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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

'BUT IT'S ONLY A CHILDREN'S BOOK'
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS A VEHICLE OF IDEOLOGICAL DISSEMINATION
Dětská literatura jako prostředek ideologického šíření

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Vedoucí diplomové práce (supervisor):
Colin Steel Clark, M.A.

Zpracovala (author): Hana Moravčíková
Studijní obor (subject):
Anglistika a amerikanistika

I declare that the following M.A. thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

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Abstract

This M.A. thesis focuses on the analysis of the presence of ideologies in three books published primarily for child readers: *The Secret Garden* (1911), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and *The Water Babies* (1863). The introduction to the problematic terminology of children's literature is followed by the main purpose of this thesis: analysis of ideologies in F.H. Burnett's, Ch. Kingsley's and C.S. Lewis's books, which reflect the ideological preferences of the authors themselves and of the time period in which the books were published. These, in particular, include three branches of Christianity (Christian Science, Catholicism, and Protestantism), British imperialistic politics and scientific racism. In addition, a partial analysis of gender issues in children's books is carried out as well as an analysis of the concept of home, one of the basic ideological symbols in children's literature. Some space is also dedicated to the discussion of the primary purpose of children's texts, which is one of the most important questions of literary criticism concerned with children's books.

Keywords: Frances Hodgson Burnett, Charles Kingsley, C. S. Lewis, children's literature, ideologies, Christianity, Imperialism, racism, instruction, entertainment;

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na analýzu ideologií přítomných ve třech knihách primárně určených pro dětského čtenáře: *Tajemná zahrada* (1920), *Lev, skříň a čarodějnice* (1991) a *Vodňátka: pohádka pro děti* (1911). Po úvodním seznámení se s problematikou základních termínů dětské literatury se diplomová práce věnuje svému hlavnímu cíli: analýze ideologií v knihách F. H. Burnettové, Ch. Kingsleyho a C. S. Lewise, které odrážejí ideologické preference autorů i doby, v níž byly knihy publikovány. Patří mezi ně zejména tři odvětví křesťanství (Křesťanská věda, katolictví, protestanství), imperialistická politika Velké Británie a vědecký rasismus. Součástí analýzy je i částečný rozbor genderové problematiky v dětských knihách a domova jako jednoho z hlavních ideologických symbolů v dětské literatuře. Pozornost je také věnována jedné z nejzákladnějších otázek literární kritiky zaměřené na dětské publikace, a to zda je primárním cílem těchto knih poučit nebo pobavit.

Klíčová slova: Frances Hodgson Burnett, Charles Kingsley, C. S. Lewis, dětská literatura, ideologie, křesťanství, imperialismus, rasismus, poučení, zábava;

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

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1. INTRODUCTION: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

A disproportion exists between the volumes of criticism dedicated to literature aimed at adults, versus that aimed at children. This is related to the fact that the identity of the child, unlike that of the adult, had not been strictly and universally determined and until the 17th century 'society viewed children as little adults who must rapidly step into the roles of their parents.'¹ Although this statement cannot be universalised because - as Peter Hunt rightly says 'the notion of childhood changes from place to place and from time to time'² - it accurately captures the situation in Britain. The first significant success in redefining the identity of the child in British society only came with John Locke's publication of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 1693 wherein Locke 'advocated milder ways of teaching and bringing up children than had been recommended previously.'³ While his revolutionary approach appealed to some, it did not convince all levels of British society as, to a large extent, it was more concerned with education rather than with the general living conditions of children. Nevertheless, at this stage children born to the higher social classes were offered a different experience of childhood compared to previous generations and finally there appeared 'a glimmer of hope that children might be permitted to go through a period of childhood rather than immediately assum[ing] the same roles as their parents'⁴. At the beginning of the 18th century, a French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau became also interested in children's education. His approach, however, differed greatly from Locke's. While Locke saw the fruits of education in the creation of a 'political man' with passions subdued by reason and habits, Rousseau preferred education, which would eventually give place to a 'natural man'⁵. He claimed that children should learn new things with the help of their natural senses and feelings and that they should spend their early life in rural settings where they could learn freely. He wanted children to lead a simple, natural life preferably until the age of 12 or 15 when they become ready for formal education⁶. Nevertheless, even Rousseau, one of a few thinkers who at this point European history thought about the nature of childhood and about the needs of children, claimed that 'we know nothing of childhood; and with our mistaken

¹ Donna E. Norton, *Through the Eyes of a Child: an Introduction to Children's Literature*, (Pearson: Boston, 2011) 40.

² Peter Hunt, *Understanding Children's Literature*, (Routledge: New York, 2005) 3.

³ Norton, 45.

⁴ Norton, 45.

⁵ Jamie Gianoutsos, *The Pulse*, "Locke and Rousseau: Early Childhood Education" Vol. 4, No. 1, 14 -15.

⁶ Jamie Gianoutsos, 8.

notions the further we advance the further we go astray.⁷ Yet in spite of this, both he and Locke initialized the still on-going efforts to define the concepts of the child and childhood.

The constantly shifting identity of the child was soon followed by a new kind of literature, which developed to attract the growing group of literate children. Subsequently the first publishers of children's literature emerged in 1744 when John Newbery published his *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* and 'publishers realized that there was indeed a market for books written specifically for children.'⁸ The conditions for the development of children's literature improved continuously and culminated in the nineteenth century with the growth of population, development of educational institutions and with the expanding technological progress, which reduced the printing costs.⁹ Since then, children's literature has gained a vast reading public and has become an established publishing genre. William Makepeace Thackeray commented on this constructive development of the approach towards children and children's literature in the first half of the 19th century:

One cannot help looking with secret envy on the children of the present day, for whose use and entertainment a thousand ingenious and beautiful things are provided which were quite unknown some few scores of years since, when the present writer and reader were very possibly in the nursery state. Abominable attempts were made in those days to make useful books for children, and cram science down their throats as calomel used to be administered under the pretence of a spoonful of current jelly.¹⁰

However, as the genesis of children's literature dates back to times when literature for adults was approximately four thousand years old, it clearly is in its infancy. The very definition of children's literature is as unsatisfactory as it is vague and has become the subject of much debate. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, for instance, poses the interesting question: 'How do we know which books are best for children if we do not even know which books *are* 'children's books'?'¹¹ Nevertheless, what all critics of children's literature agree on is the complicated nature of the concept which still leaves many questions unanswered. In fact,

⁷ Jean – Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, (Aldine Press: London, 1974) 1.

⁸ Norton, 47.

⁹ Peter Hunt ed., *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, (Routledge: London, 2005) 646.

¹⁰ *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, 552.

¹¹ *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, 15.

some literary scholars suggest that the very concept of children's literature is wrongly constructed. Jack Zipes, for instance, claims that

... children's literature does not exist. If we take the genitive case literally and seriously, and if we assume ownership and possession are involved when we say "children's literature" or the literature of children, then there is no such thing as children's literature...¹²

Based on the fact that adult literature consists of texts written by adults for adults, children's literature cannot be considered 'children's' because although it is written for children in the vast majority of cases the authors are the adults. Furthermore, children are not the owners of their books. The books have to be secured by someone else, usually by their parents and only then given to their children. In other words, the genitive case in the expression 'children's literature' does not refer to a possession nor to an authorship but simply to the intended audience and therefore it would be more appropriate to use the term literature *for* children¹³. Peter Hunt also shares Zipes's point of view by saying that 'the 'child' implied in texts 'for children' is inevitably a construction by writers, and therefore, far from 'owning' the literature, its readers are only manipulated by it'.¹⁴ In other words, the essence of children's literature can be summed up by David Rudd's claim that 'children's literature consists of texts that consciously or unconsciously address particular constructions of the child.'¹⁵ Yet, there are critics, for instance Jacqueline Rose, who are interested in the discussion of 'the child' rather than of literature, because they think that the nature of children is as uncertain as the nature of the texts written for them. Rose claims that 'children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple.'¹⁶ However, she claims that there is not a prototype child to which all children are similar. On the contrary, influenced by the world of adults, children, even in their early childhood, can realize that there are differences between them even if only perceived by the condition of their clothes or the neatness of their parents. The individual differences are eventually unimportant but what they imply is that when defining the term 'children's literature', it is as important to

¹² Jack Zipes, *Stick and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*, (Routledge: New York, 2002), 39 - 40.

¹³ Zipes, 40.

¹⁴ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 15.

¹⁵ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 25.

¹⁶ *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, 17.

discuss 'the child' as it is to discuss 'literature'. Only when these two words are clarified, will the definition of children's literature become more accurate.

In brief, at first sight the differences between adult and children's literature may seem trivial. However, once we delve deeper into it, we realize that not only are the boundaries unclear but they are also very difficult to define. This is especially the case of books which were originally written for adults (e.g. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* or *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*) but which have become widely read by children and when books written for children become popular among adults (e.g. *Harry Potter*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Little Prince* etc.). Although there is an abundance of definitions of children's literature, their very number speaks for itself; critics engaged in this subgenre of literature have found it necessary to constantly update the definition of what they study and if possible, to insert in it the latest insights as for some reason or other, they were not satisfied with the previous definition. This constant process of redefining shows that this relatively young literary genre, although closely studied during the past thirty years, has not clearly defined the boundaries of its field and many of the fundamental questions still remain unanswered. Nevertheless, the open space for new discoveries and theories within children's literature is exciting with a great number of books, topics, questions and issues still to be discussed.

Another issue, which reduces the participation of children in making of texts dedicated to them, is the structure of the target audience. Surprisingly, children are not its key element. Before the texts written for children reach the 'particular construction of the child' it has to appeal to a great number of other people mainly 'publishers, parents, the educational establishment and would-be censors'¹⁷. Children are neither the only, nor the most important, nor even the first to get in touch with the books, which are ironically dedicated primarily to them. They are in fact pushed to the very last place in the chain of the processes of creation and reception of the literature for children.

There is always an implied audience or audiences, and the implied audiences of a children's book are constituted first and foremost by an editor/agent/publisher, then by a teacher/librarian/parent, and finally by children of a particular age group.¹⁸

¹⁷ *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, 548.

¹⁸ Zipes, 44.

For this reason, when writing a book for children, writers have to bear in mind that in order to get their texts to young readers, first they have to attract the attention of adults. Thus, the prevailing criterion in the business of children's book publishing is the necessity of convincing the adult. Appealing to what the publishers like, prefer, admire or enjoy, the adult author writes a text which during the vast majority of the process of its creation including its reception, is completely separated from its target readership. If the prospective author of a children's texts decides to ignore the precisely defined sequence of this process, most probably, his work will never reach its child audience. However, there are exceptions like Beatrix Potter, who decided to overlook the British publishers' rejections of her *Tale of Peter Rabbit*, because apparently, her rabbit was too naughty. It was only in 1901, after she published the book herself, when the publishers realized that it has a potential to be successful and profitable. Consequently, proving that the taste of the audience does not always correspond to that of the publishers, the book' had been picked up by one of the six publishers who had originally turned it down. By Christmas of 1902, Frederick Warne had sold 20,000 copies of the book'¹⁹.

The whole process of creating a children's book leads to the primary concern of this thesis: the ideological impact which the strong intervention of adults in the creation of children's literature inevitably leaves in texts. If we consider young readers as innocent, inexperienced and unbiased and adults as their very opposites, we can see that the nature of their personalities is very different:

... children necessarily touch again and again on the adult threshold of delicacy, and – since they are not yet adapted – they infringe the taboos of society, cross the adult shame frontier, and penetrate emotional danger zones which the adult himself can only control with difficulty.²⁰

As the sociologist Norbert Elias suggests in this quotation, children do not perceive psychological or emotional boundaries in the same way that adults do, and what is more they are ready to cross them at any time. Adults, however, fall within certain categories, for example professional, religious, political or social, which simultaneously expand and limit their perception of the world, influence and form their attitudes and opinions. Unlike children,

¹⁹"How Beatrix Potter self-published Peter Rabbit", *The Guardian*,
< <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/dec/17/beatrix-potter-peter-rabbit-self-publishing>> Dec. 17, 2013, March, 3, 2015.

²⁰ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 21.

adults are extremely aware of their position within the above-mentioned groups and if they one day become writers, there is a high probability that this awareness will be transferred to their texts. The adult view of life is in many ways influenced by great a number of variables and cannot be compared to that of a child, who is a so called *tabula rasa*, 'an empty being on which society attempts to inscribe a particular identity.'²¹ Accordingly, Locke, who also claims that the new-born child is comparable to a 'blank page', asks the following questions:

How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience.²²

This experience, which will ultimately result in the emergence of a 'constructed child'²³ is not a consequence of an isolated life, nor is it a conclusion which children reach after having experienced at least some aspects of life. Their experience, as well as opinions and attitudes to which they arrive at, are often simply transferred to them from adults; be it their family, teachers or the authors of their favourite books. To put it in another way, a child's mind is not an independent entity which develops according to its own preferences. It is rather the opposite, an entity constantly influenced, and shaped, often restricted or redirected by others. This external interference of adults is not only conveyed to children through speech and upbringing but also by means of texts which unobtrusively enter the 'blank mind' of children, thus shaping their personalities in their early childhood. Although there are certain aspects of human beings which cannot be formed because they are strictly defined (e.g. race or ethnicity), many aspects, especially those led by ideologies, are served to children directly through incorporation into their everyday lives. However, this does not concern only the ideological preferences of parents or teachers but, surprisingly, also those of the authors of children's literature. As Perry Nodelman states in his book *The Hidden Adult*, 'the simple surface sublimates - hides but still manages to imply the presence of - something less simple.'²⁴ Therefore, even the text which seems to be straightforward can be a bearer of a

²¹ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 22.

²² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, 1999) 87.

²³ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 22.

²⁴ Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*, (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2008) 206.

more complex idea. This intricate, concealed image is precisely what Nodelman calls the hidden adult. In addition, he says that

What texts of children's literature might be understood to sublimate or keep present but leave unsaid is a variety of forms of knowledge - sexual, cultural, historical- theoretically only available to and only understandable by adults.²⁵

Zipes stresses that initially 'certain publishers considered it their civic duty to print books for children that would improve their morals, instruct them about given subjects, and delight them so that their spirits would be uplifted.'²⁶ Nevertheless, with the rapidly growing market and the increasing number of literate children, the potential readers of children's books were put at the same level as adult consumers and the purpose of education and entertaining has slowly changed into the purpose of selling. Yet the topic of educating and entertaining remained one of the crucial subject-matters of children's literature and even today it baffles people involved in its creation.

The aim of this thesis, however, is not to participate in an ever-lasting discussion, in which one side prefers instruction while the other prefers delight, but to add to these two concepts a third idea: ideology. It has been pointed out several times in the history of the children's literature that ideology is an inseparable part of the children's fiction. Dogmas, philosophies and beliefs have been integrated in a great number of books for children throughout the history of their existence. Moreover, ideological messages have a chameleon nature as they can become an integral part of all kinds of children's books whether their primary intention is to entertain or to instruct. Consequently, the presence of ideology in books written for children is directly linked to the presence of an adult who uses the text to spread what he considers the right principle. To prove that this is not only the case of Anglophone texts, in her essay "Defining Children's Literature and Childhood", Lesnik-Oberstein provides an example from Sweden:

Well into the nineteenth century, [Swedish] children's books sought primarily to impress upon their young readers good morals, proper manners, and a sense of

²⁵ Nodelman, 206.

²⁶ Zipes, 46.

religion. In Sweden it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that children's literature began to respond to the needs of children rather than adults.²⁷

In order to write a good book, adult writers create a plot or characters, which they use as bearers of ideology; be that manners, religious belief or political inclinations. Although the 20th century authors of children's fiction often intentionally omit any kind of moral message simply to offer children the liberty of enjoying the texts without being sown 'grown-up' ideas, there is a prevailing opinion that ultimately a text cannot exist without containing at least some overt or covert ideological message, whether the author intended to incorporate it in the text or not. In the introduction to Charles Saarland's essay "Critical Tradition and Ideological Positioning" Peter Hunt says:

... all texts are inevitably infused by ideologies. This has been particularly difficult to accept in the case of children's literature, which is still widely assumed to be 'innocent' of concerns of gender, race, power, and so on – or to carry transparently manipulative messages.²⁸

In a way, this is a logical assumption as most of the societies try to save children from 'adult issues'. Parents simply expect a children's book to be suitable for children; however the expectations of the individual parents very often differ. To show an example, some Christian parents prefer books which teach their children about religion from early childhood while some atheist parents may try to avoid precisely these kinds of books. Various parents are outraged by the amount of violence in their children's books while others may have a different perception of what intolerable violence is. A vegetarian parent can be enraged at the mention of an animal killing displayed in his or her child's book while an omnivore can be irritated by a suggestion of a plant-based diet shown on an environmentalism promoting leaflet.

With the shortening of working hours in 20th century, people have gained more free time. Consequently, many new religious and spiritual communities, leisure time clubs, educational institutes or even sects emerged²⁹, trying to attract people, including children, in order to secure new members, to prosper and to spread their ideology. Supporting Hunt's idea

²⁷ *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, 22.

²⁸ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 30.

²⁹ Francesca Carnevali and Julie-Marie Strange eds., *Twentieth Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*, (Pearson: United Kingdom, 2007) 198.

about the inevitable presence of ideologies in children's texts, Jack Zipes expands the application of this theory from books to all objects claiming that:

children – and I include teenagers here – must still operate in toxic environments in which their "found objects" and material products are heavily saturated with messages and meanings that suit the overall tastes of adults and the tendencies of consumerism.³⁰

Therefore, in this 'heavily saturated' democratic environment where a great number of ideologies have space to develop, it is almost impossible to find a children's book, which would be ideology-free, or in Hunt's words, innocent. 'As with discourse in general, the discourses of children's fiction are pervaded by ideological presuppositions, sometimes obtrusively and sometimes invisibly.'³¹

Another important point in the discussion of ideologies in children's literature is the power of its bearer, a topic partially discussed in Zipes's essay "The Cultural Homogenization of American Children". Although, as it has been pointed out earlier, almost all texts are infected by some kind of ideology, Zipes suggests that there are only a restricted number of ideologies which can be inserted into the widely-read books. To decide which or how many books will have the advantage of being spread is, according to Zipes, the work of the publishers who are in the process of homogenizing the culture and taking the free choice of books not only from children, but also from their parents. Therefore, the most powerful ideology is the one of the publisher which all in all reduces the importance of parents' role in the process of choosing the right book for their children. Although seemingly, they have the possibility to choose a book, the offer from which they choose is narrowed by the publisher and homogenized by the market. Consequently,

... it was assumed that dependency on parents would end in some form of independence at adulthood. In this newer world of commercial planning for children, however, early brand loyalty means a lifetime adventure in dependence.³²

³⁰ Zipes, 34.

³¹ John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, (Longman: London, 1992) 1 – 2.

³² Zipes, 8.

All things considered, we can conclude that the role of a child in the process of creating and choosing a specific book is most of the time insignificant. This however, is not solely a consequence of modern, capitalist era, as Zipes often suggests. From the very beginning of its existence, children's books were used as a new tool for the dissemination of moral and religious ideas:

When children's books were eventually written, they usually mirrored the dominant cultural values of their place and time. Thus, a study of children's literature from the 15th century through contemporary times reflects both changes in the society as a whole and changes in social expectations of children and the family.³³

As may be seen for instance in many museums of fallen political regimes, children's books have been indeed used as a mirror of the society and for this reason their basic concerns are strictly connected to those of adults. The Czech and Slovak spelling-books published around 1960s can be used as an example. These textbooks conveyed to children readers part of the messages, which the political leaders used to communicate to the adult audience through television broadcasting or newspapers. Even if only expressed by means of pictures, the prevalent ideology is clearly incorporated in the texts for the youngest readers pointing out, as Norton states, several changes in the society.

As this approach to children's literature has been always prevalent, it can be stated that texts written for children 'must be regarded as a special site of ideological effect, with a potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes.'³⁴ John Stephens, the author of the quotation, goes on by saying that 'a narrative without an ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language.'³⁵ According to Hunt, Zipes and Stephens, the presence of ideologies in children's literature is simply a fact. Therefore, the role of those, who wish to analyse children's books is not to say whether an ideology is or is not present in the text, but rather what kind of ideology is incorporated in a children's book.

Religions, social moralities and laws have been alternating throughout centuries, always shaping societies somewhat differently. Consequently, the nature of people living in each age differs from their predecessors and from their descendants as the social and moral

³³ Norton, 40.

³⁴ *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, 3.

³⁵ *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, 8.

conditions of each generation are unique. The same formula can be applied to fictional heroes and heroines, whose nature also alters depending on the time period in which they were created. Based on the prevalent ideology of any given time period, these characters have, to a certain degree, fixed appearances, features and stories. Out of these typified personalities, stereotyped characters have emerged, which can be used as a litmus test to the ideological nature of the time period. Under consideration, it is not a coincidence that the protagonists of the vast majority of 18th and 19th century children books 'have tended to be white middle class boys'³⁶ as the understanding of racial policy, social stratification and gender issues was completely different compared to the 20th century.

The following chapters of this thesis will focus on a time period between 1850s and 1950s with the emphasis on the ideological developments and differences which this wide time span brought into British society, specifically into children's literature. The presence of ideologies will be particularly studied in the following texts: *The Water Babies* published in 1863, *The Secret Garden* from 1911 and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* from 1950. In each of them, a stereotyped character of its time period appears and bears several characteristics which can be nowadays considered racist, elitist or sexist but which, at the time of their publications, represented moral models for children. Moreover, in each of the three books, one or more ideologies are present 'disclosing the writer's social, political or moral beliefs'³⁷ and the nature of the time period in which they were written. The long periods between the publications of the three books cover Victorian and Edwardian eras together with the two world wars. In addition, it encompasses the First Golden Age of children's literature. At the same time, the world's political boundaries had been changing in shapes, new countries emerged, and others ceased to exist. The consequences of the reshaping of the world were also reflected in society and accordingly in the literature which besides the alterations in the visible reality reflects the internal change in human beings: while certain kinds of behavioural manifestations started to be considered old-fashioned or even unacceptable a new form of conduct found way into society. Social awareness, tolerance to others and respect of otherness slowly began to emerge. The texts which were praised and popular in the 19th century suddenly became condemned, as is precisely the case of Kingsley's novel. In addition, many other books widely read by children in the previous centuries had a similar fate. Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* with the excessive use of the word 'nigger' has been strongly protested against together with many other books which are nowadays considered racist. However, 'the

³⁶ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 33.

³⁷ *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, 15.

liberals and radicals in America were not alone: similar restrictions were attempted in Britain. A number of British feminists, for example, launched a campaign to ban Roald Dahl's *The Witches* from school libraries because Dahl's female witches are portrayed so negatively.³⁸ To go yet elsewhere, the Czech popular tale about the tomcat Mikeš has been lately also exposed to criticism because of its anti-Romanyism.³⁹

The three subsequently analysed books also reflect some of these changes and can serve as a chronicle of the ideological evolution of the British society, each concentrating on different subject matter but capturing many secondary aspects of their contemporary societies. Trying to deliver moral and religious messages to its young readers, the authors incorporated many other ideas in their texts, often as unwanted and perhaps even as unconscious by-products. Yet precisely these messages are of the greatest importance for this thesis, as they reveal what the authors' consciousness considered natural, automatic and right. Hints on imperialism, gender discrimination, racist remarks or instinctive incorporation of social class division in the analysed books will serve as starting points for further analysis together with the major conflicts of the three stories. The analysis will be also aimed at the main characters, at their gender, race and age.

In order to determine the authors' ideological inclinations, particular attention will be paid to their background as well as to their religious and political preferences. In the case of the three authors, Christian religion, both Catholic and Protestant, will play a key role as it is one of the primary impulses for the creation of the three novels. With the intention to grasp wide contexts in which the books originated, other children's books may be used with the purpose of comparing them with the novels of the primary concern.

When examining each primary source, space will be dedicated also to the evolution of the perception of the child as well as to the development of the relationship between adults and children. In his book *Inventing the Child, Culture, Ideology and the Story of Childhood*, John Zornado quotes a Victorian minister who states that 'the adult's job, first and foremost, is a moral one, and as such, any and all manipulations are therefore justified if it brings about the child's unqualified physical submission to the adult.'⁴⁰ As authors of the children's literature enter into a relationship with their young readers, their contribution to the progress of the adult-child relationship will be also considered and studied in the context of the

³⁸ *International Companion Encyclopedia*, 499.

³⁹ Ivana Svobodová, <http://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/rasismus-v-cesku/romum-se-nelibi-kocour-mikes-lada-pry-byl-rasista_165465.html#.VOngJvmG_Jc,> 14th April, 2014, 22nd February, 2015,

⁴⁰ John Zornado, *Inventing the Child, Culture, Ideology and the Story of Childhood*, (Garland Publishing: New York, 2001) 102.

historical development beginning in the times of the preacher Jacob Abbot and ending with the post-war years. It will be mostly centred on the authors' approach to texts as it, at the same time, reflects their approach to children and mirrors the character of the relationship between parents and their children.

Moreover, the ideological loading of children's literature will be directly linked to the ways in which ideologies are incorporated in the examined texts. As will be seen in the following analysis, the general direction goes from overtly expressed thoughts and opinions to the covert presence of ideologies. The overt or explicit incorporation of ideas in the texts for children was popular mostly at the beginning of the history of children's literature when children's books had primarily instructive purpose. This is for example the case of Renaissance England:

... when the child learned overtly ... that he is wicked at heart, that his desires are the desires of the devil, and that to be a proper gentleman, and a proper servant to the queen, he must confess his sins, deny himself, and remake himself in the image of the master. For the individual ... avoiding the dominant ideology is, ultimately, impossible.⁴¹

Covert incorporation of ideologies into children's literature is above all the case of the children's books published in the last few decades, when the child has been given more liberty and when the entertaining function of texts for children became as important as the educative one. For this reason, the study of overt and covert incorporation of ideologies in the individual books will be directly linked to the time period in which the books were published. Finally, the specific historical era not only affects the way in which the audience receives the book and a degree to which it affects its readers but it most importantly dictates the acceptable amount of ideology in children's literature.

The last element, which will link the analysis of the three novels, is the study of the concept of home, one of the most important bearers of ideology in children's literature. Based on Ann Alston's essay "There's no place Like Home: The Ideological and Mythological Construction of House and Home in Children's Literature," the homes of both major and secondary characters of each book will be considered in terms of the role, which they play in the lives of the fictional children.

⁴¹ Zornado, 49.

Home in children's books is at first sight a symbol of one's social status. Nevertheless, it is also a key to the understanding of the fictional adults present in the lives of children and consequently also a lead to the ideological background of an author. Alston tracks the concept of home back to the Victorian era, when countless people had to leave their homes in order to find work in factories. She points out that the phrase "home sweet home" was becoming every day more popular and 'expressed the Victorian's deep commitment to the idea of home.'⁴² However, the ideal sweet home is not just any home or house for that matter, but a dwelling with specific appearances, furnished with precise objects, and set in lovely surroundings. Alston draws attention to the nature of all these objects saying that 'these symbols of domesticity are adult ones, surely few children want or are interested in dressers in the background be they of text or a real home, and thus the child's self-identity is dominated by adult orientated images and signs.'⁴³ This information is a key to the successful analysis of the thinking of the authors of children's literature, who indisputably furnish their children's books with what they consider inseparable parts of home. In addition, the presence of an ideal home gives also place to its counterpart. According to Alston 'the good family/home is in fact enhanced by the image of the non-conforming and thus "bad" family home. Families that are not "normal" can be recognised by the illustrations of their homes and the objects within the home.'⁴⁴ Thus, the ideal home will not show only the ideological preferences of the writers but by comparing it with its opposite, it will also reveal what they consider bad, wrong or ill.

To sum up, the following analysis of the presence of ideologies in children's literature will examine the three above-mentioned novels in order to reveal the personal ideological preferences of their authors. To identify them correctly, the prevalent ideology of every given time period will be considered together with the historical context in which the books were published. The key symbols of ideology, such as the physical features, the social status and the homes of the main characters as well as those of their counterparts, will be studied. Finally, some space will be dedicated to consider the way in which the ideologies were insinuated into the texts evaluating their influence on the young readers and a degree to which their presence disturbs the consistency of the texts. In the last chapter of the thesis, a comparison will be made between the examined novels and contemporary fiction for children considering the nature and the amount of ideologies in both groups.

⁴² Sebastien Chapleau ed., *New Voices in Children's Literature Criticism*, (Pier Piped Publishing: Staffordshire, 2005), 55.

⁴³ Chapleau, 59.

⁴⁴ Chapleau, 57.

2. THE SECRET GARDEN

2.1. 'The deep vein of symbolism'

'As long as one has a garden, one has a future; and as long as one has a future one is alive.'⁴⁵ Frances Hodgson Burnett, a garden lover, writer and the authoress of the quotation, was a personality which equally influenced adults and children from the Old and the New World. Born in Britain, Burnett often used to visit Europe and her native land spending there long periods of time and setting many of her novels in England. However, when she was a girl, her family emigrated, finding a new place for living in the USA, where she later on got married. For a long time, the American continent became her home. Her writing career started there, where her work was enthusiastically accepted as 'American magazine editors loved her mixture of Victorian English themes and American sensibilities. American audiences were attracted to British literature, and here was someone who could speak to two sets of readers.'⁴⁶ For this reason, from the beginning of her professional career, Burnett's work reached simultaneously two different audiences spreading rapidly through two continents: 'In 1876 she published her first novel, *That Lass o' Lowrie's*, [...] A story of an independent woman in an English mining town. It was well received and published in England only a few weeks after its release in America.'⁴⁷ The ultimate manifestation of Burnett's Anglo-American nature came with the publication of her novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy* set both in the USA and England. The book is a curious manifestation of the character differences of the British and the Americans represented by the two main characters of the story. With the publication of the book, 'Burnett was catapulted into an entirely new sphere of fame and fortune, eventually becoming the highest-paid American woman writer of her lifetime...'⁴⁸

Although her name is nowadays linked mostly with children's literature, during her life F.H. Burnett 'saw herself primarily as a writer for adults, but one who also had some important things to offer children.'⁴⁹ She does not belong to the group of authors such as R.L. Stevenson or Mark Twain, whose work, as has been pointed out earlier, was originally written for adults and later on gained much popularity among children. Yet somehow she addresses

⁴⁵ Anne Lundin, *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Literary Towers*, (Routledge:Now York, 2004) 121.

⁴⁶ Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina ed., *The Annotated Secret Garden*, (W.W. Norton and Company: New York, 2007) xv.

⁴⁷ Your Dictionary, "Frances Hodgson Burnett Facts" <<http://biography.yourdictionary.com/frances-hodgson-burnett>> March 1st, 2015.

⁴⁸ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xviii.

⁴⁹ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xl.

both a young and adult readership. It is not surprising then that *The Secret Garden*, nowadays Burnett's most famous book, 'was perhaps the first children's story to debut in an adult magazine.'⁵⁰ Nevertheless, at the time of its publication, the novel was far less famous compared for instance to *A Little Princess*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* or many of her novels written for adults. Not only has the fame of *The Secret Garden* overcome the popularity of the rest of her work, but it also fused her readership, until then divided by age. The story indeed appeals to a great variety of people, from children of both sexes to teenagers and adults. What is it that attracts all these categories of people?

The *Independent* notices the spiritual aspects of the book and found it "full of a fresh-air gospel which makes it wholesome reading for everybody." Another reviewer noticed that "*The Secret Garden* is more than a mere story of children; underlying it there is a deep vein of symbolism" ... There were those, however, who criticized its mysticism and New Thought message.⁵¹

This analysis of the novel will be based partially on what the reviewers found fascinating about the text. Burnett's religious and personal beliefs, 'the vein of symbolism' and 'the nature of the fresh-air gospel' will be considered together with the most important ideological streams of her lifetime. The British as well as the American context will be also taken into consideration in regard to the influence which they had on the content of the novel. This section will be followed by the interpretation of the symbolism of *The Secret Garden*.

2.2. F. H. Burnett's socio-political, religious and literary influences

Born in Manchester on November 24, 1849⁵², Burnett was a child of Victorian England. Although she moved out of Britain at the age of fourteen, both American and British societies of the time shared certain prevalent tendencies:

The rise of highly competitive industrial technology, the growth of large cities and the decline of rural traditions, an emphasis on strictly controlled social behaviour and Christian piety, and a romantic focus on home and family are

⁵⁰ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xxxviii.

⁵¹ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xxxii.

⁵² Holbrook Gerzina ed., xiv.

factors usually associated with the Victorian Age in Europe and North America, and elsewhere.⁵³

Although some of these tendencies are reflected in her children's fiction, Burnett often violates many Victorian rules. To illustrate, she often breaks the family ties, be it in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *The Secret Garden* or *A Little Princess*, in all of which the main protagonists have one or no parent, being, in addition, torn away from their homes. Moreover, her child heroes often cross the firmly drawn boundaries of what they are allowed to do or to say thus appearing to be rude and disrespectful. 'In the figure of Mary, for example, she contested the traditional view of how a heroine in a children's book should behave.'⁵⁴ In spite of the fact that at the time of the publication of her books, this might have caused an uproar, Burnett refused to follow the tradition of Victorian children's novelists, whose books 'were full of punishment and lacked colour and pleasure; she believed that children were misunderstood and that parents only gave them books to teach them lessons and to keep them quiet.'⁵⁵

Another law which Burnett breaks in her children's fiction is the image of a stereotyped main character. Although she does not leave the realm of a middle or upper-middle class society, neither the one of white race, the authoress often assigns the central role to a female protagonist. Her two most significant heroines, Sarah Crewe from *A Little Princess* and Mary Lennox from *The Secret Garden*, have in fact very much in common; they have spent most of their short lives in India, they are of similar age and social background and although Sarah's father is still alive, both girls are parentless during the majority of the story.

However, while Sarah tells a lot of exciting stories about her life in India, Mary does not have any pleasant memories from her overseas experience. On the contrary, the depiction of her life before she came to England is unfortunate and casts a bad light on India as 'Burnett connects humid climates with illness, death, and the development of negative character traits'⁵⁶. Moreover, Mary's portrayal of Indian servants and the insolent behaviour, which she tries to apply on her English servants, suggests that, influenced by British people living in India, Mary has become a nasty little racist without any respect for adults. Race, in her eyes,

⁵³ Norton, 51.

⁵⁴ Bohuslav Mánek, Ralph Slayton and Pavla Machová eds., *Children's literature in English at the turn of the millennium*, (Gaudeamus: Hradec Králové, 2002) 144.

⁵⁵ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xxxviii.

⁵⁶ Michelle J. Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls 1880 -1915*, (Palgrave Macmillan: England, 2011) 121.

is more important as a social factor than age. All this, however, cannot be understood as Mary's personal character flaws but as a general cruelty of the society in which she lived:

The period [Victorian era] is also the high point of the so-called New Imperialism, in which the acquisition of further territory for Britain and the growth of existing colonial settlements were supported at home by a web of rhetoric that combined the ideologies of imperialism, national degeneration, racial superiority, and patriotism.⁵⁷

In *The Secret Garden*, imperialism plays a key role, as it is responsible for the background which greatly influences Mary, a tabula rasa, which soaked in all the flaws of her British parents colonizing India and subjugating the indigenous inhabitants. Moreover, the influence of imperialism on any Anglophone text produced during Burnett's lifetime is almost inevitable as 'British imperialism was in its ascendancy during the time of so-called Golden Age of children's literature, from 1860 to 1930'⁵⁸. Living from 1849 till 1924, Burnett was thrown into and restricted by the time period, when imperialism was praised and supported rather than condemned.

Besides the greater or lesser impact of Victorian era and its imperialistic policy, Burnett was also influenced by other, mostly religious, ideologies. It is clear from her own comment on this topic that her religious convictions were singular and cannot be strictly defined as belonging to a specific religion: 'I am not a Christian Scientist, I am not an advocate of New Thought, I am not a disciple of the Yogi teaching, I am not a Buddhist. I am not a Mohammedan. I am not a follower of Confucius. Yet I am all of these things.'⁵⁹ Despite her negation, Burnett and her *Secret Garden* have been very often associated with Mary Baker Eddy's teaching of Christian Science.

Once sickly but later on miraculously healed, Eddy started to reveal her revolutionary scientific and religious discovery to the public from 1860s onwards⁶⁰, publishing the most important work on the topic, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, in 1875, when Burnett was twenty-six years old. It was quite well-known 'that her [Burnett's] method of thought, consciously or unconsciously, was influenced importantly by what she learned from

⁵⁷ *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls 1880 -1915*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls 1880 -1915*, 2.

⁵⁹ Holbrook Gerzina, xxv.

⁶⁰ Mary Baker Eddy, *Christian Science with Key to the Scriptures*, (The Christian Science Board of Directors: USA, 2011) viii.

Christian Science... [*The Secret Garden*] is generally credited with being a Christian Science book...⁶¹ This opinion is prevalent mostly due to the miraculous recovery of the character of Colin Craven, which very much follows Baker Eddy's approach to faith and health. As Baker, Colin was absolutely convinced that eventually he would become healthy. Thanks to his deep faith and careless pursuit of his goal, the recovery was, in Baker's words, 'not supernatural, but supremely natural.'⁶²

Although, as Burnett states in the above-mentioned quotation, she did not consider herself member of any specific church nor a devotee of any other spiritual community, her biographer Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina divides Burnett's beliefs into:

... three overlapping belief systems. The first is a nod to traditional Christianity, as practised in the Church of England. The second is a combination of self-healing and positive thinking, what today we would probably refer to as New Age. Third is a kind of paganism, drawing on nature's power over all creatures, including mankind, that harkens back to nineteenth-century Romanticism...⁶³

Besides the socio-political and religious influences, there are other, in a way indirect ideologies, present in *The Secret Garden*. They have their roots in the authoress' literary models since 'original in her style and approach, Burnett nevertheless was known as a borrower, however inadvertently.'⁶⁴ G.H. Gerzina mentions above all the influence of the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Perhaps it indeed was the individuality of the character of Jane Eyre which influenced Burnett in the process of creating a strong female character or the gothic moors which gave the mysterious character to Misselthwaite manor. However, there is a novel, which G.H. Gerzina does not mention in her analysis of the literary influences on *The Secret Garden*, but which seems to serve as the major source of Burnett's inspiration.

The plot of Emile Zola's *La faute de l'abbé Mouret* published in 1875 is incredibly similar to *The Secret Garden*. It is a story about 'an ascetic young priest, Serge Mouret, who so resists the powers of life that he falls ill with a serious fever.'⁶⁵ He only recovers after an orphaned young girl Albine takes care of him, showing him a huge, long-closed, garden,

⁶¹ Susan E. James, "Wuthering Heights for Children: Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*." *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 10.1 (2000 – 2001), 59 – 76. Print

⁶² Mary Baker Eddy, xi.

⁶³ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xxvii.

⁶⁴ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xxviii.

⁶⁵ *Children's literature in English at the turn of the millennium*, 141.

where he eventually restores his health. There are many other similarities, besides the plot, which make us doubt Burnett's originality but which are of no importance for the purpose of this thesis. What is crucial, however, is the message hidden behind the plot of both novels, specifically the discreetly discussed sexuality. While Burnett uses children as central characters, Zola works with a man in his early twenties and a sixteen-year old girl. During the process of healing, Serge learns that the garden is a parallel to human life. Understanding that the fertility of plants is as natural as the human sexuality, he enters into intimate relationship with Albine. Their garden, a metaphor for Eden, gives the new couple freedom, a life without restrictions, obligations and expectations.

The same, although on a somewhat more innocent level, happens in *The Secret Garden*, where the nature refreshes Mary's mind and leaves Colin free from the painful medical treatment of the adults of Misselthwaite. The garden space, although surrounded by walls, opens up possibilities which would be unthinkable in any other place. The constant growing of plants, from seeds to buds and flowers, presents to children the life cycle and covertly points to human sexuality.

In the end, however, like in Eden, the life of happiness and lightness is unexpectedly terminated by the interference from the outside. While Colin reconciles with his father and Serge rediscovers his lost spiritual joys, the female heroines are left by themselves: 'Albine, abandoned by the recovered Serge, commits suicide and Mary also seems to be abandoned and almost forgotten by the recovered Colin at the end of *The Secret Garden*.'⁶⁶ Consequently, as in the 19th century 'sexuality is often discussed via botany or ornithology'⁶⁷ present in the novel by means of the garden and the robin, Burnett enters a topic difficult to discuss in the children's literature during her lifetime.

In the following analysis of *The Secret Garden*, the influence of Zola's anticlerical, deeply sexual and emotional novel *La faute de l'abbé Mouret* will be examined together with the impact of Christian Science, Victorian era and 19th century British imperialism. Based on the excerpts of the individual texts, the presence of the ideological infusions in *The Secret Garden* will be confirmed or disproved. Moreover, the analysis will include the study of Burnett's approach to her main characters, specifically to their gender and social class. In addition, the concept of home and its symbolism will be studied with regard to the three main characters of the novel, comparing a village cottage, a prosperous house in India, the bleak Misselthwaite manor and the secret garden.

⁶⁶ *Children's literature in English at the turn of the millennium*, 142.

⁶⁷ *Children's literature in English at the turn of the millennium*, 144.

2.3. Symbolism in *The Secret Garden*

Ideologies influence *The Secret Garden* on three different levels: the actual time period in which Burnett lived; the fictional setting of her novel; and nature of the individual characters. The relationship between them can be compared to a structure of a food pyramid, with the most important component at its base and the least important, but still necessary, at its top. The base of the ideological structure of *The Secret Garden* pyramid is formed by the time period, in which Burnett lived, by its socio-political situation and by the prevalent religious and spiritual trends, which influenced Burnett's worldview. The notion of childhood, which has been constantly changing and evolving, had also an impact on Burnett, who adopted a modern attitude when creating her fictional characters. This attitude, however, was not her original invention but a tendency quite common in the Golden Age of children's literature:

... rather than producing an escapist literature that idealized the child as a whole being, children's writers from this era frequently represented young people as complex, highly socialized individuals who (like adults) had to struggle with thorny issues ... Instead of indulging in the fantasy that children can remain completely unaffected by the society they inhabit, these authors often acknowledged the powerful, inevitable influence of grown-ups and their social, cultural, and scholastic institutions.⁶⁸

As the time period in which Burnett lived was examined in the introduction to this chapter, the following analysis will explore the two remaining levels of the novel: the fictional mirror of the society in which Burnett lived and the impact it had on the characters.

Burnett opens her story with a short biography of her heroine, 'who is initially weak in both body and spirit after being raised as an imperial girl in India.'⁶⁹ Although Burnett had never been to India, she thinks that it is not the right place to raise a child. The fact that Burnett's notion of India is prejudiced is supported also by Clare Bradford in her essay "The end of empire? Colonial and postcolonial journeys in children's books", where she states that 'Burnett represents India as a space marked by disorder, danger, and sickness, so that Mary's

⁶⁸ Marah Gubar, *Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009) 181.

⁶⁹ *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls 1880 -1915*, 121.

return to Britain restores her to physical and mental health.⁷⁰ This however, is not Burnett's subjective opinion as '... the way she writes of it [India] reflects the prevalent English views of her time, that the Indian climate and people were dangerous to English children's health.'⁷¹ Burnett did not escape this general view, and so, consequently, her novel did not escape it and neither did her main character. Mary's behaviour represents the superiority that the colonizers felt over the colonized as well as the superiority of the white race over the Indians. Her racist conduct is stressed especially and paradoxically once she comes to England. The extremity to which she feels offended when her new maid Martha says 'when I heard you was comin' from India I thought you was a black...'⁷² suggests that, based on what she learnt in India, it is offensive to compare a white person to a native Indian: 'You thought I was a native! You dared! You don't know anything about natives! They are not people - they're servants who must salaam to you.'⁷³ Elsewhere Burnett writes: 'Indian servants were commanded to do things, not asked. It was not the custom to say "please" and "thank you" and Mary had always slapped her Ayah in the face when she was angry.'⁷⁴ Although Burnett wrote these objectionable sentences and put them in a children's book, supposedly, she did not do it in order to offend the native Indians but in order to show Mary's difficult nature. As seen by her behaviour in England, her superiority is not only conditioned by race but also by her social class as she tries to subordinate Mrs Medlock and Martha, expecting they would serve her the same way the Indian servants did. Mrs Medlock's negative answer to this expectation suggests that even though she may have the same profession as some of the native Indians have, she must be treated with respect.

Finally, what adds to Burnett's prejudiced attitude to India is the mental state in which Mary comes to England. The fact that her manners are unacceptable and that she is extremely rude suggests that, as a consequence of her life in India, Mary has become a savage. It is only her life in England what restores her physically and mentally, converting her into an amiable, young English lady. In fact, Burnett goes as far as to suggest that to behave in an 'Indian way' means to behave badly: 'Mistress Mary got up from her log at once. She knew she felt contrary again, and obstinate, and she did not care at all. She was imperious and Indian, and at the same time hot and sorrowful.'⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Clare Bradford, "The end of empire? Colonial and postcolonial journeys in children's books", *Children's Literature* 29 (2001), 196-218.

⁷¹ Holbrook Gerzina ed., 1.

⁷² Holbrook Gerzina ed., 26.

⁷³ Holbrook Gerzina ed., 26.

⁷⁴ Holbrook Gerzina ed., 24.

⁷⁵ Holbrook Gerzina ed., 90.

Although, presumably, Burnett's primary intention was to show that the nature of a child can change under certain conditions, intentionally or unintentionally, she incorporated the notion of racial and national superiority in her novel. To conclude, as Bradford states, 'to read children's books of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to read texts produced within a pattern of imperial culture. Works of the past, such as Tom Brown's *Schooldays*, *The Water-Babies*, and *The Secret Garden*, readily disclose the imperial ideologies that inform them.'⁷⁶ Nevertheless, at some stages of the novel, India and especially its culture, fascinates Burnett. This is for instance the case of the scenes when Mary plays with the statuettes of elephants, when she tells Martha stories about India or when she compares Colin to an Indian rajah. The character of Sarah Crewe from *A Little Princess*, who does not want to leave India, also proves that even though Burnett adopted the imperialistic attitude, she also maintained a partial independence when formatting her opinions and interests.

The second main character of the novel appears on the scene only when Mary discovers the garden. Although the country boy Dickon Sowerby cannot read nor write very well, he is a symbol of a happy, healthy English child deeply connected to nature. What in addition accentuates his Englishness is his strong Yorkshire's dialect, which, however, also outlines his social status.

Although Dickon is not an educated boy, his knowledge of plants and animals is remarkable. Burnett's depiction of this character is almost god-like whereupon Gerzina compares him to a Greek pagan god Pan who plays on the pipes and embodies nature and all activities connected to it. The first description of Dickon indeed confirms her theory: 'A boy was sitting under a tree, with his back against it, playing on a rough wooden pipe.'⁷⁷ The secret garden in fact revives mainly due to Dickon's gardening knowledge. Moreover, he brings Mary new seeds and shows her how to plant them, converting the garden into a blooming paradise. Dickon's strong English roots are also related to his mother, Mrs Sowerby, a perfect embodiment of an ideal Victorian woman, which, in Ruskin's words should be 'enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise not for self-development but for self – renunciation [...] wise, not with narrowness, of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, infinitely applicable modesty of service.'⁷⁸ Mrs Sowerby represents all these qualities united in a perfect example of motherhood. Opposed to Mary's egocentric mother, Mrs Sowerby in a way "adopts" Mary and Colin by sharing with them her common

⁷⁶ ⁷⁶ Clare Bradford, 196-218.

⁷⁷ Holbrook Gerzina ed., 84.

⁷⁸ "John Ruskin: Of Queens Gardens", *The Woman Question: Texts and Contexts* ,
<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/topic_2/ruskin.htm> March 7th, 2015.

sense and her traditional Yorkshire treats. Her personality together with the influence of the garden where Colin's mother's spirit is still miraculously present, forms a balanced combination of parental leadership and freedom, necessary for personal development of children.

The third children's character of the novel does not appear before chapter thirteen, yet he gradually takes over the role of the central character of the novel. Slowly pushing Mary and Dickon aside, he strengthens the social differences between them disrupting their well-functioning relationship. While after some time spent with Dickon, Mary forgets about her social superiority feeling that in the garden everyone is equal, Colin never adopts this attitude and his self-importance is obvious throughout the whole novel. The critic Adrian Gunther, for instance, 'regards Colin as a basically unpleasant character who remains intrinsically self-centered up to the very last line.'⁷⁹ Indeed, although he becomes Dickon's friend, their master-servant relationship cannot be compared to the reciprocal affection, which has developed between Dickon and Mary. Although Dickon's influence on Colin is extremely beneficial, Colin never repays his friend. Dickon, a representative of the low social class, serves Colin as a nicely treated servant and their relationship is mostly based on Colin's physical dependence upon Dickon. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, when Colin becomes physically strong and independent and when he reconciles with his father, Dickon as well as Mary, are left completely aside from the story. The space is given exclusively to Colin and to his father, to the two male representatives of the highest social class in the novel.

Besides representing the top of the English social class system, the character of Colin is also a bearer of at least two spiritual ideologies. Although the definitions of sickness and health are never fully formulated in the novel, it is clear from the process of Colin's self-healing process that according to Burnett, sickness as well as health, originates in the human mind spreading from there to the rest of the body. Inspired by Mary Baker Eddy, Burnett creates a little Christian Scientist, who believes in "magic", a concept similar for instance to "higher good". Thanks to the process of self-healing based on positive thinking and on a deep believe that recovery is indeed possible, Colin follows the very steps of Eddy, reaching ultimately full recovery and serenity of mind. To compare, Baker Eddy's process of healing seems to be based precisely upon the same objectives. In her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* she writes:

⁷⁹ Bohuslav Mánek, Ralph Slayton and Pavla Machová eds., 140.

The physical healing of Christian Science results now, as in Jesus' time, from the operation of divine Principle, before which sin and disease lose their reality in human consciousness and disappear as naturally and as necessarily as darkness gives place to light and sin to reformation.⁸⁰

Burnett transfers the meaning of these sentences to the context of Misselthwaite manor since its indoor and outdoor spaces are symbols of what Baker Eddy calls light and darkness. This fact points out Colin's bipolar state of mind while he lives inside the house and to his mental revival once he starts to spend time outside. Shut in his room with blinds closed, Colin lives in physical and mental darkness feeling nothing but pain and irritation. However, when he gets out of the house and lets "magic", or in Baker's words, the divine Principle, enter his life, 'darkness gives place to light' and Colin starts to recover. In brief, although Burnett 'denied again and again that she was a Christian Scientist'⁸¹ the influence of this branch of Christianity on her most famous novel is indisputable. Christian Science dictates the development of the story and it is responsible for the miraculous recovery of Colin Craven and partially of Mary Lenox who, more unconsciously than Colin, also followed Baker Eddy's steps.

2.4. Burnett's child hero: gender, social class, home and sexuality

In the next section of the analysis, the characters will be analysed with regard to Margery Hourihan's publication *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. In the chapter "The Hero" she discusses, among other things, the following attributes of children's books heroes: race, class and mastery, age, gender, relationship. Out of these features, the children from Burnett's novel share only the attributes of race and age. Having chosen three children of similar age, Burnett ensured internal understanding of their group. Moreover, the fact that all the children characters are white Europeans also guarantees certain cultural stability, even though it cannot be confused with equality as class has, in the novel, higher importance than race.

The social stratification of *The Secret Garden* is equally impenetrable in the world of children as it is in the world of adults. Interestingly, it seems that the social gap is not present between Dickon and Mary at the beginning of their relationship when they work together in the garden but once Master Colin appears, the gap between the characters becomes more

⁸⁰ Mary Baker Eddy, xi.

⁸¹ Holbrook Gerzina ed., xxvii.

visible. Putting Colin on one side of the abyss and Dickon on the other, Burnett leaves Mary in between, unable to decide which direction to go. Even though she is attracted to Dickon, to his connection with nature, to the way he talks to animals, and to his countryside roughness, her social status forces her to adhere to her obligations embodied in the character of Colin. Consequently, although Burnett chose a female main character, Mary progressively loses her strong individuality under the influence of her male friends. Her rebellious femininity is gradually suppressed and Colin's evolving masculinity and ego-centrism is given more and more space. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, among other critics, has pointed out that based on this development of events 'Burnett seems to be affirming male supremacy and making a defense of patriarchal authority'⁸².

Additionally, the homes of Colin, Mary and Dickon are also symbols of social diversity. Dickon's cottage full of children is far from being luxurious but it guarantees all that a child needs: love, food, understanding and care. In spite of this, Dickon seems to leave his home as often as possible. His adventurous character needs freedom and the Yorkshire moors together with Mary's garden offer him precisely this. Colin's and Mary's homes, on the contrary, are magnificent but emotionless. Their parents own big houses yet their children are unhappy because besides financial security, they are deprived of all that Dickon's cottage offers. Nevertheless, the premises of the secret garden together with Mrs Sowerby's loving care compensates what the two children have been missing, converting them into more agreeable human beings. Consequently, whether the child comes from a happy though poor family or from a wealthy yet disordered family, the secret garden seems to offer to all of them an ideal space free from 'adult prominence and adult ideals'⁸³. In the introduction to her annotated version of *The Secret Garden*, Gerzina says that most analyses of the book 'focus on the issues of motherhood, feminism, sexuality, nature, class, and illness.'⁸⁴ The garden itself is, in fact, a bearer of all these attributes; it fulfils the role of a mysterious woman, who for the first time in Mary's life, offers her space for her individual, unrestricted yet guided personal development; thanks to the constant presence of nature and to Dickon's influence, both Mary and Colin get physically and mentally better.

Finally, although at the time when Burnett wrote the book it was considered inappropriate to anyhow insinuate sexuality in a children's book, she succeeded in this task by subtly incorporating the tabooed topics into her text. Gender, fertility, affection, reproduction,

⁸² Bohuslav Mánek, Ralph Slayton and Pavla Machová eds., 139.

⁸³ Sebastian Chapleau ed., 55.

⁸⁴ Gerzina, xxxv.

courtship and many other related topics form a part of the secret garden ecosystem and teach Mary, Dickon and Colin about natural processes of the animal and plant kingdoms. Consequently, sexuality is used as a driving force of a constantly repeating natural cycle, which surrounds the three children in the garden.

Except for gender, all the above-mentioned sexually-related topics are represented in the text by other means than through people. Gender, however, is represented mostly by main children characters. Unlike masculinity, femininity is clearly defined in the text. The role of Mary, the strongest element of femininity in the text, is supplemented by the roles of Mrs Sowerby, the garden itself and the she-robin, who takes care of her offspring and, similarly to the rest of the female characters, represents a perfect example of motherhood. The masculinity, on the contrary, does not have any clearly defined boundaries. Although Dickon's strong physical shape and stable psyche embodies a quantity of masculine characteristics, the character of Colin displays several features which have been usually attributed to women rather than to men. There is again a noticeable impact of Zola's *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*, the main male character of which exhibited tremendous physical and mental weakness and who was, similarly to Colin Craven, supported and healed with the help of the main female character, who, compared to him, was in all respects stronger. The difference between *The Secret Garden* and *La faute de l'abbé Mouret* is apparent only in the feelings displayed by Mary and Albine. While Albine falls deeply in love with Serge, Mary, although enjoying Colin's presence, is rather attracted to Dickon, to the person who introduced her to the world of natural processes, to the life of plants and animals. Although unlike Zola's novel, *The Secret Garden* does not permit open manifestation of sexual behaviour, within the restricted possibilities, Burnett managed to demonstrate certain affections. After Mary told Dickon that she liked him

... she leaned forward and asked him a question she had never dreamed of asking any one before. And she tried to ask it in Yorkshire because that was his language, and in India a native was always pleased if you knew his speech.

"Does tha' like me?" she said.

"Eh!" he answered heartily, "that I does. I likes thee wonderful..."⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Gerzina ed., 96.

The Secret Garden, compared to Zola's novel is, for obvious reason, much less sexual. In spite of this, the fact that Burnett incorporated signs of evolving children's sexuality in her text as well as many related natural processes is palpable and causes tension, which an adult reader would not expect in a supposedly innocent book for children. However, based on the analysis of the presence of ideologies in *The Secret Garden*, it is evident that the book is not innocent as it introduces many flaws of Burnett's society to the world of children. Sebastian Chapleau states that 'no encoding of story can be free of societal and/or ideological marking'⁸⁶ and Burnett's novel, however pleasing or enjoyable in the circles of both children and parents, is an example which gives further supporting evidence towards this theory. The social division which influences the behaviour of children already in their early age, patronizing behaviour or British colonisers or interweaving of modern religious trends entered Burnett's story as naturally as they entered her contemporary society. To criticize Burnett for incorporating the imperialistic thoughts would be pointless as at her time these were rather called normal, common or natural than imperialistic:

European imperialists—most notably Victorian England—believed it to be their *moral duty* to dominate the less civilized, for in English culture the human species had found its perfect form. Harmand's perspective remains remarkable for its crystal-clear articulation of this ideology, an ideology that when practiced as a pedagogy of oppression justified a racist and violent ideological hierarchy.⁸⁷

In conclusion, the outcome of a study of ideologies in children's books is not a critique of their authors. As in the case of F.H. Burnett, it is rather a critique of their contemporary society which respected, allowed and praised dissemination of ideologies which were considered beneficial but which are nowadays greatly criticised and sometimes even condemned. Although ideologies are also present in the books written primarily for adults, the adult capacity to critically re-evaluate a text guarantees a lesser impact on readers. Zornado claims that 'culture's ideological beliefs - and not human nature - shape human growth and development'⁸⁸ and for this reason, attention needs to be paid to children's books, which have not only become a vehicle of entertainment or education but also a means of ideological influence.

⁸⁶ Chapleau ed., 14.

⁸⁷ Zornado, 101.

⁸⁸ Zornado, 104.

3. *THE LION THE WHICH AND THE WARDROBE*

The evidence of countless letters written to his young admirers as well as the essay "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" suggest that C.S. Lewis was fascinated by his child readers. However, rather than defining childhood, he tried to investigate the nature of the boundary between childhood and adulthood. In the above-mentioned essay he says that the word which best defines the transition from childhood to adulthood is not a change but rather an enrichment.⁸⁹ He claims that when growing up, people do not have to stop liking 'childish things', but they simply expand the spectrum of their interests. 'I now enjoy Tolstoy and Jane Austen and Trollope as well as fairy tales and I call that growth: if I had had to lose the fairy tales in order to acquire the novelists, I would not say that I had grown but only that I had changed'⁹⁰. Elsewhere in his essay he claims that fairy tales and other childhood tales had not been written specifically for children, on the contrary, adults used to enjoy them equally, if not more. His arguments imply that, in terms of literature, the boundary between a child and an adult reader is not and should not be strictly drawn. Moreover, he suggests that both children and adults alike should be offered the liberty to read whatever material they choose and that age-appropriateness is artificial at best:

For I need not remind such an audience as this that the neat sorting-out of books into age-groups, so dear to publishers, has only a very sketchy relation with the habits of any real readers. Those of us who are blamed when old for reading childish books were blamed when children for reading books too old for us.⁹¹

In other words, Lewis's specific approach to children and consequently to literature is influenced by his notion of a boundary-less zone between childhood and adulthood and between adult and child readers.

⁸⁹ C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children", *Catholic Library*, <<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=9117>> 28 March, 2015.

⁹⁰ "On Three Ways of Writing for Children".

⁹¹ "On Three Ways of Writing for Children".

3.1. C.S. Lewis and the fantastic fairy tale

In his fifties, Lewis admitted that what he most liked to write were fantastic fairy tales, the 'fundamental nurturers of moral imagination'⁹² since they satisfy both his child and adult selves. In addition, he considers this the best genre for children, because, unlike for instance the school stories of his time, the fantastic fairy tale liberates them from reality. He elaborates this idea by claiming that popular school stories take place in pedestrian reality and once children find themselves in the same scenario without experiencing the same adventures as their fictional heroes, they are disappointed. Lewis believes that children understand that fantastic stories are fictitious and for this reason, they are not upset when their own adventures do not turn out the way they do in their fantastic stories.⁹³ In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis made the most of the fantastic fairy tale and created a land where his adolescent imaginings could be realized and became part of a story that was entertaining both for children and adults.

The creation of Narnia, however, was preceded by contemplation on the nature of the fantastic fairy tale. The answer to this question was offered by Lewis's friend J.R.R. Tolkien. When writing his essay "On Three Ways of Writing for Children", Lewis was to a great degree influenced by him, referring mostly to his essay "On Fairy Stories", which delves into the very core of the fairy tales and fairy stories:

... fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is Faerie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.⁹⁴

In Narnia, Lewis incorporated all of the components of Faerie that Tolkien prescribes. He prepared a fantastic land, an unusual setting for human characters, in which the fantastic is the normal and a common human child is exceptional. Yet, as it turns out in

⁹² Peter J. Schakel, *Imagination and Arts in C.S. Lewis – Journey to Narnia and Other Worlds*, (University of Missouri Press: Missouri, 2002) 170.

⁹³ "On Three Ways of Writing for Children".

⁹⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories".

<http://www.rivendellcommunity.org/Formation/Tolkien_On_Fairy_Stories.pdf> 28 March, 2015.

the story, the difference between our world and Narnia is not as great as it seems when the four children enter Narnia for the first time. The behaviour of the creatures living in this land very much resembles the one of humans in the world from which the Pevensie children come. Sincerity, naivety, greed, betrayal, deceit, cruelty, fear and many other human behavioural traits are also the features of the fantastic creatures in Narnia.

Interestingly, although both Tolkien and Lewis set their stories in fantastic settings, neither of them is able to define what fairy story is. After admitting that it is in fact impossible to define it, Tolkien at least attempts to outline the meaning of the word:

... a “fairy-story” is one which touches on or uses Faerie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faerie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician.⁹⁵

In Lewis’s case, the main purpose of the story is three-fold: adventure, morality and fantasy. These three components are firmly connected; only the existence of the first makes the existence of the other two possible. Firstly, Lewis uses fantasy to create an exciting adventure, then he uses the adventure to generate a moral and ideological message.

3.2. Christian myth in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Lewis’s specific understanding of childhood and adulthood, and his approach to fantasy fairy tales or fairy stories as presented by Tolkien play a key role in the analysis of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. However, there is another important distinctive feature of his fantasy fairy tales and that is the Christian allegory: becoming a Christian in his thirties, Lewis spent most of his literary career writing apologetic books. His children’s literature did not escape this general tendency and in common with the rest of his work, it functions as Christian evangelism.

In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, J. Stephens defines the implicit ideological aspects as follows:

⁹⁵ Tolkien.

Their presence may be thought of as analogous to a geometrical shape in which one figure is inscribed with another, as an octagon within a square, for example, in such a way that the two figures merge at overlapping boundaries. Segments thus exist in which the inner figure coincides with the outer and becomes invisible.⁹⁶

Therefore, although the ideology itself may be covered by other elements of the text, it is still present in its vast majority. Disappearing for only short time periods, it comes again and again in order to determine the development of the main characters and of the plot.

What helps Lewis to write his children's fiction in this manner is a powerful ideological weapon called the point-of-view. Often acting as their conscience, the use of the omnipresent third person narrator allows him to enter the consciousness of all the characters. In a way, Lewis himself acts as a Christian God; although he has the power to direct their lives, he gives his characters free will. Thanks to it, the faun or Edmund are allowed to make wrong decisions. However, as it seems in Narnia, they make mistakes only in order to be used as examples of those who eventually embrace the right path after they deeply repent for their sins. As Stephens points out 'point-of-view is the aspect of narration in which implicit authorial control of audience reading strategies is probably most powerful.'⁹⁷ Moreover, Peter Hunt similarly argues that 'implicit authorial control is a characteristic marker of the discourse of children's fiction.'⁹⁸ Lewis adopts the implicit authorial control in order to make his story coherent; it is not only Aslan, a character reflecting the last moments of Christ's life and his resurrection, who represents the Christian myth. The Pevensie girls accompany him on his way to the altar in similar way to the women who accompany Christ on his way to Golgotha. Peter Pevensie is established as a leader of Narnia similarly to Simon Peter who becomes Christ's successor on Earth. Because we see insight of the minds of Lewis's characters, we know that their thoughts are similar to those of their Biblical models. The omnipresent point of view helps Lewis to tie all his characters together by unifying their thoughts and deeds and deriving them from the Gospel. Finally, Stephens states that 'a text may overtly advocate one ideology while implicitly inscribing one or more other ideologies'⁹⁹. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* works precisely on this principle. Although Christianity is never openly presented, morality is an always-present explicit element which guides the readers through the

⁹⁶ Stephens, 2.

⁹⁷ Stephens, 26.

⁹⁸ Stephens, 27.

⁹⁹ Stephens, 41.

narrative from the first to the last pages of the book: 'Readers often concentrate on the Christian dimension of his works, but equally or more important to him was the moral dimension. This seems especially true for the Chronicles of Narnia'¹⁰⁰. The constant notion of what is good and what is bad is always openly stated in the text. To illustrate, although the character of the faun intends to betray Lucy, ultimately he realizes that it would be wrong to do so and decides to do otherwise. Similarly, after Edmund betrays his siblings, he eventually realizes the seriousness of his deed and not only regrets his actions but he completely changes his nature. Generally speaking, all of the creatures of Narnia share the same morality. The overall moral code of Narnia, however, is not based on laws or rules but on the conscience of every citizen. They share the notion of what is good and what is bad. Only the followers of the White Witch, the wolves and some ugly-looking creatures like ghouls, boggles, minotaurs or ogres, ignore this inner set of values and serve a self-appointed queen who not only ignores but openly violates the established moral system of Narnia. One of the possible explanations of her attitude is that she is not a real Narnian, as she escaped her own world and came to Narnia only accidentally. However, it is not an accident that the moral code, which the inhabitants of Narnia so deeply respect is modelled on British society. Lewis, however, created such an entertaining story to cover his main purpose that readers, especially young readers, do not perceive either the instructional or the ideological components of the text.

What then is the general purpose of *The Chronicles of Narnia*? In his book *Four Christian Fantasists*, Richard Sturch suggests that the creation of Narnia had, besides other purposes, one chief objective: remythologizing.

Students of theology have long been familiar with the contention that much of the Bible, and of traditional theology in general, is expressed in the language of 'myth', and that since this language is no longer comprehensible to most people, a process of 'demythologizing' is needed in order to get at, and communicate to others, the truths of Christian faith at present obscured by unnecessary 'mythology'. [...] Some process of remythologizing would be desirable, so that the Gospel would be as comprehensible to modern people as, in its first mythological form, it was to people of the first century A.D.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Peter J. Schakel, 170.

¹⁰¹ Richard Sturch, *Four Christian Fantasists: A Study of the Fantastic Writings of George Macdonald, Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien*, (Walking Tree Publishers: Zurich, 2001) 97.

Lewis narrowed the meaning of Sturch's 'modern people' even more by concentrating specifically on children who, in Lewis's view, are also in need of a more up-to-date, entertaining analogy of the traditional Christian teachings, or in other words, of traditional Christian myth. He did not conceal his opinion that the teachings of the Bible should be torn out of the Sunday schools and brought closer to the lives of children: 'He wondered if, by recasting Christian doctrines into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, he could steal past those watchful dragons of tedious sermons and obligatory worship.'¹⁰² He undertook the task of remythologizing, keeping the basic Christian myth of God the Father and his son Jesus Christ in the centre of his mythological story. He wrapped the story in a completely new cover, which unlike the Biblical version, fulfilled several additional tasks; it was attractive, entertaining, adventurous, simple to read and it appealed to the imagination. Although it was designed specifically for children, it caught also the attention of adults, who, similarly to children, realized that the teachings of the Gospel did not have to be limited by time or place. Despite never mentioning Golgotha, the cross, Jesus, Jews or the Virgin Mary, '*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* remythologizes Passion and Resurrection'. And whereas a great deal of violence is incorporated in the book, Lewis manages to control and censor it, and therefore offers children just the necessary core of the myth.

Surprisingly, Lewis probably did not realize the amount to which the Christian myth is transferred to *The Narnia Chronicles*. When answering a letter to one of his young admirers he wrote:

You are mistaken when you think that everything in the books 'represents' something in this world. I did not say to myself 'Let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a Lion in Narnia': I said 'Let us *suppose* that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as He became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen.'¹⁰³

This answer, however, is unacceptable. If Lewis had used Passion and Resurrection only as an inspiration, letting the story develop in its own way, his answer would have been more appropriate. However, to claim that he was just 'imagining what would

¹⁰² David C Downing, *Into the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis and The Narnia Chronicles*, (Jossey Bass: San Francisco, 2005) 64.

¹⁰³ David C Downing, 64 -65.

happen' is absurd as he represents precisely the events which preceded and followed Christ's crucifixion. Moreover, at no stage of the story's culmination, from the moment when Aslan decides to sacrifice himself until his resurrection, does Lewis add anything innovative to the story; he simply disguises the familiar myth with fancy clothes and sets it in an unknown territory. There is only one way to react to Lewis's statement that 'You are mistaken when you think that everything in the books 'represents' something in this world' and it is to claim the exact opposite. Subconsciously, perhaps, Lewis wrote a book in which everything seems to represent something in this world; be it Mrs. Beaver, an animal representing the caring figure of a human mother, the house of the faun, which resembles a perfectly safe and comfortable human dwelling, the food eaten in Narnia or the mental features of its inhabitants or even the very character of Aslan. Precisely because of this it is naïve to claim that the story had the liberty to develop differently from it in the Bible. To sum up, the myth of Narnia is a copy of Lewis's reality, in both of its physical and mythological components.

In *Christian Mythmakers*, Rolland Hein claims that 'what flows into you from myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level.'¹⁰⁴ The reality of Narnia, however fantastic and imaginative, is only the reality of Lewis's life. Therefore, the truths coming from the myth which is represented through the stories in Narnia, are not in any way original, they are the very same myths that we have had for two or more thousands years. The success of Narnia was basically guaranteed because 'man is fundamentally mythic.'¹⁰⁵ Choosing the most popular myth of all times, Lewis was predisposed to reach a wide reading public. Moreover, as Sturch suggests, Lewis was trying to stretch his readers' imagination as much as possible. Besides the Christian myth, imagination is most probably the other key element which stands behind Narnia's success. The Bible has been read for centuries and people are continuously coming back to it again and again. For this reason, a new, imaginative version of the same ideological content was most welcomed among the believers.

Although Lewis does not objectively realize the degree to which Christian mythology forms part of his most famous text, at one point he claimed that 'an author

¹⁰⁴ Rolland Hein, *Christian Mythmakers*, (Cornerstone Press: Chicago, 2002) 220.

¹⁰⁵ Rolland Hein, xi.

doesn't necessarily understand the meaning of his own story better than anyone else'¹⁰⁶. Thus, he admits that the content of his texts is not completely in his hands. However, the sophisticated balance between the imaginative, the mythological and the moral components of the story is admirable and it contributed to a firm coherence of the text. Finally, his biographer Alan Jacobs also claims that one of Lewis's most valued qualities is to moralize while not letting people know they are being tutored:

Lewis is known as a moralist, but I think we can infer from this comment that his teaching is often a function of his adoration—so that the moral elements of his writing are not so easily distinguished from the enchantment of storytelling and story-loving. It is the merger of the moral and the imaginative—this vision of virtue itself as adorable, even ravishing—that makes Lewis so distinctive.¹⁰⁷

The Christian myth in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is as omnipresent as its narrator. It is represented by a sequence of events, which is initiated once the Pevensie children enter the magical territory. The following section of this chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the character of Aslan and of the so-called Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. The rest of the Christian elements in the text are mostly used in order to support these five main characters.

When he was in his early fifties, Lewis was maintaining correspondence with an Italian priest called Don Giovanni. In one of his letters the priest writes:

I wish that for your love of me, you would see fit to write what you think about the moral state of our times. I would like you to indicate saving remedies, so far as they seem opportune to you, for reparation and the removal of evil, for the renewal of courage, for advancing the unity of hearts in charity.¹⁰⁸

Although Don Giovanni might have had something different in mind from children's literature, it seems that Lewis decided to follow his advice and combined the genre of fantastic fairy tale with the suggested topics. The most important outcome of this

¹⁰⁶ Rolland Hein, xiv.

¹⁰⁷ Jacobs, xxiii.

¹⁰⁸ Jacobs, 250.

experimental combination is the character of Aslan. His role in the Narnia's 'Faerie' is crucial as he is the cornerstone of most of the magical components of the story. Furthermore, he is the centre of its spiritual content, as he literally takes on the role of the son of Christian God. In the chapter "The Spiritual Visions of the Narnia Chronicles", the author David C. Downing writes that 'in Aslan, Lewis hoped to portray a God who is both awe-full and good, inspiring equally a wholesome fear and a wholehearted love'¹⁰⁹. A similar impression of God arises from the Gospel: while in the Old Testament God often induces fear, the New Testaments with Jesus' parables is much more comforting. The Aslan that we see in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* reminds us rather of the latter. The effect of his presence in the lives of the Pevensie children is similar to the one of Christ's contemporaries. 'It is a story of personal salvation – and the personal sacrifice that makes that salvation possible'¹¹⁰. Although this statement describes Aslan's task, it can be also used as a definition of Christ's role on Earth, as both he and Aslan come in order to repair what has been broken and to direct people to the right paths. Defeating the devil, or as this is rendered in Narnia, the White Witch, they liberate humanity and the creatures of Narnia. Moreover, they represent the divine presence in the lives of all creatures they come in contact with, soothing them or scaring them according to their conscience. When the Pevensie children hear the name of Aslan for the first time, they experience the following emotions:

Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or beginning of summer.¹¹¹

Using Biblical references, Christin Ditchfield, the author of the *Family Guide to Narnia*, explains that 'to the righteous, the name of the Lord is "glorious and awesome" (Deuteronomy 28:58), "majestic" (Psalm 8:1), and worthy of praise (Psalm 113:3). To the wicked it speaks of judgment (Isaiah 64:2) and is the object of blasphemy and scorn (Psalm 139:20; Isaiah 52:5)'¹¹². This indeed seems to apply as the only one who does not experience positive

¹⁰⁹ David C. Downing, 63.

¹¹⁰ Christin Ditchfield, Wayne Martindale, *A Family Guide to Narnia: Biblical Truths in C.S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia*, (Crossway Books: Illinois, 2003) 46.

¹¹¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, (Harper Collins: Australia, 2008) 51.

¹¹² Christin Ditchfield, Wayne Martindale, 54.

emotions when thinking about Aslan is the traitor Edmund. Moreover, Aslan's wait for the consequence of his self-sacrifice follows Christ's last steps before he was arrested. Before the soldiers seized him, he spent a few hours in Gethsemane feeling 'sorrowful and troubled'¹¹³. We see Aslan in the same mental state before he submits to the White Witch.

Voluntary surrender and the subsequent death is the apparent culmination of the Christian myth in both the Bible and Narnia. However, the reason why most of the Christian believers consider Jesus the son of God is not because of his self-sacrifice but because he overcame death and was resurrected. Following the very same steps, the character of Aslan supports this myth. By transferring it into another place, among creatures different from humans, Lewis suggests that the story of Jesus Christ is not limited by either time or by place. Finally, referring to the battle which takes place after Aslan's resurrection, Ditchfield quotes the prophet Isaiah pointing out the ultimate proof of Lewis's strong Biblical inspiration: 'As the lion growls, a great lion over his prey ... so the LORD Almighty will come down to the battle'¹¹⁴.

The function of Aslan, however, could not be fulfilled without the presence of the four Pevensie children: Lucy, Susan, Peter and Edmund. Their role in the redemption of Narnia is almost as important as the role of Adam and Eve in the creation of the original sin. When Lucy enters Narnia for the first time, she notices a strange creature. As it turns out, it is a faun Mr Tumnus, who subsequently asks: 'Excuse me - I don't want to be inquisitive - but should I be right in thinking that you are a Daughter of Eve?'¹¹⁵ This suggests that the starting point for the development of the story is the notion of the first humans. The remythologizing of the traditional Christian myth begins the moment the faun addresses Lucy with the words 'daughter of Eve'. She, together with her siblings, another daughter of Eve and two sons of Adam, assume the role of one or more Biblical characters. The girls generally represent the Biblical women who accompany Christ during his passion, his ascent to Golgotha and his crucifixion. Similarly to the Biblical women, who were the first ones to learn that Jesus' grave is empty, Lucy and Susan are the characters, who find out that Aslan rose from the dead. In fact, the main female characters are given more space in the text than their brothers.

The Sons of Adam represent two categories of people; Peter stands for most of Christ's disciples and followers, while Edmund represents those, for whom Christ came to Earth and whom he came to redeem. He is the one for whom Aslan dies. The best Biblical parallel

¹¹³ Matthew, 26:37.

¹¹⁴ Isaiah, 31:4.

¹¹⁵ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 9.

figure for Peter would be probably Simon Peter, whom Christ appointed as his successor. When Aslan wins the final battle, he says to Peter: 'That, O Man, is Cair Paravel of the four thrones, in one of which you must sit as King. I show it to you because you are the firstborn and you will be High King over all the rest.'

Although Edmund's betrayal tempts us to believe that he was created as an analogy of Judas, the Biblical 'figure' which he resembles much more is the lost sheep. The evangelist Luke describes the Parable of the Lost Sheep in the following words: 'What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?'¹¹⁶ Towards the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Aslan indeed finds Edmund and brings him back to his 'flock' because otherwise it would be incomplete. He cares about Edmund even though he knows he betrayed not only him but also his siblings. Moreover, the key difference between Judas' and Edmund's betrayal is that while Judas understood its consequences, Edmund did not realize the seriousness of the situation. When betraying his family and friends, he was being deceived by the White Witch and enchanted by her dark magic. Certainly, both he and Judas were driven by greed; Judas wanted the thirty pieces of silver while Edmund longed for the Turkish delight. Nevertheless, it is Edmund's repentance, which ultimately saves him and which distinguishes him from Judas.

Even though Aslan and the Pevensie children are Lewis's most powerful tools when remythologizing the passion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, other minor elements help him to create an upgraded version of the ideology which he preferred over any other. Nevertheless, the morality present in Narnia does not have to be exclusively Christian. Often, it is rather a general moral code, which though arising from Christianity, is nowadays understood as basic and is present in all civilized societies regardless of whether they are believing or atheist. David C. Downing explains this as follows:

Lewis believed there is a broad consensus among religious traditions about basic right and wrong, about the value of honesty, courage, and compassion. He considered moral relativism a "resounding lie," and included a twenty-five-page appendix in *The Abolition of Man*, quoting ethical teachings from many times and places that praise honesty, generosity, compassion, and respect for elders, while

¹¹⁶ Luke, 15: 4.

condemning violence, cruelty, greed, selfishness, dishonesty, or faithlessness to one's family.¹¹⁷

3.3. Gender and home

Although the first of *The Chronicles of Narnia* was published almost forty years after the publication of *The Secret Garden*, Lewis's approach to gender issues is not more progressive than Burnett's. On the contrary, it seems to be rather retrogressive as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* reinforces the distinctions between boys and girls, and between men and women. Even Father Christmas and his gifts confirm the gender roles of all four children; When giving the girls their presents, he does not forget to say to both of them that they 'are not to be in the battle'¹¹⁸ adding that 'battles are ugly when women fight'¹¹⁹. Peter, on the other hand, gets a shield and a sword. Affirming his developing masculinity, he is naturally expected to fight and to defend Narnia. Although Edmund is not present in the scene of gift-giving, once he is liberated from the White Witch's captivity, he demonstrates at least two features which Lewis ascribes only to his male characters: courage and strength.

The nature of Lewis's female characters can be best represented through the character of Mrs Beaver. When they were hiding in the burrow, Mr Beaver and the boys went fishing 'while the girls were helping Mrs Beaver to fill the kettle and lay the table and cut the bread and put the plates...'¹²⁰. Other female features such as loving care or physical weakness also stress the well-established concept of femininity. Moreover, the marriage of Mr. and Mrs Beavers reinforces the already considerable differences between men and women by showing the typically masculine and feminine habits. The only woman in the fairy tale, who actually enters the battle and adopts certain masculine features, is the White Witch. With the help of her wand, she overpowers most of the inhabitants of Narnia and controls the society. However, the demonstrations of her strength are not positive. On the contrary, she is power-hungry, deceitful, calculating, bloodthirsty, cold, and ultimately devoid of femininity. To sum up, even though Lewis had a fantastic space where he could have portrayed boys and girls without gender prejudices, he did not experiment with the idle potentials of sexes and simply mirrored the gender situation of his own society, drawing unsurpassable boundary between the female and the male worlds.

¹¹⁷ David C. Downing, 91.

¹¹⁸ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 78 – 79.

¹¹⁹ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 79.

¹²⁰ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 54.

As it has been pointed out in the introduction of this thesis, home has a strong ideological charge in children's fiction. To show an example, even though the inhabitants of Narnia are animals, their homes are copies of human dwellings. Their furniture, accessories as well as their food ostentatiously remind the readers of their own world. The Pevensie children, who come from British society, are often familiar with food and drinks, with the room layout and with the objects which furnish the animals' dwellings. Consequently, the presence of these objects gives them the feeling of safety, warmth and familiarity. To illustrate, the faun's house as well as the one of the Beavers' represent a perfectly human dwelling. When Lucy drinks tea with Mr Tumnus, Lewis offers us her impression of the faun's house: 'Lucy thought she had never been in a nicer place. It was a little, dry, clean cave of reddish stone with a carpet on the floor and two little chairs [...] and a table and a dresser and a mantelpiece over the fire and above that a picture of an old Faun with a grey beard.'¹²¹ The nature of faun's house indicates the character of the faun himself. Thanks to the similarity between his and Lucy's home, she recognizes that he is a good creature and becomes his friend. The house of the White Witch, on the contrary, represents a counterpart of faun's and the Beavers' dwelling but similarly to their houses, it captures the nature of her personality: 'It seemed to be all towers; little towers with long pointed spires on them, sharp as needles. [...] And they shone in the moonlight and their long shadows looked strange on the snow. Edmund began to be afraid of the House.'¹²² Children know that needles are dangerous and by comparing the towers of the White Witch to them, Lewis explicitly says that she is dangerous. Even Edmund, who thought that White Witch is good and that she was going to give him some more Turkish Delight knew that there is something wrong with her castle. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* can be therefore used as an example representing texts where 'the good family/home is in fact enhanced by the image of the non-conforming and thus bad family home'¹²³. To conclude, Lewis is indeed a follower of myths. By designing the dwellings of the inhabitants of Narnia the way he did, he once again 'reemphasises a myth'¹²⁴. This time, however, it is not a religious myth from the Middle East but 'entirely western, entirely middle class'¹²⁵ myth which influences the Pevensie children not only in Britain but also in Narnia.

¹²¹ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 12.

¹²² *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, 67.

¹²³ Chapleau, 57.

¹²⁴ Chapleau, 57.

¹²⁵ Chapleau, 60.

4.

THE WATER BABIES

In his introduction to *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Peter Hunt quotes fantasy and science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin, who says that 'fantasy is the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul'.¹²⁶ Charles Kingsley's publication *The Water Babies* confirms this view as the protagonist of the story is a 10-year-old chimney sweeper Tom, who becomes a water baby, repents his sins, forgives those who have hurt him and drastically changes the nature of his personality. Published in 1863, the story exhibits several important characteristics of the Victorian era and sheds light on concepts of childhood. At this time, 'sense of national and racial superiority continued to be the principal characteristics of children's literature'¹²⁷ and became the fundamental feature of Kingsley's fantastic fairy tale. This chapter is specifically concerned with the Victorian notion of childhood and contrasts it with that of Kingsley. Using Christian morality as a corner-stone for his allegory, he criticises British society, specifically its acceptance of child labour as 'during the classic Industrial Revolution period between the 1750s and the 1820s [...] children are thought to have entered the labour market in larger numbers'¹²⁸. Next, the influence of Darwin's publication *On the Origin of Species* published in 1859 as well as his correspondence, which he maintained with Kingsley, will be considered with regard to Kingsley's views of white racial superiority which have thoroughly suffused *The Water Babies* and which presented Victorian society in 'an atmosphere congenial to racial stereotyping'¹²⁹ often supported by scientific racism.

4.1. Childhood in Victorian era

Thousands of 19th century British children lived in extremely poor conditions, often working harder and longer than adults. This led to 'fierce debates about the working conditions of emergent industrial labour'¹³⁰ not only among contemporary politicians but also in the literary circles. Although awareness of this social problem increased mainly due to the works of authors such as Charles Dickens, Horatio Alger Jr., Frances Trollope or Elizabeth Barrett Browning, child labour remained commonplace in Victorian society. It is true that it

¹²⁶ Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz eds., *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, (Continuum: London, 2001) 8.

¹²⁷ Troy Boone, *Youth of Darkest England: Class Children at the Heart of Victorian Empire*, (Routledge: New York, 2004) 6.

¹²⁸ Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain: 1750 – 1870*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2003) 27 – 28.

¹²⁹ Anton S. Wohl, Victorian Racism, *The Victorian Web*,

<<http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/history/race/rc5.html>> April 25, 2015.

¹³⁰ James Eli Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature*, (Wiley Blackwell: USA, 2009) 63.

had been present in British society long before the Victorian era but the growing industrialization of the country opened new job opportunities¹³¹, which were often (wrongly) considered suitable for children. In addition, England was a very young country at this time as 'about one person in three was under the age of fifteen.'¹³² All big families, whether they lived in an industrialized or in a rural region of England, saw children as a potential financial source. As Adams says in *A History of Victorian Literature*, 'in the case of very poor families, the earnings of children might provide a higher standard of living compared with households in which children did not work.'¹³³ Thus, despite the activity of concerned literary figures who opposed child labour, more and more children became involved in hard and dangerous physical work before reaching the age of ten. Although 'the increasingly prosperous middle and upper classes began to view childhood sentimentally'¹³⁴, children from lower social classes, driven by their own or by their parents' poverty, were obliged to work usually ten or more hours per day. For this reason, most Victorian writers were concerned with the terrible quality of children's lives rather than with those of middle and upper class children. In writing *The Water Babies*, Kingsley joined this group of socially concerned writers, each of whom concentrated on a specific problem within the context of Victorian child labour. Choosing a chimney-sweeper as the protagonist of his book, Kingsley explored the hard life of children who were engaged in one of the most difficult and dangerous jobs of their age: 'Their death rate was appalling. Cancer of the scrotum was common in the boys—caused by crawling naked through the sooty flues.'¹³⁵ The fact that the life of boys who worked as chimney sweepers was extremely difficult was publicly decried more than fifty years before Kingsley published his novel: It was William Blake, who in order to draw attention to abandoned child workers, wrote two poems both entitled *The Chimney Sweeper*. Interestingly, one of the protagonists of these poems, a small chimney sweeper, is also called Tom, justifying the belief that Blake's poems served as an inspiration for Kingsley. Besides writing a socially concerned fairy tale, Kingsley engaged himself in another activity, which suggests that he felt sympathy not only for children but for all the hard working British people who lived in bad conditions. He joined a periodical called *The People's Friend* where he wrote 'under the pseudonym of "Parson Lot"' and helped to define what would become known as Christian Socialism, proclaiming a fundamental Christian sympathy across class, which might be turned

¹³¹ Emma Griffin, "Child Labour", *British Library*, <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/child-labour>> April 4th, 2015.

¹³² Boone, 4.

¹³³ Adams, 94.

¹³⁴ Donna E. Norton, 51.

¹³⁵ Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, (Baylor University Press: Texas, 2005) 150.

to improving working-class life.¹³⁶ In addition he published a novel *Yeast: A Problem* engaged with the hard work of farmers as well as many pamphlets with a clear intention of spreading social awareness.

However, the fundamental difference between Kingsley and his contemporary authors lies in the purpose of their texts. While the primary aim of *The Cry of the Children*, *Oliver Twist*, *Ragged Dick* or *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* was to 'arouse the Victorian conscience to the plight of unfortunate children'¹³⁷, in Kingsley's text this intention is rather secondary. Despite the fact that he calls attention to the degrading conditions of chimney sweepers and to the ignorance of contemporary society to their plight, his primary intention is to depict a spiritual journey leading to forgiveness, a path that anyone can take, even if he is only a ten-year-old chimney sweeper. Ironically, in spite of this, the publication of *The Water Babies* had a clear impact on British society as 'Kingsley was successful where other reformers had failed in finally getting the use of children for sweeping chimneys prohibited: the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act became law within a year of the publication of *The Water Babies*'¹³⁸.

Another paradox arising from Kingsley's text is precisely its instructional nature. Unlike many, (mostly Puritan) priests of the 18th century, Kingsley, an Anglican vicar, did not agree 'that humans are born sinful as a consequence of mankind's 'fall'¹³⁹, neither did he believe 'that childhood was a perilous period.'¹⁴⁰ For this reason, although the underlying idea of the whole story is a religious lesson, he approaches children differently in comparison to his Protestant predecessors who wrote predominantly 'didactic prose and verse setting forth models of proper behaviour'¹⁴¹. To illustrate, a prolific evangelist author Mary Martha Sherwood claimed that 'all children are by nature evil, and [...] pious and prudent persons must check their naughty passions in any way they have in their power.'¹⁴² However, rather than condemning children as being wicked, ontologically, Kingsley followed Rousseau's notion of childhood, according to which 'children are innately innocent, only becoming corrupted through experience of the world'¹⁴³. Rousseau's idea of the natural education of children is present in the text as soon as Tom leaves society and enters the underwater world.

¹³⁶ Adams, 109.

¹³⁷ Donna E. Norton, 52.

¹³⁸ Stephen Prickett, 150.

¹³⁹ Kimberley Reynolds, "Perceptions of Childhood", *British Library*, <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/perceptions-of-childhood>> April 11, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Kimberley Reynolds.

¹⁴¹ Adams, 242.

¹⁴² Adams, 242.

¹⁴³ Kimberley Reynolds.

It is precisely there, that he learns the deepest moral truth: nature is in fact the key to moral purity, or to the physical and implicitly inner 'cleanness' which Tom seems to be obsessed with.

Kingsley was not the only British author of children's literature with an alternative opinion on childhood. It is important to bear in mind that he published *The Water Babies* only three years before another important Victorian fantasy, Carroll's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, was published in 1865. 'These works often have been taken to inaugurate a "golden age" of children's literature in English, a belated flowering of romantic conceptions of childhood fertilized by a growing literary marketplace.'¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Kingsley's notion of childhood must be considered progressive for its time, however manipulative, moralistic or disrespectful his approach to child readers may seem today. Interestingly, Carroll, like Kingsley, felt the need to create a fantastic land in order to make childhood enjoyable and above all, possible to experience. Even though Alice is a representative of a higher social class, the responsibilities of being a well-bred young lady do not allow her to behave as a completely blithe spirit. Regarding the freedom of childhood, the social restrictions of her family are as restrictive as poverty is to the chimney sweeper Tom. Similarly to him, Alice has to leave reality and enter a fantasy land if she wants to behave beyond the constrictions of etiquette.

To sum up, based on the two most important Victorian fantasies of the time period, it can be concluded that even though these writers were intrigued by the possibilities of a free childhood, the settings of their texts suggest that they did not believe in the possibility of a real childhood experience within the context of Victorian era. Although many other literary authors of the time stressed the importance of childhood, the greater part of 19th century England was still unable to offer this experience to most children.

4.2. Kingsley and the fantasy genre

There is a persistent and prevalent opinion in literary circles that the fantasy genre is somehow 'childish' and immature. The roots of this belief lie in western protestant notions of the 'work ethic' However, as Peter Hunt suggests, there is not an objective reason, why fantasy should be considered a childish, marginal literary genre.¹⁴⁵ On the contrary, many consider it inappropriate for children, on religious or other grounds. Moreover, fantasy texts are often full of allegories, links or critical comments which children understand only very

¹⁴⁴ Adams, 228.

¹⁴⁵ *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 4.

rarely. A recognition of this has led to the growth of 'dual focus' fantasies which offer two clear readings for different audiences. Alternate topoi are, after all, often created of by the combination of fantasy and science fiction, in order to criticize the very society in which its readers live. *The Water Babies*, with its religious, Darwinian allusions, is an example of a fantasy tale which, especially at the time of its publication, attracted both adults and children. Mirroring several aspects of Victorian society and transferring them into the underwater world, adults appreciated its social relevance while children admired its inventiveness. For this reason, although the book is part of the canon of children's literature, it is contentious whether it is more suitable for children or for adults. Whereas the author always addresses his young readers with the clear intention of making gentlemen out of them¹⁴⁶, several passages of the book seem to be rather long, uneventful and too contemplative for a children's book. While contemporary fantasy fiction such as the *Harry Potter* series or the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, often remind the reader of a television thriller with unceasing action and frenetic pace, *The Water Babies* is relatively static. Moreover, Stephen Prickett, the author of the *Victorian fantasy* claims that

there is not a clear one-for-one correspondence between the events in the surface narrative and the underlying theme: the surface narrative is stuffed with superfluous detail that is actually quite irrelevant to the deep structure. The main story itself is rambling and ramshackle, taking every excuse for asides or digressions that cut right across any clear allegorical thread...¹⁴⁷

For this reason, it is hard to believe that any child reader would be able to maintain focused attention during these sections of the book, which greatly deviate from the main story line and often discuss abstract topics in great depth. Yet the novel meets most of the basic characteristics of the fantasy genre, for 'fantasy is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not anti-rational, but para-rational; not realistic, but surrealistic, superrealistic; a heightening of reality.'¹⁴⁸ Although Kingsley fulfils most of these expectations, there are some elements, which make his fantasy unconventional. While fantasy tales usually carry their readers to unknown lands, Kingsley exclusively sets his stories in here-and-now. While Carroll's Alice enters an absurd land

¹⁴⁶ For discussion of Kingsley's gender bias in the text see the subchapter 4.5. Home and Gender.

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Prickett, 141.

¹⁴⁸ *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 17.

hidden in the rabbit hole where physical laws do not exist, Kingsley engages his imagination to a much lower degree. As a churchman, an admirer of God's creation and also as a passionate biologist, Kingsley uses the realm of Earth instead of an imaginative, non-existent, exotic, setting. He creates the 'water baby', yet the water baby is reminiscent of a 'land baby', in other words a normal infant. He lets animals talk in his text but he does not invent new, fantastic creatures as for instance C.S. Lewis does in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. All this can be explained by the fact that Kingsley was a great admirer of nature: 'Nature is the theme of *The Water Babies* in an almost musical sense: it is presented to us in a series of different keys, interrelated and orchestrated to produce a structure analogous to a fugue.'¹⁴⁹ The laws of nature, even the most progressive ones such as those presented by Charles Darwin, are as sacred for him as the Christian Gospel. Moreover, Kingsley adheres not only to natural laws but also to a strong, omnipresent moral code which is given far more importance than the plot itself. For this reason, although Carroll's *Alice's adventures* were published only three years after Kingsley's novel, they are almost devoid of and satirical of instructive content. While Carroll seems to write his text as pure entertainment for children and possibly adults, Kingsley does the very opposite. Kingsley's storyline, already broken by many digressions, is in addition disrupted by constant exhortations and instructions, which ultimately makes the story even less coherent.

To sum up, Kingsley writes his fantasy in order to produce an ideal setting for a theological allegory, proclaiming 'its allegorical status in every line and incident'¹⁵⁰. It is clear that contrary to Carroll, his intention was not to enrich the lives of children by an original imaginative story, but to instruct them about well-known topics in a new way, a possibility mediated by the fantasy genre. His text does not represent much more than a setting for an ideological message which is overtly expressed again and again throughout the text, until the very end of the novel, where in an epilogue, accurately called 'moral', the author spells out for the final time the moral lesson that should be taken from the story.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Prickett, 145.

¹⁵⁰ Stephen Prickett, 140.

4.3. Christianity in *The Water Babies*

Compared to many late 18th and early 19th century authors of children's literature who produce 'overtly didactic literature aimed at teaching proper behaviour and religious faith to the child'¹⁵¹, Kingsley made a progressive move and created a story which was not only instructive but also entertaining. Nevertheless the delightful element of the story did not overshadow his primary intention: to spread Christian ideology. As he used the fantasy genre for this purpose, Kingsley initiated production of fantasy books with strong presence of Christian allusions primarily dedicated to children. Together with George MacDonald he set up a new tradition of combining entertaining fantasy settings with traditional Christian doctrine, thus preparing literary ground for figures such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams or C.S. Lewis, who belonged to the group of so called Inklings and 'whose fiction is permeated, deliberately, with Christian ideas and beliefs'¹⁵².

As discussed previously many writers of children's literature realized that the possibility to write texts for children provided them with great power as 'childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being'¹⁵³. Kingsley decided to use this power primarily to evangelize by means of presenting some of the basic laws for a true Christian life. Interestingly, Kingsley does not choose a typical hero as his protagonist. (The image of the well-bred Christian boy can be seen in F.H. Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, who stands in contrast to the rude-though-good-hearted Tom.) This original approach allows Kingsley to simultaneously show a true Christian life and a Godless existence filled with hard work and misbehaviour. Nevertheless, not only does Kingsley present basic Christian truths and laws to children, but what is more, he also goes into the theological core of his religious belief. By means of the water babies, creatures never seen by people, as a simile, he claims that the absence of proof for God's existence is not evidence of his inexistence:

“But there are no such things as water babies.”

How do you know that? Have you been there to see? And if you have been there to see, and had seen none, that would not prove that there were none [...] And no one has a right to say that no water baby exists, till they have seen no water babies

¹⁵¹ Ruth Murphy, "Darwin and 1860's Children's Literature: Belief, Myth and Detritus", *Journal of Literature and Science*, Volume 5 (2012): 5 – 21.

¹⁵² Sturch, 3.

¹⁵³ John Stephens, 10.

existing; which is quite a different thing, mind, from not seeing water babies; and a thing which nobody ever did, or perhaps ever will do.¹⁵⁴

Manipulating the fantasy fairy tale as if it was a book of sermons, Kingsley often leaves the plot of the story and dedicates much space to the discussion of one or more Christian issues. However, the target audience of these sections of the book are the parents who read the book to their children rather than the children themselves for not only are Kingsley's ideas abstract, transcendental or otherwise difficult to grasp by children but the vocabulary that he chooses in order to explain himself is often too complicated for a child reader. This, however, can also be explained by the fact that at the time period 'children's literature was not as distinct in its readership from adult literature as it is assumed to be now'.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, by transforming several sections of his fantasy fairy tale into instructional tracts aimed at spreading the awareness of fundamental Christian dogma, Kingsley clearly suggests that the instructional role of the text is superior to the entertaining one. In addition, the overt use of ideological insinuation allows him to openly proclaim his primary intentions:

one true orthodox, rational, philosophical, logical, irrefragable, [...] and on-all-accounts to be received doctrine of this wonderful fairy tale is that your soul makes your body just as a snail makes his shell. For the rest, it is enough for us to be sure that whether or not we lived before, we shall live again; though not, I hope as poor little heather Tom did. For he went downward into the water: but we, I hope, shall go upward to a very different place.¹⁵⁶

As he claims, the allusion to the afterlife is the most important 'doctrine' of his book and appears on several different levels. Though the 'different place' from the quotation stands clearly for heaven, Tom's underwater life is in a way also an afterlife, although it has never been clear whether it is meant to be Purgatory (the existence of which is not accepted by the Anglicans), or whether it is simply an alternative way of living an earthly life before Tom can enter the real Heaven. In Christian Scripture, Kingsley's source text, John the Evangelist writes that 'the water that I [Jesus] will give him will become in him a spring of water welling

¹⁵⁴ Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies*, (Penguin books: England, 1995) 67 – 68.

¹⁵⁵ Ruth Murphy, 5 – 21.

¹⁵⁶ Kingsley, 85 – 86.

up to eternal life¹⁵⁷ and in *The Water Babies*, once Tom falls under water, a set of inner changes are initiated which ultimately transform him into a better person, presumably ready for 'eternal life'. The same Evangelist also mediates Jesus' words that 'unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'¹⁵⁸. Thus, when Tom falls down the chimney in the Harthover House and sees himself in the mirror, he feels disgust after realizing how dirty he is, especially compared to the clean, white girl, who is sleeping in the bed in the same room. However, after he is 'baptised' by the water into which he falls and becomes a water baby, two processes of cleansing are initiated as 'Kingsley attempted to identify spiritual or moral law with physical law'¹⁵⁹; the first one is literal when the water washes the soot off his body; the second process, however, the cleansing of his soul, is much more protracted and it is completed only when Tom forgives his torturer Mr Grimes and when his new self, capable of forgiveness, is 'born of water'. Thus, the character of Tom follows one of two most common patterns of character development in children's literature of the 19th century. The so called 'change of heart' story usually presents a child who has not reached the ideal state of self-discipline and needs some improvement. This kind of story usually culminates in the change of the protagonist's heart and in the improvement of his behaviour.¹⁶⁰ This story pattern is especially suitable for a fairy tale with a strong moral message such as *The Water Babies*, the spiritual journey and the gradual changing of the protagonist's heart is more important than the entertaining development of the fantasy. This section of the thesis can be best concluded by Prickett who claims that 'in Kingsley, the fantasy has a moral, and allegorical basis, sometimes subtle and well integrated, at other times crude and obtrusive'¹⁶¹. In any case, the ideological charge of *The Water Babies* is perceptible throughout the whole story and although at the time of its publication the book was considered entertaining, its strong, overt moral tone is nowadays considered intrusive and hard to accept.

4.4. The impact of Darwinism

In 1859, one of the most influential scientific works ever written, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, was published. Its publication was immediately followed by numerous

¹⁵⁷ John, 4:14.

¹⁵⁸ John, 3:5.

¹⁵⁹ Donald E. Hall ed., *Christian Muscularity*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1994) 92.

¹⁶⁰ Dona E. Norton, 52.

¹⁶¹ Stephen Prickett, 12.

controversial debates. While some scientists and laymen accepted the Theory of Evolution straight away, others, especially Christian believers, has been relentlessly rejecting it. Ruth Murphy explains that although the publication 'was carefully ambivalent, focusing entirely on animal development without reference to humanity [...], scientific and public debate focused on human evolution from apes, and the ethical problems of reconciling a brutal, indifferent nature with a benevolent and omnipotent God'¹⁶². For this reason, it is surprising that Kingsley, an Anglican churchman, already believed in all of the new discoveries that Darwin made even before the actual publication of the theory. The correspondence that Kingsley maintained with Darwin allowed him to understand in detail his theory and see it not in opposition to his religious beliefs, but on the contrary, to consider it yet another proof for what Christians believe to be God's creative power. As Kingsley understood it, 'children's literature [...] played an important role in terms of educating children to receive and respond to the new scientific ideas'¹⁶³ therefore, he subsequently used his opinion on this issue as a corner-stone for *The Water Babies*. By balancing the amount of scientific and religious information, he created a link between science and religion, two fields which, after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, started to diverge greatly. Moreover, 'in his combination of moral earnestness and scientific enthusiasm, his eagerness to find moral significance in natural patterns, Kingsley represents some of the major tendencies in Victorian culture.'¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, this blending of science and faith together in a children's book was not unusual in the first half of 19th century. Natural theology had been long considered suitable for children as it encouraged both growth of mind and spirit¹⁶⁵ but the authors of children's books used science solely to support the Gospel. As Darwin's theory threatened the customary understanding of the first chapter of Genesis, among other sections of the Old Testament, most of the Christian authors would not accept it. Kingsley, on the contrary, understood the theory as a new possibility for enlightening people about the Christian message. Based on the contemplative passages and the great number of allusions in the book, there was reason to believe that *The Water Babies* was intended to educate all people, not only children. As the Theory of Evolution was a brand new idea to the increasingly vast reading public, Kingsley decided to mediate it on a relatively comprehensible level, which was consequently appealing equally to children and adults. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the boundaries between books written for children and for adults were not as strict in the Victorian period as

¹⁶² Ruth Murphy, 5 – 21.

¹⁶³ Ruth Murphy, 5 – 21.

¹⁶⁴ Donald E. Hall ed., 91.

¹⁶⁵ Ruth Murphy, 5 – 21.

they are today. Parents from lower social classes were often literate but poorly educated and specialised books or books with complex vocabularies were unsuitable for their level of understanding. In other words, 'what we categorise as Victorian children's literature was often read simply as literature in its own right by adults. Texts for children that explained science, or dealt with the relationship between scientific knowledge and the social and spiritual world, provided a layman's guide to science and faith for scientifically naive adults'¹⁶⁶.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that throughout the novel there are countless allusions to Darwin and his theory or to other famous biologists of the time, Kingsley never subordinates religious beliefs to science. The apologetic passage about water babies quoted in the previous section suggests that an absence or presence of a physical proof is less important than faith. Ruth Murphy makes a valid point when she says that

... for Kingsley, it seems, scientific knowledge is all well and good when it functions as an allegory to reveal the essential goodness of God's creation, but its focus on empirical evidence and its threat to destabilise religious readings of nature make it ultimately untrustworthy.¹⁶⁷

On the one hand, Kingsley's text is progressive because it accepts the Theory of Evolution without refuting its relevance based on the Bible. On the other hand, reaching both adults and children, he does not hesitate to prioritize religion over science, thus undermining the authority of science, which he occasionally seems to satirize. In any case, the story of Tom the chimney sweeper who evolves from a dirty black savage into a clean, civilised water baby as well as many other examples of underwater creatures who go through life cycles that change their physical appearances, suggest that Kingsley accepted Darwin's assumptions about the evolution of the human race and extrapolates them in the sense of social evolution towards 'homo superior'. This acceptance allowed him to create a new myth, both religious and scientific, and to encapsulate it into a fantasy fairy tale, which attracted the attention of the Victorian reading public.

When discussing the influence of the Theory of Evolution on Kingsley's text, it is necessary to pay attention to an undesirable impact of the theory upon *The Water Babies*, namely its implicit support for variety of racism. The impression that moral purity is automatically connected to physical neatness, cleanness and whiteness is very strong in the

¹⁶⁶ Ruth Murphy, 5 – 21.

¹⁶⁷ Ruth Murphy, 5 – 21.

text. In addition to this, Kingsley makes it clear that, it is the opposite condition: dirt and blackness, that are the signs of savagery and moral backwardness. This striking difference is presented to the readers on the example of two child characters in the story: Tom and Ellie. When Tom falls down the chimney to Ellie's room he sees 'the most beautiful girl that Tom had ever seen. Her cheeks were almost as white as the pillow, and her hair was like threads of gold spread all about over the bed'¹⁶⁸. However, when he sees himself in the mirror he sees 'a little ugly, black, ragged figure, with bleared eyes and grinning white teeth [...] What did such a little ape want in that sweet young lady's room?'¹⁶⁹ he asked himself. At this stage of the story, Tom was often naughty and what is more important, he led a godless life. Ellie, on the contrary, was decent and innocent during the whole story. Consequently, Tom reaches the moral purity only when he becomes a clean, white water baby and after he regrets the wrong deeds which he had done.

Although Darwin did not support racist acts such as extermination of natives in North and South America, he considered the white race superior to other races, an idea which Kingsley enthusiastically adopted. In one of many letters which he and Kingsley exchanged, Darwin wrote the following words:

I declare the thought, when I first saw in Tierra del Fuego a naked painted, shivering hideous savage, that my ancestors must have been somewhat similar beings, was at that time as revolting to me, nay more revolting than my present belief that an incomparably more remote ancestor was a hairy beast.¹⁷⁰

Kingsley shares this controversial opinion voicing it through the character of a salmon, who talks to Tom:

My dear, we don't not even mention them, if we can help it; for I am sorry to say they are relations of ours who do us no credit. A great many years ago they were just like us: but they were so lazy, and cowardly, and greedy, [...] that they chose to stay and poke about in the little streams and eat worms and grubs; and they are

¹⁶⁸ Kingsley, 25.

¹⁶⁹ Kingsley, 26.

¹⁷⁰ "Darwin, Kingsley, "Evolution and Racism", *Uncommon Descent*, <<http://www.uncommondescent.com/intelligent-design/darwin-kingsley-evolution-and-racism/>> Feb. 27, 2014, April 13 2015.

very properly punished for it; for they have grown ugly and brown and spotted and small.¹⁷¹

Although Kingsley accepted Darwin's theory, including the part about ape ancestors, which was seen by many scientists and laymen as degrading, he felt a surprisingly strong need to draw boundaries between the white and black races. This imaginary boundary is visible also in *The Water Babies*, where opinions supporting racial discrimination appear several times. As Prickett states, 'almost every event in *The Water Babies* carries with it a clear intimation of "inner meaning"¹⁷² and scientifically sanctions Darwin's Theory of Evolution. It is indisputable that Kingsley's most famous book has besides a scientific also a literary value. Nevertheless, his personal prejudices converted his book into a text that held a negative ideological charge with a potentially dangerous impact for its readers. Although the pacifist Christian mediation of the Word of God makes it a useful source of moral guidance, it does not compensate for the author's bias towards other races and nationalities.

4.5. Home and gender

To analyse the ideological symbols of home in the life of a protagonist who is practically homeless may seem absurd. However, as Ann Alston suggests in her essay, even the absence of home can be a sign used to support the concept of an ideal home: 'The family house [...] has not lost its values because some texts do not have it, indeed, by describing those families that do not have it as somewhat inadequate, the value of the ideal house in children's literature is actually enhanced.'¹⁷³ The fact that Tom is an orphan and that he lacks a proper upbringing is an example of what Ann Alston identifies in her essay; it presents the readers with a problematic boy with many flaws which, paradoxically, serves to stress the idea of a perfect child.

As Tom does not have parents or a proper home, he lacks the space under the influence of which his self could be ideologically formed. There are no symbols of domesticity which would suggest the ideological tendencies of his parents and of Tom's contemporary society. The only relationship which Tom has is the one with his master Mr. Grimes. His home, however, is never mentioned in the novel, which in itself suggests that Tom does not spend a lot of time there. Although he occupies himself by going from one

¹⁷¹ Kingsley, 125.

¹⁷² Prickett, 157.

¹⁷³ Chapleau ed., 56.

building to another, the only thing which he gets to see, are the inside of their chimneys. However, his first visit of the interior of a house changes the rest of his life; it reveals to him the difference between poor and rich and metaphorically also the contrast between black and white. The one short moment that he spends inside of a real home is enough to make him realize the misery of his existence. To make this obvious, Kingsley shows him a house which could be hardly more impressive. Prickett claims that 'Harthover House (its very name perhaps an indication of the supremacy of Heart and Hearth) is the essence of Englishness—possibly even a symbol of England itself.'¹⁷⁴ It indirectly suggests what a proper English home should look like and it makes Tom realize that nothing similar to it forms part of his life. It is in fact a symbol representing the very opposite of Tom's life; his blackness is in direct contrast with its cleanness and with its inhabitants' whiteness. Furthermore, the fact that he does not have a proper home when he lives under water is suggestive not that Tom is homeless, but that he is at home in the whole underwater world. Nevertheless, although he is liberated from the ideological influence of domestic objects, the influence of the creatures living in his underwater world counterbalance the inexistence of an ideologically charged home. Both animals and fantastic creatures promote and deliver a consistent ideological message personified in the so-called Golden Rule and expressed, among other things, by means of Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby's name.

Besides disseminating Christianity and Darwinism, Kingsley's text promotes well-established Victorian gender roles. However, his understanding of them is not based exclusively on the superiority of male sex over the female but rather on the so called 'doctrine of complementarity', according to which 'women were not to be viewed as inferior to men but as fundamentally different from, and thus incomparable to, men.'¹⁷⁵ On the basis of this, Kingsley claims that there is not a competition between the female and male sexes in the society. On the contrary, the doctrine of complementarity states that 'they adapted, entering into a symbiotic relationship that allowed each sex to benefit from contact with the other.'¹⁷⁶ However, no matter what Kingsley's motives were, he still confirmed male superiority by suppressing and discriminating the female characters. Moreover, believing that celibacy is an unnatural law violating physical state of human body, he condemns it and understands monogamous marriage as an ultimate fulfilment of the doctrine of complementarity. Consequently, he wants his characters to fulfil their gender roles in order to fulfil the goal of

¹⁷⁴ Prickett, 145.

¹⁷⁵ Hall, 92.

¹⁷⁶ Hall, 92.

this doctrine and, most importantly, because he believed that 'movement away from fixed gender roles means not exaltation but degeneration'¹⁷⁷.

Furthermore, the gender roles of the main characters are strongly linked to their social status. Thanks to this, Tom is basically free from any social restrictions. He plays outside in the dirt, he does not wash, he runs through forests and he experiences a great adventure in his underwater life. Ellie, on the contrary, represents the idealized life of a young lady. Although for a short period of time she becomes a water baby too, her primary role in the story is to give an example of moral and physical cleanness and of flawless behaviour. The roles of the adults in *The Water Babies* reaffirm the gender roles of Victorian society as a whole. The adult female characters, all human, fantastic and animal, are very alike in their behaviour and represent the embodiment of motherhood. In her book *Deconstructing the Hero*, Margery Hourihan claims that 'these mothers are invariably good, nurturing, sometimes almost saintly. They are the presiding spirits of the domestic sphere.'¹⁷⁸ At some stage of Tom's life they take care of him, and leading him along the path of cleanness, they feed him, clean him, protect him and ultimately make him a better person. Finally, the narrator's attitude to the female characters is unified; they are praised for their deeds as they share a viewpoint with the narrator himself.

Kingsley's male characters are either men of action or men of science. Apart from Grimes, they do not enter into direct contact with Tom as each of them is interested in something other than child care. Although the master of Harthover is sensitive and feels sorry for Tom, his feelings do not have any direct impact on the boy's life. Moreover, the narrator's attitude to the male characters differs. While he praises some of them, he criticizes and ridicules others. He changes his tone when writing about characters who share religious beliefs and ideological preferences versus those who have different opinions on scientific and/or religious issues. While he supports and treats the former group of characters with respect, he mocks and ridicules the latter one.

Furthermore, there is an interesting element concerning the gender issue that is present throughout the whole book: Kingsley's mode of addressing the reader. He often introduces his moralistic passages with 'my dear boy' as if all of his readers were exclusively male. This may be because the expected outcome of the moral lesson to be drawn from the story is not to help raise a young lady but to inspire boys to become proper English gentlemen. The young female reader, therefore, is paid much less attention both in the fictional story and in the instructive

¹⁷⁷ Hall, 98.

¹⁷⁸ Hourihan, 162.

passages of the narrator. In his book *Muscular Christianity* Donald E. Hall claims that one of the consequences of Victorian era is 'that male control of the political process, the medical community, the publishing industry, and of discourse itself has produced a body of work that actively inscribes patriarchy.'¹⁷⁹ Hall refers specifically to Kingsley, whose approach to text is reinforced by so called 'muscular Christianity', 'an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself [...]'¹⁸⁰ In fact, Kingsley is considered the founder of this specific Christian doctrine. Therefore, it is not surprising that he 'use[s] the male body as a canvas upon which they portray both social and psychological dramas.'¹⁸¹ Consequently, he chooses Tom instead of Ellie as a protagonist of his book and devotes most of the space in his fairy tale to him as well as to other male characters. According to Kingsley and many other followers of muscular Christianity, physical as well as religious strength can be best expressed through the male body. For this reason, *The Water Babies* is a fairy tale 'thoroughly grounded in male experience and the male body'.

¹⁷⁹ Donald E. Hall ed., 8.

¹⁸⁰ Hall ed., 22.

¹⁸¹ Hall ed., 22.

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CONCLUSION

Although many critical essays have been written about the concept of children's literature, they seem to agree only on one point, best formulated by Jacqueline Rose: 'children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple. It is an idea whose innocent generality covers up a multitude of sins...'¹⁸² Many authors of children's literature have realized that to approach a child is not at all simple and that 'things are more complicated than they had assumed'¹⁸³. A generalized address to a child reader is insufficient and dangerous; instead a targeted and specific mode of address is needed. As Peter Hunt says, it would be utterly disrespectful to think child readers as less nuanced and sophisticated as adults.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, similar tendency has been followed also in literary criticism where 'most recent scholarly discussion of children's literature focuses on the specific characteristics of texts produced in specific times or places or by specific groups of people.'¹⁸⁵

The constantly evolving and changing concept of childhood suggests that adults have been learning about it and redefining it throughout centuries yet the fact that it has never been permanently agreed on is a sign of an uncertainty of what childhood, and for that matter a child reader, actually is. This thesis has only analysed three of the myriads of children's texts published over the centuries yet each of the three authors of these books has a different understanding of childhood and, consequently a different narrative conducts when approaching the child readers.

The general tendency from instructive books towards the predominantly entertaining ones which have been written over the course of 250 years suggests that the writers were very slowly realizing what children like to read and that instead of trying to understand childhood by supporting its natural needs, for a long time they were trying to redefine its nature, to restrict it by their instructional tracts and to make children behave like adults as soon as possible. Thanks to Locke and Rousseau the view of childhood has begun to change ultimately leading to a change of approach to children's literature. The deep desire to instruct rooted, in the Puritan culture, was overwhelmingly present in all the children's books till 1846, when Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* was published. Soon it was followed by

¹⁸² Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, (The Macmillan Press: USA, 1984) 1.

¹⁸³ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Understanding Children's Literature*, 28.

¹⁸⁵ Nodelman, 6.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, which posed another of the many unanswered questions concerning children's literature: 'Should children's books be for instruction or delight?'¹⁸⁶ It seems that the answer to this question has been changing with the same frequency as the answer to the question as to who the children from children's literature are. The answers to both these questions are therefore conditioned by the period of time in which a specific book was published. Thus, the primary aim of a book published in the late 18th century Britain or in the early Victorian era is undoubtedly instructional, as it is influenced by the religious ideology. Lear's and Carroll's texts, on the contrary, seem to revolt against the instructional books written for children by writing their very opposites, thus producing purely entertaining texts. Nevertheless, there are very few as straightforwardly instructional texts as Kingsley's and as purely entertaining as Lear's. As Hunt says, children's literature is a 'tangled jungle' and the most common method for writers of children's literature is to blend instruction with entertainment and to produce texts which are enjoyable but also beneficial in terms of moral or ethical growth of a child. However, the recipe for this 'literary cocktail' for children has been disputed. Kingsley's open treatment of Christianity, Darwinism and racism, for instance, was acceptable at the time of publication of *The Water Babies*. However, as can be seen in the examples of *The Secret Garden* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, this trend has changed and ideologies began to be spread covertly through their encapsulation into metaphors. The treatment of Christianity in Kingsley compared to that of Lewis indeed proves the veracity of this theory.

Children's literature, like adult literature, has not stopped evolving and for that matter it would be appropriate to pay some attention to the contemporary trends in the field which Peter Hunt likes to call 'the most exciting and most vibrant of all literary studies'¹⁸⁷. The market with children's books has never been as rich in terms of genres and topics as it is today. Although Jack Zipes, a noted critic, is convinced about the homogenization of American culture and consequently about the homogenization of children's literature, the growing departments with children's books occupy still more and more space in bookshops and contain books designed for children of all different ages, interests and intellectual levels suggesting that despite a certain tendency towards homogenization of children's literature, the variety is still wider than it has ever been. It seems that the idea of a universal child is long forgotten and that authors of children's literature have learned to write for children of different

¹⁸⁶ Janet Maybin and Nichola J. Watson, eds., *Children's Literature - Approaches and Territories*, (Open University Press with Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2009) 12.

¹⁸⁷ Janet Maybin and Nichola J. Watson, eds., 12.

nationality, talent, personal character, mental or physical state, family background etc. In terms of ideology, there seems to be a uniform, ideology-free moral lesson, a civic ethical code, which can be found in most of the books. This code is unobtrusively incorporated in the majority of texts and covertly supports the teachings of parents and teachers. Unlike Kingsley's or Lewis's moral lessons, this moral is not influenced by a religious belief and, with a few exceptions, it is equally acceptable to believers and non-believers. Nevertheless, this does not mean that books with ideological content have completely disappeared from the market neither that the question of instructional versus entertaining books has been answered. The most popular books for young adults published in the last two decades suggest that there has been a change in what children or young adults consider entertaining and what the authors consider instructional. While in times of Lewis Carroll the word entertaining meant mostly interesting and funny, an entertaining book published nowadays has to fulfil many more expectations. There has been a certain tendency to write books published in series, which are not only funny, if they are at all, but which are most importantly thrilling, detective, exciting, scary, and imaginative. Philip Pullman claims that 'in the contemporary world, stories on themes too large for adult fiction [can] only be dealt with adequately in a children's book'¹⁸⁸ and very often in a fantasy book. Fantasy has become the most popular genre producing texts such as *Harry Potter*, *Artemis Fowl*, *Inheritance Cycle*, *His Dark Materials* but also *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy which is perhaps more popular in these days than it was at the time of its publication. In each of these books, children or young adult protagonists 'are depicted as struggling to save civilization, to preserve 'our' world from some threat of annihilation.'¹⁸⁹ Similar tasks await also the main characters from another immensely popular young-adult genre which is post-apocalyptic, often dystopian, science-fiction usually published as trilogies or tetralogies. *The Hunger Games*, *The Maze Runner*, *Razorland Trilogy* or *The 100* are just some examples of this quickly growing genre which attracts a growing number of both child and adult readers.

Although these texts are set in the future, often in different worlds, the problems which the main characters encounter are usually comparable to those of present day humans. Tom Moylan claims that in dystopian novels, 'children and young-adults assist them [people] in learning to understand the meaning of the culturally and unconsciously coded world of a mimetic novel, or, indeed, of "real life"'.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 122.

¹⁸⁹ Hourihan, 47.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Westview Press: USA, 2000) 291.

However, rather than being instructive and entertaining, these books are disturbing, cautionary and even threatening. Their moral lesson does not concern the everyday life of children or young adults but it draws attention to a possible, dangerous development of society, thus pointing out that something is wrong with the way we live our lives. Although the severe and restrictive ideologies present in these books are almost always fictitious, as in the case of dystopian literature for adults, their roots can be often found in past political regimes, such as Nazism or Communism. They embody concerns and worries of adults, and enter children's or young adults' books as they did at the times of Kingsley, Burnett and Lewis. This persistent tendency suggests that not much has changed in terms of the presence of the 'hidden adult' in children's books and that ideologies, whether imaginative or real, are still an inseparable part of children's literature. However, what has changed is the attitude of the writers. While in the past they used to write fantasy utopias for children because 'a descriptions of what the writer knows or thinks is a better world than the actual less ideal one of which the writer is conscious,'¹⁹¹ the listed works of the contemporary authors of fantasy literature for children suggest that they do not want to offer a fictional version of a better world but a dystopian version of the actual reality.

Rather than answering the question whether books for children should be 'instructional' or 'entertaining', the authors of children's literature, especially those of books for young adults, have shifted the meaning of these terms by writing captivating books of which the primary intention is to warn society against traits leading towards bleak visions of the future. To conclude, although the nature of entertaining and instructional books has changed, the ideological function of children's texts, however fictitious or invisible, remains integral to children's literature as it ever was in its most formative periods.

¹⁹¹ Nodelman, 217.

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