..........

(p51)

In *Peter Pan*, magic as child-empowerment is escapist and problematic, and not really worked out in any feasible way.

In the work of Edith Nesbit, magic is less escapist and more complex. It infiltrates the children’s ordinary world, and they are able to make some use of magical power, but this is always fraught with difficulties. Overall, having access to magical power is shown to be a great responsibility which must be handled carefully. In this, Nesbit follows fairytale discourse, and this is particularly evident in *Five Children and It* (1902), which assumes a shared knowledge with the reader:

I daresay you have often thought what you would do if you had three wishes given you, and have despised the old man and his wife in the black-pudding story, and felt certain that if you had the chance you could think of three really useful wishes without a moment’s hesitation. The children had often talked the matter over, but, now the chance had suddenly come to them, they could not make up their minds.

(p32)

Needless to say, the children get into all sorts of difficulties and, like many fairytale characters, must learn to be careful what they wish for. Nonetheless, their experiences
with this magic, which is part of their everyday world rather than separate from it, are very different from the children's experiences in *Peter Pan*. Though Nesbit's children undergo a chaotic trial-and-error learning process, they do have the ability to harness and use magical forces: the power is in their own inexperienced hands. This contrasts strongly with *Peter Pan*, in which magic is a power which takes over the children and forces them to choose between 'freedom' and home.

Egoff believes that:

> The children in Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* and *The Railway Children* know what it means to have a mother ill. But they use their wits, initiative and ingenuity to offer what assistance they can, sometimes by magic, and in doing so they help themselves....The children in these stories have a chance also for action, courage and nobility.

(Egoff 1981: 24)

Egoff therefore links magic to the sophisticated and proactive child (as discussed in chapters four and five) and so supports Zipes' arguments regarding the way in which fairytale discourse gives power to the oppressed.

In C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series (1950 - 1956), magic does not infiltrate the ordinary world as it does in Nesbit, yet it is not as separate as it is in *Peter Pan*: Lewis opts for the classic porthole, later employed by Rowling. Though the magic world is a different place, there is a clear point of entrance within the ordinary world. In Barrie's novel, by contrast, they undergo a long, exhausting journey which emphasises the distance between the ordinary and magic worlds.

In Lewis' novels, magic provides exciting adventures, but also has negative, harmful forces which even influence Edmund and cause him to betray his siblings. In contrast, Nesbit's children may experience chaos, but they do not encounter the malicious or deceptive forces which pervade Narnia. Lewis' child characters, however, are proactive and skilful in dealing with their encounters: they do not possess magical powers themselves, but must actively deal with the magical forces which surround them. They
have a similar tough, adventurous spirit to Nesbit’s children, but without the foolishness
which causes the latter to make mistakes. The exception, of course, is Edmund, until he
repents. His flaw in the beginning is a lack of humility - the other three possess this
quality, and it enables them to accept help and advice from others. The egocentric child
who acts alone, and acts from selfish desire, is therefore shown to be flawed, and this is
something which will be examined later, in relation to Rowling and Jones.

Depictions of children’s magical power inevitably correspond with the emergence of
increasingly sophisticated child characters. The children in Peter Pan have very little
control over magical happenings; Nesbit’s children have magical power in their hands,
but display immaturity in their attempts to use it, while the children in Lewis’ Narnia
stories begin to interact with magical forces with confidence and competence which, as
we shall see, occurs more frequently in the post-1960s era.

Varieties of magic

Magic in literature is, like laughter, far more than just a ‘fun’ fantasy element and, as
we shall see later, it may not always be exclusive to fantasy texts. Charles Butler points
out that ‘…magic in literature can function as an extended metaphor for real life’
(Butler 2002a: 67). However, Butler also discusses the way in which Jones sometimes
shows magic as a form of negative power used against children, as opposed to a
positive form of empowerment for them. In these instances, the distinction between
magic and psychological manipulation is often blurred: ‘In fact, we might even be
tempted to read magic as a metaphor for manipulation of this kind’ (ibid 72). Butler
cites the title character of Jones’ Black Maria (1991), explaining how she has gained
control over others: ‘“Do you understand how it’s done? The main spell is just talk, and
that’s quite easy, but of course you are working away underneath the talk, putting all

---

3This was also addressed in chapter four, where it was suggested that, in Harry Potter, the magical world
could be seen to represent the world of childhood itself, with its power to disrupt the social order of adults.
sorts of things into people’s minds and tying their thoughts into the right shape” *(Black Maria* p211).

Butler goes on to say that when Aunt Maria turns Chris into a wolf (an obvious fairytale element), this ‘deliberately dispenses with this nuanced uncertainty’ and confirms that magic is an actual force rather than psychological power (Butler 2002a: 74). He finds this frustrating, but there is no need for it to be so - the point still stands that, despite some ‘obvious’ spells, magic can also be a metaphor for psychological power, though it may be other things as well. As such, everyday concerns, with which readers can identify, are intertwined within a magical setting. Psychological power can also be a positive force, though the manipulative Aunt Maria uses it in a negative way.

Butler subsequently raises the question: ‘Is magic a manifestation of inward powers or something external to nature and disruptive of it?’ (ibid p75). Though Butler seems to want a definitive answer, this idea of magic as external or internal is an interesting one which can be used in discussion of Dahl and Rowling as well as Jones. Dahl appears to concentrate on magic as an external force which happens to children, but nonetheless shows it as a form of empowerment for the child. In Dahl, magic is usually a positive and benevolent force which is on the child’s side, and causes oppressive adults to get their come-uppance. There are often variations of the fairy-godmother, and these issues are closely linked to the ‘laughter as empowerment’ element in Dahl’s work. These novels could be seen as a fantasy of child power for the child-characters and, subsequently, the child-reader.

If we replace class issues with adult-child power struggles, Dahl’s use of magic corresponds with some of Zipes’ comments on oral folk tales: ‘...the magic and

---

4 This was discussed in chapter two (pp84-5).
5 Dahl’s *The Witches* (1983) is the exception in showing harmful magic which is out to get the children: ‘Don’t forget that [a witch] has magic in her fingers and devilry dancing in her blood....These magic powers are very frightening’ (p3). *The BFG* (1982) touches on a similar theme in the existence of child-eating giants, and also the ‘witching hour...when all the dark things came out from hiding and had the world to themselves’ (p2).
miraculous serve to rupture the feudal confines and represent metaphorically the conscious and unconscious desires of the lower classes to seize power' (Zipes 1983: 8). No matter what the ending, which, in the folk tale, may be modest rather than revolutionary, ‘the impulse and critique of the “magic” are rooted in an historically explicable desire to overcome oppression and change society’ (ibid p8).

In James & GP (1961) and the Charlie novels (1964 and 1973), the children are empowered, but the magical power is outside themselves. James (not unlike Cinderella) encounters a mysterious stranger who gives him magic seeds, while Charlie, by chance, wins a golden ticket to Wonka’s magical world. Magic happens to them; they are ‘lucky’. In The Great Glass Elevator there are external forces (strange beings) and Charlie and Willy Wonka must work to fight back and save themselves. Nevertheless, the magic is still external: they use tablets and other inventions of Wonka’s to rescue the grandparents, and also various devices on the elevator, but they do not have inner magical powers (Wonka may do, but this is not made explicit). Charlie is using magical devices, but they do not come from inside himself: he must, as chapter five has shown, develop his own abilities in order to use the devices effectively, but there is never internal magic power.

There is some change in Dahl’s later works. Though The BFG (1982) still conforms to the format of the earlier novels, George’s Marvellous Medicine (1981) and Matilda (1988) show an increasing sense of magic as a form of inner psychological power in the child (so, consequently, the child has some control over it). George, like Charlie, uses external objects to create magic. However, unlike Charlie and James, there is no Willy Wonka or magic seeds to generate magical forces for him - it is purely his own efforts

---

6 The events in the Charlie novels are not exactly ‘magic’ in the way that James’ magic seeds are, but nonetheless Willy Wonka and his chocolate factory certainly come much closer to magic than to realism.

7 Sophie, like most of Dahl’s protagonists, plays an active role in the plot to overpower the child-eating giants. Nonetheless, she begins the novel as a helpless orphan who is literally plucked from her bedroom window by the bumbling, Hagrid-like Big Friendly Giant. She may become more active later on, but she plays no part in her initial change of circumstances, and never possesses magical powers.
which produce magical effects in the medicine. George’s fear of his Grandma, and
desire to take action to empower himself, is what spurs him to create the medicine. It
seems that the force of this emotion and the feeling of psychological empowerment that
it gives George are what ignite the forces of magic and connect him to supernatural
powers:

[George] was shaking a little. Oh, how he hated Grandma! He really
hated that horrid old witchy woman. And all of a sudden he had a
tremendous urge to do something about her. Something whopping.

(p12)

A rich blue smoke, the colour of peacocks, rose from the surface of the
liquid, and a fiery fearsome smell filled the kitchen....It was a brutal
and bewitching smell, spicy and staggering, fierce and frenzied, full of
wizardry and magic.

(pp32-3)

Significantly, when George’s father later tries to re-create the same medicine through
rational thinking and planning, it does not work in the same way. Only George’s
emotions could create it in its original form.

However, Matilda is even more significant in terms of linking magic and
psychological power. When we first meet Matilda, she is a small child possessed of
great genius. This is technically realistic, but so extreme that it almost enters into the
realms of fantasy. As the novel progresses, and Matilda is faced with more and more
frustrating challenges, she discovers that she has mysterious abilities which go way
beyond intellectual talent. The result is a feeling of great power:

A strange feeling of serenity and confidence was sweeping over her and all
of a sudden she found that she was frightened by nobody in the world. With
the power of her eyes alone she had compelled a glass of water to tip and
spill its contents over the horrible headmistress, and anybody who could do
that could do anything.

(p162)
However, when Matilda’s situation becomes settled and happy, and when her mind is given the opportunity to develop fully, she finds that her supernatural powers have gone. Miss Honey offers the following explanation:

“While you were in my class you had nothing to do, nothing to make you struggle. Your fairly enormous brain was going crazy with frustration. It was bubbling and boiling away like mad inside your head. There was tremendous energy bottled up in there with nowhere to go, and somehow or other you were able to shoot that energy out through your eyes and make objects move. But now things are different. You are in the top form competing against children twice your age and all that mental energy is being used up in class.”

(p223)

Like George, Matilda’s frustration, emotional as well as intellectual, transforms, not just into a powerful feeling, but into an ability to connect with supernatural or magical forces. The link between magic and the mind is therefore made explicit in these two novels.

It is significant, however, that Matilda’s powers disappear when she no longer needs them. Though Miss Honey gives the above ‘rational’ explanation, which shows that these powers come from inside Matilda, they are not inherent, like those of Harry Potter, and she has no real control over them. These powers simply manifest when Matilda is most vulnerable and in need, and most frustrated. George, too, connects with magical forces in a moment of crisis. There is an element of Christianity here in that an omnipotent power appears with help when children are at their lowest and most helpless. In particular, these scenarios call to mind the Christian miracles, such as the loaves and fishes; Noah’s Ark; the passing of the Red Sea.

There is a strong link between Christianity, particularly the Old Testament, and the traditions of folk and fairytales, and Dahl comes closer to these traditions than the other writers. Eugen Weber describes various features of the traditional folktale. His comments could quite easily be applied to a Dahl novel:
...here there is always retribution, and cruelty always receives a cruel punishment because folk tales, while not particularly moral, reflect the natural belief that punishment should follow crime - and that is what makes a really happy end....The children, in due course, repay the treatment they have received.

(Weber 1981:108)

This eye-for-an-eye mentality is expressed quite explicitly by Mr Kranky in George’s *Marvellous Medicine*, after Grandma's demise at the hands of George's medicine: ‘“That's what happens to you if you're grumpy and bad-tempered” ’ (p103). This, ideally, is the role of God: to ensure that justice is carried out.\(^8\) Justice is usually at the forefront of Dahl's work: most of his novels reassure children that the world is ultimately safe and protective; bad adults get their comeuppance (or, in the case of *C & CF*, bad children), while good children will be rescued by a higher force, though this is often combined with their own efforts. Perhaps surprisingly, then, Dahl’s depictions of child-empowerment are not as revolutionary as they may at first appear.

In Dahl, therefore, despite strong and proactive children, magical forces are more often external. In Jones and Rowling, this is not always the case. Butler answers his own question with regard to Jones: ‘the question of whether magic is part of the ordinary world or an alien intrusion into it is never definitively answered. Like Polly [*Fire & Hemlock* 1985], we must be able to read it as either or both’ (Butler 2002a: 75).

Both Jones and Rowling show magic as an external force and a form of psychological power: child characters such as Harry Potter and Cat Chant are often subjected to external magic, which is more often than not trying to harm them, and they have to learn to develop their own inner magical powers to protect themselves. As such, magic is not only both external and internal, it can also be used as a form of defence or attack.

This suggests that, actually, both inner and outer forms could be metaphors for power struggles in everyday life: we are constantly engaged in struggles between our own

\(^8\) Again, this is more prominent in the Old Testament; the New Testament places more emphasis on compassion and forgiveness. Nonetheless, in Christianity as a whole, God's role is to reward goodness and punish sins.
powers (actual and psychological) and those of other people and social forces, and these powers can be harmful or virtuous depending on how they are used.

In *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly is battling against the oppressive supernatural powers of Mr Leroy and Laurel who, she later finds out, want to take Tom’s life as one of many sacrifices for Mr Leroy’s immortality. Yet Polly is simultaneously discovering both the power of her own mind, and her ability to take action to save Tom and herself. One of the most significant sections in this respect is Polly’s ‘rescue’ after abandonment by both parents. In this novel, ‘Nowhere’ represents the world of magical possibilities, while everyday reality is ‘Now Here’. The forces of Nowhere appear to take over and rescue Polly:

Polly went on walking, but now she had somewhere to go. She was following a tugging in her head. It was like an instinct, the way migrating birds go, or salmon swim, sure and unhesitating, to the right place in the end.

(p228)

In some respects this may appear to be like a Dahl novel, whereby outer forces arrive at the child’s most vulnerable moment and take care of her. However, Polly is no passive bystander. The passage stresses the word ‘instinct’, and the way in which Polly herself has developed the ability to access these supernatural forces, which communicate with her via her instinct. ‘Nowhere’ does not arrive spontaneously: rather, this is ‘Nowhere coming when she called’ (p227). Thus, inner and outer forces work together to guide and save her.

In Jones’ *The Lives of Christopher Chant* (1988), Christopher, who is Chrestomanci as a child, is learning to cast many spells. However, magical forces do not automatically perform as requested; these forces can only be harnessed with sufficient psychological power. When Christopher tries to conjure fire, his first attempt produces only ‘a thin yellow spire of smoke’. However, when he strengthens his state of mind, the results are far more dramatic: ‘“Plenty of will as you raise your hands,” Flavian said. “I know!”’
Christopher said, and willed savagely. Fire! Fire! FIRE! The pile of sticks went up with a roar in a sheet of flame ten feet high...’ (pp189-90). Most of Jones’ protagonists, along with Harry Potter, possess inherent magical powers, but the process of learning how to use them is also a process of discovering the power of their minds.

Rowling’s novels place explicit emphasis on magic as psychological power: many of the magical spells are quite obvious positive-thinking techniques. Chapter three has already discussed one of these: the Boggart takes the shape of whatever one most fears, and the spell for overcoming it is to laugh at it. More complex and profound is the Patronus spell for overpowering Dementors. The Dementors have a terrifying physical presence, but their power lies in their ability to ‘...suck all the happiness out of you...and if they get a chance, they kiss you....It’s what they call it when they suck the soul out of your mouth’ ’ (Order of the Phoenix 2003 p36). The victim is thus left in a state of severe despair. However, the spell to overpower the Dementor is simply intense positive thinking, as Professor Lupin explains:

“The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the Dementor feeds upon - hope, happiness and the desire to survive - but it cannot feel despair as real humans can, so the Dementors can’t hurt it.”....“And how do you conjure [a Patronus]?”

“With an incantation, which will work only if you are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory.”

(Prisoner of Azkaban 1999 p176)

Order of the Phoenix shows Harry trying to gain complete control over his own mind, in order to prevent others having access to his thoughts. Snape explains how one wizard may have power over the mind of another:

“Only Muggles talk of ‘mind-reading’. The mind is not a book, to be opened at will and examined at leisure. Thoughts are not etched on the inside of skulls, to be perused by any invader. The mind is a complex and many-layered thing, Potter....It is true, however, that those who have mastered Legilimency are able, under certain conditions, to delve into the minds of their victims and to interpret their findings correctly.”

(pp 468-469)
Ultimate power comes from learning Occlumency: ‘“The magical defence of the mind against external penetration....” ’ (p458). One who is able to control his own mind cannot, therefore, be controlled by another. However, Rowling emphasises that this is something which is extremely difficult, and this echoes the Aunt Marge episode in Prisoner of Azkaban (pp18-28) which shows Harry struggling to control his mind and detach from the tormenting and bullying, though in this instance it is shown literally as psychological effort, rather than a magical spell.

For many of these characters, the discovery of magical powers is the discovery of their true identity, and usually leads to confidence and happiness. In Jones’ Witch Week (1982), Nan and Charles live in a world in which magic is prohibited and witches (male and female) are burned. Nonetheless, for these two children, finding out that they are in fact witches is not a negative experience. Charles has been haunted by various ‘inner demons’ since early childhood, which now instantly dissolve. His traumatic memories ‘were in the past: they were gone’:

> It was like having toothache that suddenly stops. In the peace that came with this, Charles saw that his mind must have been trying to tell him he was going to grow up to be a witch. And now he knew, it stopped nagging him.

(pp112-113)

For Nan, the experience cures her inferiority complex: she ‘knew she was in danger and she knew she should be terrified. But she was not. She felt happy and strong....It was like coming into her birthright’ (pp127-8).

Nan’s delight and feelings of strength and confidence echo those of Dahl’s Matilda (discussed previously). However, while Dahl’s child characters often find that magical miracles lead to instant happy endings, in Rowling and Jones, whether magic is internal or external (or both), it can also be complex and difficult. Egoff is very quick to hail the glories of children’s books from earlier eras while berating recent ones (writing in 1981). She discusses the way in which, in early fairy tales, magic and the supernatural usually
come with a caution or ‘veto’: for example, Cinderella undergoes magical transformation, but must be home by midnight. For Egoff, ‘This comprehension of both the power and prohibition of magic is a far cry from the modern substitution of egotistical self-help for the natural verity of folk wisdom’ (Egoff 1981: 205). Dahl’s use of magic could be seen as partially conforming to the ‘self-help’ variety, but even here there are warnings and prohibitions. James’ magic seeds come with a warning, and James must take on a lot of responsibility in dealing with the consequences of his mistake. Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, meanwhile, comes with many prohibitions, and severe consequences for children who do not adhere to them. Similarly, in The Great Glass Elevator, all manner of things go wrong when Wonka does not use his magical inventions carefully.

Jones and Rowling, meanwhile, conform quite strongly to the type cited by Egoff as exclusive to much earlier eras. In these novels, though the discovery of a character’s true magical identity is a positive experience, magic is more complex and does come with an understanding of both ‘power and prohibition’, rather than being a source of easy and absolute power for the child. For Harry Potter and Cat Chant the development of magical power is, as chapter five has shown, under the guidance and restrictions of experienced teachers. For Harry the primary rule is that school pupils cannot use magic outside Hogwarts. This emphasises how powerful both inner and outer forces are: such power cannot be used instantly by one who does not yet fully understand it. The children therefore have great potential power, but must learn to use it responsibly and skilfully. This is also emphasised in Jones’ The Lives of Christopher Chant (1988). Dr Pawson informs Christopher, who has been getting carried away with his new-found magical powers, that he must also learn control:

---

9 To be fair, Jones had only just begun writing at the time of Egoff’s book, while Harry Potter was obviously not in existence at this time. Nonetheless, Egoff’s entire approach assumes that the past is superior.
“Control?” Christopher said blankly....“That’s right,” Dr Pawson bawled. “You didn’t think I’d let you loose on the world without teaching you to control your power, did you? As you are now, you’re a menace to everyone. And don’t tell me you haven’t been trying to see what you can do, because I won’t believe you.”

(p134)

In turn, however, Christopher is to become the next Chrestomanci, whose job is to ‘...watch over all the magic in the world and prevent any harm being done with it’’(p140).

These restrictions combine with the ever-present threat of harmful external forces. Rowling’s series in particular centres around the evil Voldemort and his plot to take over the magical world: this plot includes the intended killing of Harry. Voldemort, like Jones’ Gwendolen and also Uncle Ralph, is someone who has become carried away with his own power, using it for egotistical and harmful means, and this clarifies the need for careful training of young wizards and witches. Voldemort, Gwendolen, Uncle Ralph and also Fire and Hemlock’s Mr Leroy all become so addicted to power that they find ways to siphon or exploit the magical powers of others - merely making use of their own abilities is not enough for them.

For Harry, therefore, the discovery and development of his inner magical powers, though exciting and liberating, is always combined with the knowledge that there are oppressive external forces against which he must defend both himself and the entire magical society. As Egoff says, ‘Modern fantasists see evil in a metaphysical way; it must be battled with, but it will always abide’ (1981: 91). Harry Potter’s path to magical empowerment, and that of Cat Chant, is one of learning to use his skills and talents unselfishly, rather than egotistically; the former could be described as true empowerment, while the latter comes from weakness. At the end of Philosopher’s Stone (1997), Dumbledore explains that Harry was able to get the Stone (which grants eternal
life) only because he did not want it for himself: ‘...only one who wanted to find the Stone - find it but not use it - would be able to get it...’ (p217).

There are various points when it is made clear, to Harry’s horror, that there are similarities between Harry and the evil Voldemort. They possess similar magical powers but, as Dumbledore explains, what is important is the way in which they make use of these powers: ‘ ‘It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” ’ (Chamber of Secrets 1998 p245). The series, without being sentimental, also emphasises the power of the heart over the ego. Harry survived Voldemort’s attack because, as Dumbledore explains in Philosopher’s Stone (p216), his mother’s love protected him against evil. Harry’s own ability to act from the heart is the ultimate power that he has over Voldemort:

“There is a room in the Department of Mysteries...that is kept locked at all times. It contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than the forces of nature....It is the power held within that room that you possess in such quantities and which Voldemort has not at all...It was your heart that saved you.”

(Order of the Phoenix p743)

While magic in Dahl has elements of Christianity, magic in Jones and Rowling can be linked to Eastern religions such as Buddhism, in that child characters discover the inner power within their own minds, and then use this to access external forces. Eastern religions, though obviously thousands of years old, are a recent arrival in Western culture, and coincide with post-1960s anti-authoritarian social changes. Finding inner power is very different from the Christian idea of an authoritarian creator God. Coinciding with this is the difference between passively accepting what happens (God’s will) and the Buddhist belief that each individual creates his or her own destiny (or karma) and thus has the power to make positive changes. As the Tibetan Buddhist master Geshe Kelsang Gyatso explains:
Expecting solutions to our problems to come from outside ourselves, or looking to others for solutions can prevent us from trying to make [spiritual] progress.... it is our own responsibility to overcome our problems.... One of the best methods for dealing with problems is to gain control of our own mind. Mind transformation is a powerful method for controlling problems.... The only way to reach Buddhahood is by training in the control and transformation of our mind.......

(Gyatso 1984: 41)

A central part of early children's literature was Christian indoctrination. It was only in Victorian times that this began to change; significantly, this was the same era in which fantasy for children began to emerge and flourish, with many writers, as we have seen earlier in the thesis, re-working fairytale discourse. In some ways, then, magic has replaced formal religious content in children's books.

Chapter three discussed the way in which fairytale discourse centres on empowering the oppressed. It seems that, over time, children's literature (specifically fantasy) has re-worked fairytale discourse in accordance with social changes in order to give more and more power to the child. Zipes, as we have seen in the Introductory chapter, points out that fairytales have always had a strong social element, interacting with both literary discourse and cultural values, specifically those which relate to the socialisation of children.

Today's fantasy stories for children would not be classed as 'fairytales', but nonetheless they still clearly appropriate fairytale discourse. Dahl's magic, as we have seen, echoes both traditional folktales and Christianity in predominantly depicting children being empowered and rescued by a higher force. This force also ensures retributive justice. Magic in Jones and Rowling, meanwhile, has elements of Eastern religions, which in turn link to post-1960s changes in the Western world, in suggesting that children can actually empower themselves, as opposed to being empowered by higher forces.

---

10 See the Introductory chapter (p6) for a definition of the traditional fairytale.
Maria Nikolajeva makes various points about the child’s power in the face of authorities and / or higher forces, which could be applied to Rowling’s novels as well as Jones’:

In all Jones’ novels, the young protagonists discover some form of superior - sometimes divine - authority that governs every single parallel world and has control and power over the fates of their inhabitants....The interrogation of this authority becomes an essential part in the protagonist’s path toward maturity.

(Nikolajeva 2002: 27)

Nikolajeva adds that ‘parents are often represented by supernatural, omnipotent powers against whom the characters feel completely helpless’ (ibid p33). However, this is not entirely true of the Jones novels discussed in this thesis. *Eight Days of Luke* (1975) is similar to both Dahl and Rowling in that David has access to a magical world and ultimately triumphs over his oppressive guardians, who have no magical powers whatsoever, although, as with Harry Potter, there are other magical forces against him. In *Black Maria*, the title character (Mig’s aunt) has strong powers but is ultimately defeated. The same is true of the Chrestomanci series: in *Charmed Life* (1977) and *Witch Week* Chrestomanci has great power, as do the adults in *Magicians of Caprona* (1980), but in these novels the children are also developing their own powers. In *Witch Week*, Chrestomanci masterminds the plan to save them all, but it can only be orchestrated with Charles’ and Nan’s help; *Charmed Life* ends with Cat using his magical abilities to save Chrestomanci, who is almost overpowered by the Nostrum brothers, while, in *Magicians of Caprona*, it is once again the children who save the day.

Empowerment and triumph, as for Harry Potter, do not come as easily as they do for some of Dahl’s characters, but they do eventually happen. Nikolajeva is perhaps correct in saying that Jones’ characters ‘feel completely helpless’ (my emphasis): they may feel this way sometimes (or often), but in actuality they are not helpless. They simply need to realise this, so that their magical powers develop along with their confidence.
Nikolajeva does in fact go on to acknowledge the child’s power: in many of Jones’ novels ‘the protagonists find themselves faced with the threat that the established order will be destroyed. The understanding is that the child, in the capacity of its innocence, is able to avert the destruction’ (2002: 36) (again, this also applies to Harry Potter). However, it is important to point out that it is not innocence per se which gives them this ability, but their own magical powers, albeit used with a predominantly virtuous state of mind. Nikolajeva also adds that the concept of the child-saviour ‘is as old as the fantasy genre itself: preventing the destruction of the world is the chief concern of most fantasy heroes from Tolkien and CS Lewis to Philip Pullman and JK Rowling’ (ibid p36).

Magic in Jones and Rowling usually does empower the child, but with three important differences from Dahl: firstly, in the work of Rowling and Jones, magical interactions are more complex, and the process of empowerment is a rollercoaster of ups and downs. Secondly, Dahl’s characters, for the most part, save themselves11 (this could therefore be seen as ‘egotistical self-help’, as Egoff says); Harry Potter and Jones’ protagonists frequently save many others. Finally, as we have seen, Rowling and Jones emphasise the connection between magic and inner psychological power more than Dahl.

In terms of how children are empowered by magic, there is, then, a clear distinction between Dahl on one hand and Rowling and Jones on the other. However, this does not mean that the approaches are opposed to each other. Rather, they could all be seen to be travelling in the same direction, as it were, but whereas Dahl keeps things on a fairly simplified level, Rowling and Jones go a little further.

11 There are some exceptions here: Matilda and James do rescue some other individuals, while the protagonists in The Witches and The BFG help to rescue children on a large scale. However, their role happens more by chance - they are not deliberate (or chosen) archetypal child-saviours in the manner of Harry Potter or Cat Chant.
Realist magic\(^{12}\)?

The third difference noted here demonstrates that magic (particularly in terms of what it represents) is not necessarily exclusive to the fantasy world. Hixon discusses the way in which Jones blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, particularly in her depiction of magic:

One of Jones’ concerns as a fantasy author is in exploring how close the realm of fantasy lies to this commonplace world; this concern is the primary reason why she combines the two seemingly disparate genres of contemporary realism and folkloric fantasy....For Jones, the fantasy element, or the magic in her stories, often works as a metaphor for human imagination and creativity, the “right-brain” approach to grappling with the problems of everyday life.

(Hixon 2002: 99)

Hixon believes that Jones’ *Fire & Hemlock* demonstrates this most explicitly. This novel not only links magic and psychological power, but through doing so it goes on to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, and does so to a greater extent than any of the other novels discussed. In the first few pages, as the adult Polly surveys ‘Fire and Hemlock’, the painting she loved as a child, we are told that ‘The penalty of being grown up was that you saw things like this photograph as they really were’ (p12). This implies that the magical gaze of childhood, as explored in chapter five, is not real. However, as the novel progresses, this is very much disputed, and magical and imaginative thinking are shown to be equally real. Not only this, but the imagination is shown, in part, to create one’s external reality. Polly and Tom’s game of make-believe actually causes the things they have imagined to manifest: ‘the implication is that the town of Stow-on-the-Water does not exist...until Tom and Polly call it into existence through their imagination’ (Hixon 2002: 100). Thus the power of the mind is

---

\(^{12}\) This expression is not to be confused with ‘magic realism’, which is a ‘Latin-American literary phenomenon that is characterised by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction’ (*Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia* [http://www.britannica.com/cbc/article?tocid=9370947]).
emphasised, along with an explicit connection between what goes on in the mind and what goes on externally.

As Hixon says, ‘This sphere of the creative imagination in the novel is “Nowhere,” the place where seemingly magical things can happen, whereas the ordinary and everyday is “Now Here” ’ (ibid p100). Not only this, but the two are permanently intertwined, and this is demonstrated most explicitly when Tom shows Polly the two vases. As he spins them round, Polly reads ‘“NOW - HERE”....Upon which, Mr Lynn spun them again. This time when they stopped, the vases read NO and WHERE....Both vases really said NOWHERE, but the letters were so arranged on them that you could never see the whole word at once on the same vase’ (F & H p33).

Later, Polly realises in quite a profound way what this means. As she and Tom invent their make-believe game, Tom wants to know ‘“Are the giants and dragons and so forth here and now, or are they somewhere else entirely?” ’(p79). Polly’s response is: ‘“Sort of both....The other place they come from and where you do your deeds is here - but it’s not here too”....She saw in her mind two stone vases spinning, one slowly, the other fast, and stopping to show half a word each.... “It’s like those vases. Now - here and Nowhere” ’ (p80). As Hixon says, ‘...in other words,...both the ordinary and the magical exist side by side’ (2002: 101). Egoff discusses writers who show the real and the fantastic co-existing: ‘...they engender a sense of wonder in readers, not so much by making us realise that the fantastic and the real can co-exist, as by convincing us that they already do so. It is the shock of recognition that we experience’ (1981: 87).

In Jones’ Chrestomanci series, the ordinary world as readers know it does exist, but only as one of many multiple worlds. These novels are set primarily in the magical worlds, thus showing non-magical reality as Other rather than as the norm. This, like Rowling’s use of the term ‘Muggle’, subverts the centrality of reality as readers know it. Even in Dahl, despite the lack of traditional realism, child characters usually live in
more or less ordinary worlds into which doses of magic arrive. This too suggests a lack of fixed boundary between the real and the magical. After his experiences, George realises that ‘...something tremendous had taken place that morning. For a few brief moments he had touched with the very tips of his fingers the edge of a magic world’ (GMM p104). It is also intriguing that Dahl’s children rarely show great surprise at the appearance of magic. This perhaps suggests, like Jones’ Fire & Hemlock, that their openness and willingness to believe in it is what causes it to manifest.

Jones’ Fire and Hemlock takes things a little further, suggesting that all external reality originates from the mind. It is significant that Polly’s mother, Ivy, also creates her own reality with her thoughts, only this time it is in a negative way. Ivy suffers from extreme paranoia and, through believing that everyone else is being secretive and turning against her, she creates self-fulfilling prophecies whereby her delusions do drive everyone away from her. If thoughts create external situations even in such an ‘ordinary’ way, the possibility of creating magical realities no longer seems quite so far-fetched: Polly ‘had Ivy’s example to show her that there were ways of thought that were quite unreal, and the same ways went on being unreal even in her [magic] business’ (p266). Ivy’s negative example also suggests, by implication, that the same process of thoughts creating reality can work in a positive way. Thus, the objectivity of any ‘reality’ is undermined: ‘Real life, which yesterday had seemed safe and dullish and ordinary, was not real at all’ (p310).

There are some episodes in Fine which, perhaps surprisingly, could be classed as experiences of ‘magic’, though obviously in a realist sense. Before discussing this, however, it is worth mentioning an important, much earlier, novel which helps to make this link between ‘fantasy’ magic and ‘real’ magic: Frances Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden (1911). The novel’s children, Mary, Dickon and especially Colin, frequently use the word ‘Magic’ (always with a capital ‘M’) to refer to the external
healing power of nature and spiritual / supernatural forces (all of which are linked
together) and to the internal ability to access this healing power and allow it to
transform oneself both psychologically and physically. Again, as in Jones' Fire &
Hemlock, there is a strong link made between physical reality and one’s psychological
state:

“...Sometimes since I’ve been in the garden I’ve looked up through
the trees at the sky and I have had a strange feeling of being happy as
if something were pushing and drawing in my chest and making me
breathe fast....Everything is made out of Magic, leaves and trees,
flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people. So it
must be all around us. In this garden - in all the places. The Magic in
this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to
be a man. I am going to make the scientific experiment of trying to get
some and put it in myself and make it push and draw me and make me
strong......”

(pp239-40)

Equal emphasis is always placed upon both the external and the internal: external
Magic cannot be accessed unless inner effort is made, but neither can inner Magic be
ignited without the aid of greater forces. This, as we have seen, is very similar to the
type of magic in Harry Potter and many Jones’ novels: there is both an outer and an
inner power, and ‘magic’ (of all kinds) occurs when the two meet. It is also significant
that in these novels both inner and outer magic already exist, but must be discovered
and developed, whether this is through magic school or positive thinking. As Colin says:

‘ “I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of
it and make it do things for us....” ‘ (The Secret Garden p239).

The whole idea of a ‘secret garden’ thus appears to be an analogy for one’s inner point
of access to magic. It is always there, but may be locked up and hidden away, and so
require an inner journey of self-discovery not only to locate it, but also to regenerate it,
as the children’s efforts cause the garden to blossom again. In her own childhood, Diana
Wynne Jones had access to two gardens, one pleasant ‘though somewhat boringly laid
out around a large square of grass’, and the other hidden, locked and enchanting. This
second, hidden, garden she likens to *The Secret Garden* (though she does, understandably, find the novel somewhat sentimental) and also to the creative side of the brain:

> When I got there I simply wandered, in utter bliss....I remember I *did* try to connect it with *The Secret Garden*. I dragged a copy of that past the censor, with my mother saying, “Oh very well then, read it if you must, but remember it’s nothing but sentimental nonsense!” ....I see now that the two gardens...came to represent the activities of the two sides of the human brain, the first concerned with day-to-day living and the second with all creative needs. But I put it to myself more in terms of enchantment as opposed to the mundane.

(Jones 1997: 10)

In Hodgson Burnett’s novel, Dickon and his mother epitomise those who are fully connected to magic, while Mary and Colin are en route to becoming ‘magic people’, as are most of the child characters in this thesis, both fantasy and realist characters in their different ways. Mary ‘was a great believer in Magic. Secretly she quite believed that Dickon worked Magic, of course, good Magic, on everything near him and that was why people liked him so much and wild creatures knew he was their friend’ (p219). Both Dickon and Mrs Sowerby are also significant in the joy and wisdom they bring to others: thus it is a two-way process whereby an inner connection to magic radiates outwards again to other people and the surrounding environment. There is a ripple effect whereby Martha and Dickon help Mary who then has the same effect on Colin, who goes on to heal his father as well as himself. Again, this has similarities with Harry Potter and Cat Chant who begin to benefit others through developing their own magical powers. Even in Dahl, though the protagonists do not, as we have seen, save others on the same scale as Harry and Cat, there is some ripple effect: Charlie’s experiences benefit the entire family; James helps his insect friends; Matilda uses her powers to help Miss Honey, and George frees his family from the witch-like Grandma.

It should be pointed out that Hodgson Burnett was a Christian Scientist, and also, whether or not she was aware of it herself, the ideas in the novel, like magic in Rowling
and Jones, accord with various other religions (particularly Eastern belief-systems). However, these elements can be seen on many levels including the purely psychological. It is only towards the end that there is a small amount of specifically religious content; thus readers can be inspired, and can interpret ‘magic’ in many different ways, without having to take on any specific doctrine.

*The Secret Garden* makes it clear that magic can be part of ‘real’ life. One of Fine’s novels for younger children, *Bad Dreams* (2000), deals with ‘obvious’ magic (psychic powers, talismans and so on) and portrays it in an extremely negative light. The depiction of Imogen’s mother is quite a harsh and judgemental stereotype of someone who lives her life by alternative values:

...Mrs Tate was different. You only had to peek in her enchanted back garden with its secret dells and perky elves, or join in eating iced fairy cakes in one of her story-book tea times, to know she didn’t really live in the sensible grown-up world where people look after their children properly and protect them from things that might damage them.

(p118)

Imogen’s psychic abilities, which initially appear to be internal but turn out to be caused by her necklace, are shown for the most part to be a curse which causes severe anxiety and isolation from other children. Not only is it made clear that this curse comes from an object outside herself, it is also shown to be something which stifles Imogen’s true self. Without the necklace, ‘Imogen had woken to her own real self - lively and noisy, and surrounded by friends’ (p107).

Magic in this novel is therefore an oppressive, external force which causes only problems. However, one of the things which enables Mel to help Imogen is her discovery of a book called *Magical Thinking*: ‘I would have thought that *Magical Thinking* would be about spells, or the power of thought, or voodoo or something. In fact it was poor old Professor Blackstaffe trying to persuade us to use our brains’ (p83).

Thus, despite the harsh condemnation of the supernatural, there is a clear suggestion
that the word ‘magic’ has broader connotations and can in part refer to the ability to access inner psychological tools and wisdom (‘. . . titles so often turn out to mean something quite different from what you imagined when you first saw them . . . ’ (p82)). Mel makes significant use of Professor Blackstaffe’s book throughout the novel and it is her help which eventually frees Imogen from oppressive forces and enables her, as well as Mel herself, to find her true self: ‘people live their own lives - lives completely special to them. They have their own things that matter, their own ways of going about them . . . ’ (p144).

Fine, then, shares with the fantasy writers in this thesis a tendency to link ‘magic’ to the mind, and thus to the ability to experience joy. Kitty (Goggle Eyes 1989), as has been shown in chapter five, is tuned into the ‘joy of living’, finding wonder in nature and simple things. Simon (Flour Babies 1992) discovers the ‘magic’ of a baby’s laughter,13 and his own power to cause such a reaction.14 In both these examples, the children discover ‘magic’ outside themselves, but also their own inner ability to connect with it. These experiences give them an increasing ability to cope with their various traumas, and to resist being ‘squashed’. Simon is trying to come to terms with the father who deserted him, and also his own self-doubts; his experience with the baby seems to reassure him that he has a greater capacity for joy and love than his father apparently did. Kitty is not only coping with a new stepfather (one who is on a very different ‘wavelength’ to herself), but she also campaigns with her mother against nuclear weapons and other similar issues. Her ability to tune into the wonder of nature and simple things gives her the strength to try to resist oppressive social forces which threaten to destroy the magic of life, just as Voldemort threatens Harry’s world; Miss Trunchbull tries to destroy the children’s capacity for joy, and poverty threatens Charlie and his family.

13 Incidentally, Barrie’s Peter Pan (1911) claims that a baby’s laughter created fairies (p29).
14 This is quoted in chapter two (pp105-6).
In *The Tulip Touch* (1996), the way in which Natalie frees herself from Tulip (discussed in chapter five) could be seen in a similar light. Natalie turns inward and discovers her own inner strength, and it is this which enables her to put a stop to Tulip’s psychological power over her, echoing Harry Potter’s struggle in *Order of the Phoenix* to prevent others having access to, and control over, his thoughts. Tulip had been ‘sucking’ Natalie’s power out of her, and Natalie must re-claim it. Life after this is, for Natalie, far more liberating and magical:

And it was only then I realised that, in the small daily probing of sides of myself left too long untested, I’d come across a few things I’d totally forgotten. The feeling of power. The sense of being in control.

(p122)

That was the strangest thing about those weeks: the feelings that I had. Like coming out of a grey endless dream, I felt the world lift around me. For far too long, I’d stayed in Tulip’s shadow. Each day now I felt a bit stronger and things went better....I became a whole person again....I realized for the first time in years that I was happy.

(pp123-4)

Natalie’s discovery of ‘sides of myself left too long untested’ begins to alter, not just her mind, but her outer reality. This echoes Colin in *The Secret Garden*: he too discovers parts of himself that he was previously unaware of and, consequently, his whole world, including his physical health, transforms.

Egoff, writing in 1981, believes that, in contrast to the folk tale and its inheritors, ‘In recent books, by contrast, the child is impotent’ (1981: 24). This point may be relevant to some contemporary realism (today, as well as in the early 1980s when Egoff was writing), but in Fine’s case it is not entirely true. It does perhaps apply to Tulip, whose situation is extreme. Also, as the previous chapter has shown in its discussion of freedom / guidance issues, children do require sufficient support. However, with the exception of Tulip, Fine gives her child characters considerable psychological power in their discovery of ‘magic’ both inside and outside themselves. The ability to access this
prevents, or at least decreases, feelings of ‘impotence’. Natalie, who has been subject to somewhat minor neglect by her parents, even finds the strength to acknowledge that she herself has played a part in this, by cutting herself off from them. The realization and acknowledgement of this appears to be quite liberating, for readers as well as Natalie, in that, though Natalie’s parents are certainly at fault to some extent, it alters the view of the child as an entirely impotent and passive victim. Consequently, just as Natalie realises that she must accept some responsibility for her downfall, so too can she take charge of herself and make positive changes. Colin, Mary and Dickon would certainly call this transformation ‘magic’.

Chapter five pointed out that, in The Granny Project (1983) and Madame Doubtfire (1987), the adults have been ground down by everyday stresses and strains and thus have lost touch with their ‘inner child’. It seems that perhaps the inner child and inner magic are all one. In these two novels, the entire families have lost their magic, for the greatest tragedy is that the children have been affected too, or perhaps ‘infected’ would be more appropriate. Egoff uses the expression ‘the enchantment of life’ (in relation to modern re-workings of fairytales which she believes are devoid of this quality) (1981:205). This is a useful expression in discussing realist magic: many of Fine’s characters discover magic in the form of enchantment with life and enchantment with their own inner qualities. The ‘tragic’ characters are those who have lost both, along with their sense of humour, and here Fine’s work links to Rowling’s Dursleys and their fear of magic and imagination and their absolute lack of a sense of humour.\footnote{Again, this was discussed in chapters four and five as a loss of the inner child.} Obviously Rowling portrays this humorously, while Fine emphasises the tragedy, but there is humour and tragedy in both. Ironically, in The Granny Project, it is Granny’s death\footnote{Discussed and quoted in chapter three (p144)} which produces a rare magic moment, and reminds Natasha, the children’s mother, of the enchantment of both life in general and her children.
Magic as discovery of inner psychological power and enchantment with life can also be connected, in both fantasy and realist texts, to resisting the dominant (and oppressive) norms of society. Fine’s *The Stone Menagerie* (1980) is particularly relevant here. Ally, who struggles with an oppressive mother, must spend every Sunday visiting his Aunt Chloe in a psychiatric hospital. On one of these visits, while wandering outdoors, Ally discovers a hippy couple, Flora and Riley, living in a stone menagerie in an isolated part of the grounds: for Ally this is a magical discovery which seems to transform his life.

Very early in the novel, before the discovery of Flora and Riley, Ally’s daydreaming and wishful thinking are shown, not just as escapism, but as something which is psychologically uplifting and enables him to deal with his current reality more effectively:

```
He had daydreams of going to sea. He knew he was stuck, what with school and exams and the flute, but he still dreamed of sailing away....It always consoled him somehow....A shanty he’d learned on his flute started up in the back of his mind...his spirits quite steadily lifted.
```

(p9)

Following this, Ally’s mother notices the signs of uplifted spirits in her son and the tension begins to ease. Ally’s daydreaming, therefore, benefits those around him as well as himself.

Later, Ally’s discovery of the couple in the grounds is laden with references to magic and fairytales. Significantly, it is a hidden path which leads Ally to a world which is different from what he has known before: ‘The water levels must have changed a lot on both sides since it was built....And one day later you would not have guessed that there were steps upon the banked-up side. Just like today, someone who didn’t know would not have found the old stone bridge at all’ (p17). As in *The Secret Garden*, Harry Potter and various Jones novels, there is once again a suggestion of something which was always there, but must be discovered. Later, the route to the stone menagerie itself
echoes the tangled undergrowth of both ‘Sleeping Beauty’ (mentioned in passing, along with ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ (p60)), and Hodgson Burnett’s novel: ‘In places it could not be seen at all, so heavily shrouded was its crumbling, pitted stonework now by sprawling riotous creepers....the wall might have remained unnoticed, hidden so well away within this thick protective dark green girdle’ (p60).

The place is connected to altered perceptions, with the idea being that only a certain type of person will find it: ‘ “The patients do stare out of the window quite a bit, but they won’t see. You'd only see it if you had a look. I’ve stared out every Sunday all this summer, and only looked today” ’ (p33). All this is combined with the depiction of the enchanting, fairy-like (and appropriately named) Flora. Admittedly we are seeing her through Ally’s love-struck eyes, but nonetheless the fairytale references are significant:

She was lovely, he thought. Like a daydream of his. Eastern-looking, fancy-dressy, Halloweeny. What his father called “straight off a broomstick” and his mother, with tight lips, “unkempt”. She was well worth his scratches and stings and his waterlogged shoes.

(p20)

...the tiny golden bells in her ears tinkled away with a summery, gossamery ring that Ally at once found entrancing.

(p21)

However, in case there is any danger of rose-tinted sentimentality, the depiction of Flora is balanced by that of her partner Riley who makes continual and (more or less) humorous criticisms of their lifestyle:


(p33)

A strong link is made between Ally the child (possibly teenager), Aunt Chloe who is mentally ill and Flora who lives an alternative lifestyle: all three represent a potential
threat to social norms (as chapter four discussed in terms of children). Aunt Chloe is not allowed to be herself, and so has withdrawn into a private world. She has a habit of blinking while gazing at certain objects: ‘A nervous mannerism, Dr Barney called this blinking; but Ally had suspected for some time now that his Aunt Chloe did it quite deliberately, to catch the bright light-sparkles better, as Ally too screwed up his eyes against the street lamps...to make the shining silver spokes around them dance’ (p37).

Thus, both Ally and Chloe attempt to find a more ‘magical’ way to look at life, and this helps to create a bond between them. Ally’s mother, representing oppressive non-magical reality, is unable to understand both her sister and her son, and constantly tries to force them into her way of seeing: ‘Why couldn’t she just simply let him be, to watch the bright bewitching sparkles too! - he saw that she, like her bemused twin sister, was narrowing her eyes. Not harmlessly at pretty, sunlit cellophane, but threateningly at him’ (p38).

Ally later takes Aunt Chloe to meet Flora and Riley. In this place, with a young boy and a couple who live by alternative values, Chloe seems to discover her own inner magic and joy; consequently, she makes sudden improvements:

Aunt Chloe looked quite different....For one thing she was smiling. Her anxious peaky face had softened, making her look considerably younger, much younger than she was. Perhaps Flora’s soup had done her good: her skin looked pinker, fresher. Her pale eyes shone.

(p84)

Chloe is renowned for ‘switching off’ and paying no attention to what is going on around her. In Flora’s place, however, Chloe begins to listen and respond. Here, it seems, it is safe to ‘tune in’ and she now wants to pay attention. This, along with Ally’s mother’s behaviour, suggests that Chloe’s ‘switching off’ was a conscious and deliberate way of escaping oppression and distress.

It is therefore suggested that the same forces which have driven Chloe to mental illness have also motivated Flora to ‘go her own way’ and think for herself. While
Chloe has withdrawn mentally, Flora finds a more active, positive approach. There is occasionally a darker side to Flora in that she can be domineering: when she goes into labour and passionately refuses outside help, her threats link her to witches and curses (p86). However, this is caused by her fear of being taken from her magical world and back to ‘normality’. She fears authorities interfering and controlling her as they do Chloe: ‘That’s not 
her mind inside her head, you know, Ally. That’s just the mind they’re giving her, three times a day, in between meals’ ’ (p81).

Flora, Chloe and Ally simply want to be in touch with their own inner magic, and think and live in their own ways, rather than being forced into what someone else wants them to be. Flora’s particular magic is that she has the strength to do this. Despite the fears of her partner and Ally, she gives birth easily and independently. Significantly, Chloe is the only one who helps. She later agrees to a small check-up, ‘Since it’s all over anyway, and everyone agrees I managed beautifully all by myself.”....“You did, you did,” crowed Riley, over the moon. “You managed beautifully” ’ (p110).

Ultimately, both Ally and Aunt Chloe make significant progress in healing their psychological wounds in this magical place. Chloe’s condition improves dramatically, and Ally begins to find the strength to stand up to his mother and find his own identity. As he says to Chloe:

“...They’re not an easy lot to hold your own against, if all the rows I have with Mum are anything to go by. I bet you soon gave up, and just kept quiet....I’m going to dig my heels in when it all comes up for me. Refuse to budge, like you. But tell them why. I think it may be better in the long run.”

(pp66-7)

Like Kitty, Simon and Natalie, Ally begins to discover his inner magic to protect himself against crushing by oppressive forces. The ending emphasises that he has many

---

17 Incidentally, this can also be seen as the difference between Harry Potter and Dudley Dursley. As chapter four discussed, one is willingly moulded, while the other fights oppression and remains true to himself.
battles with his mother ahead, but that he is strengthened and protected by his magical experiences.

There is also a sense that Flora and, less so, Riley, influence more than just these two individuals: after much negotiation, the couple are allowed, pending formal interview, to work at the hospital and live in a staff flat, with Chloe helping to look after the baby. They therefore bring their ‘magic’ into a more conventional situation, to help others as they did Chloe and Ally. The ending therefore gives an optimistic sense of different realities merging together, and of Flora’s magical world infiltrating and helping more oppressed realms of society. Yet the novel negotiates a fine balance whereby the focus on Ally’s family battles and the nurse’s stern manner, along with Riley’s humour, prevent any sickly-sweet sentimentality or excessive optimism.

Inglis links the use of myth and magic in literature to post-Romantic counter-cultures ‘who have been voicing for many years a proper human distaste for the over-productivity, the waste and headlong destructiveness of [our] economic and political system....[This type of counter-culture] seeks to imagine values, ways of life and forms of thinking and imagining....which are capable of keeping alive a resistance to all in the polity which it condemns’ (Inglis 1981: 233). This links very much to the values of Flora, and also Goggle Eyes’ Kitty and her mother (anti-nuclear campaigning, finding joy in nature). Significantly, Inglis’ chapter on this is entitled ‘Rumours of angels and spells in the suburbs’. The general idea seems to be ‘magic’ as a form of alternative ideology, as a constant ‘nudge’ to consider ways of thinking beyond the rational surface. Inglis calls this ‘the political ethics of the back garden’ (1981: 233). Incidentally, Flora and Riley are quite literally in the back garden, hidden in the undergrowth. This would explain why The Granny Project’s Natasha seems to entertain a different perspective when confronted with both the death of Granny and the reminder it brings of her children’s births: both birth and death are profound experiences which frequently cause
one to rethink values and ways of living, and consider what may lie beyond conventional life, in a materialist and / or supernatural sense.

Even in Dahl, there is often a sense of magic as another way of thinking and living which infiltrates and undermines ‘reality’. The point was made earlier that even Dahl’s novels complicate the divide between the ‘real’ and the magical. The latter seems to hover underneath everyday reality and burst through when it is needed, and the discovery of it makes reality a far more enjoyable place to live in, as it does for Fine’s Ally - Matilda, Charlie, James and George all experience rejuvenated and far more joyful lives after they have been touched by magic of various kinds. They simply have less control over it than the children in Rowling, Jones and Fine.

In both the Harry Potter and Chrestomanci series, magic constitutes a society of its own, and so is less obviously a counter-culture to ‘normality’. In Harry Potter, magic initially subverts the Dursleys’ bourgeois reality, and continues to do so throughout the novels, but the magical world is gradually shown to contain as much snobbery, oppressiveness and general social problems as the muggle world. This point also applies to the majority of the Jones novels discussed in this thesis: magical worlds have many problems of their own. Nonetheless, as we have seen, in both Harry Potter and the Chrestomanci novels, developing inner magic powers is the key to finding one’s true identity and inner strength, and consequently learning to cope with oppressive external forces (social and individual). For Harry Potter, Cat Chant and Christopher Chant in particular, the realisation of their magical powers is the beginning of an albeit long, gradual process of learning how to become strong. 18 Chapter three pointed out that awareness of adult fallibility makes a child far less vulnerable to exploitation. If such a healthy awareness of others’ flaws is combined with the ability to access one’s own strength, then the child is truly empowered, or en route to becoming so.

18 As chapter five pointed out, the use of a series, rather than a one-off novel, enables the process to be depicted as more gradual and complex.
Conclusion

Inglis’ discussion of magic as counter-culture points out that magic in literature ‘does not possess any large theory’. Instead ‘it intends no grander consequence for its beliefs than that the lives of its children be given the sense of mystery, magic, faery and supernatural dread, without which those lives will be ungentle and dried up, coarsened by the vulgar calculus of market-place utilitarianism’ (1981: 234). This is perhaps what Merla means when he states that ‘I believe in magic. Not as mystic mumbo, but as a way of life’. He goes on to describe magic as ‘an archetypal life-giving quality’ (Merla 1980: 349). This once again brings to mind Egoff’s expression, ‘the enchantment of life’; Inglis uses a similar expression, ‘re-enchant the universe’ (1981: 234). This feeling can be generated as a way of coping with, and perhaps transcending, the harsh realities of life, in the same way that humour, as we have seen before, can restore joy and maintain sanity, though the external situation may remain the same.

Egoff believes that, in all eras, ‘The writer of fantasy goes beyond realism to reveal that we do not live entirely in a world of facts, that we also inhabit a universe of the mind and spirit where the creative imagination is permanently struggling to articulate meaning and values’ (1981: 81). However, according to Egoff, in children’s fantasy from the mid-twentieth century onwards, ‘...the inner landscape of the mind is explored much more deeply and sensitively’ than in previous eras (1981:105). I would add that Fine’s sensitive depiction of the psychology and power of the mind makes Egoff’s arguments appropriate for her work too: Fine certainly shows that being in touch with one’s mind and spirit is an essential ingredient for a happy life and successful relationships with others.

Peter Hunt discusses the effects of fantasy’s increasing emphasis on psychology in the late twentieth century: the ‘boundaries between reality and psychological fantasy have become increasingly blurred’ (Hunt & Lenz 2001: 22). This is confirmed by Nikolajeva
who states that, in recent children’s literature, ‘the psychological-realistic code merges with the psychological-fantastic code...’ (1996: 70). Nikolajeva is referring specifically to U.S. children’s fiction, but her points apply to the writers in this thesis and to many recent British children’s books:

In fantasy from the 1980s and 1990s innovations are not primarily variations of themes and motifs, but concern problems, messages and values...that can be discerned behind magical adventures. They also concern psychology, which enables fantasy to treat the same issues we find in the best non-fantastical novels for children. Magical adventures in recent fantasy become a quest for identity, and protagonists are no longer obedient pawns in games played by higher powers, but are developed into active and engaged participants who are often central to the plot.

(1996: 73)

It seems, then, that today’s writers, both fantasy and realist, place increasing emphasis on helping children discover their inner power - the unending landscape of their own minds. This shared interest in the power of the mind destabilises the divide between fantasy and realism. Even Dahl’s later novels show a significant move in this direction. However, most of Dahl’s work does ultimately suggest the idea of a benevolent higher power rescuing vulnerable children, and in this he echoes Christian philosophy. Rowling, Jones and Fine come closer to Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism (as, I believe, does The Secret Garden) in suggesting that true power is found by turning inwards and delving into one’s own mind or, at least, a combination of inner and outer forces.

Jones’ essay in Foundation discusses her reasons for writing for children. Her main focus is to encourage discovery of the power of the mind:
I would hope to encourage some part of one generation at least to use their minds as minds are supposed to be used. A book for children is really a blueprint for dealing with life. For that reason, it might have a happy ending, because nobody ever solved a problem while believing it was hopeless....The blueprint should, I think, be an experience in all the meanings of that word, and the better to make it so, I would want it to draw on the deeper resonances we all ought to have in the other side of our minds.

(Jones 1997: 14)

Magical and imaginative thinking also enables the blossoming of the true self - the self which makes use of all parts of the mind and has at least some power to resist oppressive external forces. This is particularly true of Fire & Hemlock’s Polly. On returning to ‘Nowhere’ after an absence, Polly ‘felt all easy and light, like you do when you stretch after sitting still, or get into your own clothes after playing dressing-up. Last term had been all wrong somehow. It was as if she had been pretending to be someone else’ (p116). As if to confirm this, Polly later looks back on the four years of her life in which she was without the magical presence of ‘Nowhere’ as a time when she was not herself: they had been ‘formless and humdrum years. Polly had done things, true, but it had all been without shape, as if she had been filleted away from her own motives and things which gave her shape’ (p319) (this also echoes Natalie’s time when under Tulip’s influence).

Ted Hughes’ essay, ‘Myth and Education’, confirms this idea of magic / myth / imagination as part of the ‘inner child’ which, it seems, is the true self:

[Children] want to escape the ugliness of the despiritualized world in which they see their parents imprisoned. And they are aware that this inner world we have rejected is not merely an inferno of depraved impulses and crazy explosions of embittered energy. Our real selves lie down there. Down there, mixed up among all the madness, is everything that made life worth living. All the lost awareness and powers and allegiances of our biological and spiritual being.

(Hughes 1976: 91)

In the work of all four writers, in varying degrees, magic gives the children, and sometimes the adults, increasing self-worth; faith in both the world and their own
powers; and reassurance that there is wonder both inside and outside themselves, despite the various different types of oppression they must face. The focus is therefore on empowering children psychologically, and helping them find their inner strength and inner self. Sometimes the child character’s power extends to physical abilities, but the underlying psychological power is always paramount, and physical powers may be a metaphor for psychological powers. Thus, children may be subject to the actual and physical powers of adults, but they do have power over their own minds.

In Jones’ Fire & Hemlock there is ‘This idea of a hidden “middle path”…that leads from this ordinary world to a mystical dimension….“Nowhere,” for…Jones - as well as for Polly Whittacker - is that spiritual place where one is self-confident enough not to have to cling to anyone else in order to survive and be happy’ (Hixon 2002: 101). This is exactly what Fine’s Natalie discovers when she frees herself from Tulip. Although the emphasis is, as we have seen, primarily on psychological survival, the point is also expressed aptly in Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden, when Colin learns to stand, quite literally, on his own two feet:

“I can stand” [Colin] said, and his head was still held up and he said it quite grandly.

(p227)
CONCLUSION

The Introductory chapter raised the issue of the degree to which the writers engage with both literary and social discourse. The thesis has confirmed that Fine the realist writer engages with contemporary social issues more than with literary traditions, though this is not in any way to imply that her literary qualities are inferior. The other three writers, however, make more extensive use of older traditions such as fairytale discourse, and their engagement with this is slightly more extensive than their relationship with contemporary social issues. Nonetheless, all four writers do interact with both these issues: there may be a different weighting between the realist and the fantasists (or, rather, the writers who are primarily fantasists\(^1\)), but the work of all four writers is informed by, and interacts with, both literary traditions and post-1960s society. Andrew Blake’s views on the Harry Potter novels could be applied to all four writers: ‘..the old is remodelled so that it can contain the new….past literary forms and present concerns exist with the new’ (Blake 2002: 8; 17).

The thesis has also confirmed my expectation that writers who appear to be vastly different on the surface may have much in common. Though the differences between writers must of course be respected, it is certainly worthwhile to examine these writers simultaneously and explore the parallels as well as the differences. What is most significant is that there are various elements in post-1960s society with which all four writers interact, but each does so in his or her own way: the different literary features employed by each writer ensure that similar social issues are explored and presented differently. For example, Fine’s *The Tulip Touch* (1996) and Jones’ *Fire & Hemlock* (1985) each depict serious child abuse, yet while Fine features a bleak, realistic ending, Jones follows a realistic and frightening portrayal of severe neglect with a magical rescue and a happy ending.

\(^1\) As the Introduction has discussed, Dahl, Rowling and Jones are not always clear-cut ‘fantasists’.
In terms of the ongoing debate regarding the child-as-vulnerable-innocent or the child-as-destructive-demon, these writers place some emphasis on the destruction that can be caused by the spoilt, overly-assertive child, yet these are never the central characters with whom reader-identification is expected. There is also awareness of negative traits within ‘good’ children and, for the most part, this is shown as normal and acceptable. However, far more emphasis is placed on the child’s potential vulnerability, yet this is combined (in most cases) with an emphasis on the child’s potential strength.

Victor Watson points out that child characters ‘in most children’s books are, I believe, treated by writers with a mixture of reverence and realism’ (Watson 1996: 5). Watson seems to be referring here to children’s literature throughout its history. This links to my point in chapter five that most of the novels in this thesis could be seen as bildungsromane for children, in which characters learn to deal with all manner of challenges, yet experience many trials and tribulations along the way. The chapter also acknowledged that this point applies to many of the landmark texts throughout the history of children’s literature - by ‘landmark’ I mean those which were popular at the time, and are still well known and well regarded today.

This again clarifies that Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine engage with contemporary social issues, while continuing some of the traditions of their predecessors. Today’s ‘realism’, in both fantasy and realist texts, shows a more acute understanding of child psychology than in the past, and more awareness of the normality of faults and weaknesses, but this does not deter writers from also revering the child’s positive potential. Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine, amongst many of their contemporaries, applaud children and childhood, yet without oversimplifying the child’s character and without excessive glorification. There is little idealisation of childhood, such as that which was evident in the first half of the twentieth century, and the psychology of the child’s mind is explored in more depth than ever before,
as the last chapter in particular has shown. Nonetheless children, as Watson says, are revered.

Contemporary awareness of children's feelings and needs, and of their negative traits, is, therefore, usually combined with the fairytale element of faith in the child's goodness and ability to transcend trauma. This point can apply equally to realist texts: in a recent talk, Anne Fine said that, apart from severe circumstances, children usually cope with life's challenges and are not always as fragile as some psychologists would have us believe. She suggests that excessive focus on the child's inability to cope will create a negative self-fulfilling prophecy (as chapter four explored) (Fine 2004).

This calls to mind William Blake's concept of innocence and experience. In the texts explored here, children (characters and readers) are exposed to 'experience' in the form of family conflict and challenges, and general adult fallibility. Yet, with the exception of Fine's Tulip, they are not usually left in a place of despair. Most child characters maintain 'innocence' (in a loose sense of the word\(^2\)) in the form of virtuous qualities, sophisticated potential and a connection to a place of inner strength and inner magic. They not only survive, therefore, but experience happiness.

Tulip, on the other hand, has experience without innocence and, significantly, she is both vulnerable and demonic at the same time: Fine is the only one of the four writers clearly to show the vulnerability of the 'difficult' child. Tulip has been subjected to the most severe type of adult fallibility (physical, emotional and possibly sexual abuse) and she is not able to maintain her innocence or access her 'inner magic'. She has no 'enchantment' with herself or with life. She is one of the few child characters in contemporary children's literature who is not a survivor. It is important, as discussed previously, that the story is not

\(^2\) I am aware that chapter four pointed out that most of these characters are *not* 'innocent'. However, here the word is being used in a loose sense to mean qualities which enable strength, happiness and enchantment to flourish.
told from Tulip’s point-of-view. Thus, Fine gives us a sensitive portrayal of the horrors of Tulip’s life, while ensuring that reader-identification is with Natalie, who does survive and flourish.

On the other hand, the child who has innocence without experience is, as Blake stressed, extremely vulnerable to exploitation by others. A fundamental part of experience is awareness of adult fallibility. In particular, Jones’ Cat and Christopher naively place their faith and trust in the wrong person. For their physical and psychological survival, they must learn to be aware when an adult is at fault, yet without becoming cynical and jaded. Harry Potter, too, is sometimes ‘duped’, along with the reader - the revelation of the villain is often a surprise (the difference here is that these children learn to be aware of adult fallibility, while also experiencing positive qualities in adults, whereas Tulip only experiences severe adult flaws - there is no balance). On the whole, the more children are able to access their inner strength and magic, the more ability they have to cope with adult fallibility and other challenges.

Nonetheless, the child is shown to need the adult. Adult fallibility, and the child’s need to find inner strength, does not mean that the child can manage without adult support, guidance and limits. Within reason, children must have freedom to explore and to learn by their own experiences and mistakes. However, all four writers also show that children benefit from reasonable boundaries and discipline, yet this can be a difficult balance for the adult to achieve. Excessive restraint, particularly that which comes from the adult’s egotistical desire to control the child, is damaging and hinders the child’s development. Nonetheless, the potential of children does not flourish in an environment which allows them continually to have their own way; leaves them to their own devices; or burdens them with too much responsibility before they are ready for it. In this, Dahl, Rowling, Jones and
Fine all seem to be reacting against extreme liberalism, showing that it is in children’s best interests to be guided, and sometimes disciplined.

Children’s literature in earlier eras often made a similar point, yet the biggest difference here is that the contemporary writers in this thesis show that not all adults act in children’s best interests: adults may sometimes be egotistical, controlling, indifferent or incompetent. Thus, while children are shown to need sufficient adult support, not all adults can provide this. In Dahl’s work, adults are usually one extreme or the other, while the other three writers explore this in more depth and frequently portray adults who are, for the most part, ‘good-enough’, yet are still flawed and make mistakes.

In an article on Pullman’s Dark Materials trilogy, Moruzi criticises Pullman for not allowing the child characters complete independence from adults: ‘He allows them to become increasingly independent, but only within carefully defined adult parameters which allow him and his adult readers to remain comfortable in their superior positions in the social hierarchy….he fails to engage in the subversive possibilities of the genre [of children’s literature]’ (Moruzi 2005: 65). However, it need not be problematic for adult authors to show child characters benefiting from adult assistance. If child characters are shown to be entirely free of adults this creates, or increases, a huge gulf of separation between childhood and adulthood. Chapter three pointed out that mocking-demystification of adults increases this divide, while sympathetic-demystification tries to create bridges of understanding. In the same way, accepting that children can benefit from appropriate adult support, while always condemning oppressive or inappropriate control, can also help to harmonise the adult-child relationship. Or, at least, it suggests that children and adults should learn to live alongside each other, rather than advocating that children break their dependence on adults.
Early children’s literature, even well into the Victorian era, usually depicted adult power which would today be considered oppressive. This gradually developed into fantasies of children escaping from adult power: this type of children’s book appeared occasionally in the nineteenth century and frequently in the first half of the twentieth century. In the post-1960s era, however, there is a general trend towards accepting adult power, and the tensions of the adult-child relationship, and finding ways to deal with this and negotiate the power struggles. A fundamental part of this is acknowledging adult fallibility – thus, the fact that adults hold a certain amount of power does not in any way make them flawless. Alongside this acknowledgement, finding one’s inner power is shown as the ultimate empowerment which makes it much easier to cope with the power of others.

These points apply less strongly to Dahl than they do to the other three writers, and he could be criticised for increasing the divide between childhood and adulthood: his work contains far more examples of mocking-demystification than sympathetic-demystification, and his child characters usually escape from negative adults, who are then replaced by near-perfect substitutes. He does not, therefore, fully explore the tensions and power struggles of the adult-child relationship to the same extent as the other three writers. However, he does not, as we have seen, advocate complete freedom from adults, and many of his child characters must still learn to deal with adult fallibility and adult power: Charlie cannot have full control of the factory until he is an adult, though this does not appear to bother him, while Matilda, until her escape to Miss Honey’s care, empowers herself with psychological strength and devious behaviour in order to cope with her oppressive parents. Most significantly, Danny comes to terms with his father’s shortcomings, while maintaining his love for him – this is Dahl’s most complex novel. To repeat Watson’s point, quoted in chapter four (Watson 1996: 5-6), the majority of the child characters in the work of all four
writers learn to cope. They do not, for the most part, allow themselves to be oppressed, but they do not usually seek escapism either.

On the whole, in the work of all four writers, those adults who have the healthiest relationships with children, and are most attuned to their real needs, are those who have not repressed or denied their 'inner child'. These adults have taken their childhood qualities and developed them into adulthood, and there is a strong implication that many of the child protagonists will do the same. The gulf between childhood and adulthood is therefore bridged somewhat, and this contrasts strongly with children's literature in the first half of the twentieth century, in which childhood and adulthood were often segregated. Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine therefore present possibilities for healthy adult-child relationships, though, as we have seen (and less so in the case of Dahl), there is usually an acknowledgement that there will always be some conflict, and a suggestion that this should be accepted rather than resisted.

With regard to the 'teaching' and guidance of the author, most of these novels contain what could be referred to as emotional didacticism. These novels, along with much of today's children's literature, still try to teach children, but focus on their emotions and their psychological well-being, rather than overt religious teaching, manners or social conduct. Sheila Egoff discusses this - though she is writing in 1980, her views are still relevant today, and apply particularly to Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine:
Despite the major changes [in post-1960s society and post-1960s children's literature]...contemporary children's literature is not as cut off from the past as it may appear: there is an underlying link with earlier periods. In a broad sense it stills fulfils the major ground rule: that of reflecting the manners and mores of society and the child's place in it. While the psychological approach of the seventies is very much in tune with the times, it also calls to mind the precept literature of the first two hundred and fifty years of writing for children. Contemporary authors are telling children how to live emotionally, as their predecessors told them how to behave. The saving graces of this new didacticism are its literary sophistication, its compassion, and its concern for the individual.

(Egoff 1980: 432)

The Introductory chapter pointed out that one of the main aims of this thesis is to examine what these writers make of the old and the new, both in terms of literary traditions and social issues. They continue the long literary tradition of children's literature as a form of didacticism, yet this is combined with a post-1960s mindset regarding children's feelings, needs and rights. As Egoff points out, increased literary sophistication ensures that any 'teaching' is subtle and implicit, and the emphasis is always on the child's psychological and emotional well-being. The positive adult characters depicted in the novels are able to teach and guide without being harsh or oppressive and, in the same way, Dahl, Rowling, Jones and Fine, like many of their contemporaries, offer their novels as supportive 'friends' to their child readers, rather than overt and authoritative teachers.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY TEXTS

Dahl, Roald


Fine, Anne


Jones, Diana Wynne


Rowling, J.K.

OTHER PRIMARY TEXTS


Edgeworth, Maria, 1796-1801/1897. *The Parent’s Assistant or Stories for Children,* London: Macmillan  
1813. *Rosamond,* Boston: Cummings & Hilliard


Hughes, Thomas, 1857. *Tom Brown’s Schooldays,* T. Nelson & Sons Ltd.2


---

1 See footnote no. 6 in chapter three (p118) for an explanation of *Peter Pan’s* publishing history, including various format and name changes.

2 Place of publication and year of edition not given.


SECONDARY MATERIAL


BBC1, 2001. What Kids Want...and How They Get It, 19 December, Matthew Thompson, (dir.), Dani Gover (prod.)

BBC1, 2004a. Look North, 24 March

BBC1, 2004b. News at One, 28 May

3 Year of original publication not given.


Braid, Mary & Victor, Peter, 1995. ‘Is childhood nothing like it used to be?: most adults believe so’. *The Independent on Sunday*, 6 August, p6


Briscoe, Joanna, 2003. ‘The generation that took a gamble’, *The Guardian*, 13 September, accessed online: [http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,3605,1039876,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,3605,1039876,00.html) (5 July 2004)


Clare, John, 2004. ‘Ministers & unruly pupils “causing collapse of schools” ’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 May, p1


Columbus, Chris (dir), 1993. *Mrs Doubtfire*, USA: 1492 Productions/Blue Wolf Productions, Twentieth Century Fox


CRAE (Children’s Rights Alliance in England), [http://www.crae.org.uk/about/about.html](http://www.crae.org.uk/about/about.html) (accessed 28 June 2004)


The Daily Express, 2003. ‘Tragic Huntley blunders that must never be repeated’, anon, 18 December, p14


Derbyshire, David, 2004. ‘Now obesity kills child aged three’, The Daily Telegraph, 27 May, p1


---

4 Year of first edition not given.

Ellis, Walter, 1995. ‘The Death of Childhood: the time has passed when to be young was very heaven’, The Times, 1 August, p13


Fine, Anne, 2001. Interview on ‘Desert Island Discs’ (with Sue Lawley), Radio Four, 16 December


Ford, Gina, 1999. The Contented Little Baby Book: the secret to calm and confident parenting from one of the world’s top maternity nurses. Vermillion: London


Green, Dr Christopher, 1984/1992. Toddler Taming: a parents’ guide to the first four years, London: Vermillion


The Guardian, 2001. ‘Justice has been done’, 12 December, anon (quotation used is Paul Cavadino from the Crime Reduction charity, Nacro), accessed online: http://guardian.co.uk/child/story/0,617661,00.html (19 July 2004)


296


The Independent, 1986. ‘A pregnant pause’, anon, 9 October, p6


ITV, 2004. GMTV, 19 July


Jones, Nicolette, 2004. ‘What exactly is a children’s book?’, The Times, 30 April, T2 supplement, pp4-5

King, Frederick Truby, 1913. Feeding & Care of Baby (issued by The Society for the Health of Women & Children), London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.


Lindow, Sandra, 1997. ‘Trauma & recovery in Ursula Le Guin’s *Wonderful Alexander*: animal as guide through the inner space of the unconscious’, *Foundation: the international review of science fiction*, No 70 (summer), pp32-38


Lockyer, Daphne, 2004. ‘How to make a bad child good’, *The Times*, 1 July, supplement pp4-5


Nodelman, Perry, 1987. Touchstones: reflections on the best in children’s literature (volume two), Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana: Children’s Literature Association

Nodelman, Perry, 1989. Touchstones: reflections on the best in children’s literature (volume three), Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana: Children’s Literature Association


The Observer, 2003. ‘Past failures that were ignored’, anon, 26 January, accessed online: http://society.guardian.co.uk/climbie/story/0,10939,882563,00.html (19 July)


Pollit, Katha, 2003. ‘In the family’s way’, The Guardian, 9 September, accessed online: http://books.guardian.co.uk/lrb/articles/0,6109,1038749,00.html (2 July 2004)


Radice, Sophie, 1999. ‘The £110 000 question: is this baby a blessing or a burden?’, The Guardian, 23 June, accessed online: http://www.guardian.co.uk/parents/story/0,3605,290896,00.html (5 July 2004)


Rose, Jacqueline, 1984. The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction, London & Basingstoke: Macmillan


Selick, Henry (dir), 1996. James & the Giant Peach, UK/USA: Allied Filmmakers/Skellington Productions Inc./Walt Disney Pictures

Sieghart, Mary Ann, 1995. The Times, 5 August, weekend section, pp1;3


Stone, Lawrence, 1981. The Past & the Present, Boston (Mass.): Routledge & Kegan Paul

Stuart, Mel (dir), 1971. Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory, USA: David L.Wolper Productions/Paramount


*The Times*, 1968. ‘Girl, 11, sentenced to life detention for killing boys’, anon, 18 December, p4


Toynbee, Polly, 1995. ‘Suffer the little children: Dr Barnado’s this week celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founder’s birth. Polly Toynbee asks what lessons we have learnt about caring for kids’, *The Independent*, 4 July, section 2, pp4-5


Watson, John B., 1928. *Psychological Care of Infant & Child* (with the assistance of Rosalie Watson), London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.


Williams, Stuart, 2004b. ‘It’s parents who make children unteachable’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2 May


