

Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation

Edited by

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and

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Introduction

Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt

Childhood, children and perceptions about both are constantly subject to change. Nathaniel Hawthorne's image of the ideal child audience now feels saccharine and condescending: a tall young man, surrounded by a circle of small faces, in a country-house idyll, answers their demand for 'More!' This is the narrative setting for Hawthorne's *Wonder Book* (1851) and its sequel *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), both narrated by the college student, Eustace Bright, to his coterie of little followers, named, like fairies, after flowers: Daisy, Buttercup, Primrose, Huckleberry and Periwinkle. In Caroline Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries*, Aristo the tutor and other adults often tell stories from Greek myth to the four young detectives.¹ But elsewhere the children challenge, subvert, rebel and take charge of the narrative.² This image of innocent children as ideal readers of ancient culture, particularly myth, is enduring, and already at work in the ancient world.³ In Plato's *Statesman* the Stranger introduces the

¹ Adults telling stories to children in the *Roman Mysteries*: the glossary at the end of each book is called 'Aristo's scroll'; *Secrets of Vesuvius* 39-45 (Aristo to the children on Vulcan); *Pirates of Pompeii* 106-8 (Pollius Felix on Dionysus and the dolphins); *Twelve Tasks* 187-8 (Cartilia uses Pygmalion as an exemplum for Flavia); *Colossus of Rhodes* 28-30, 42 (the children translate Apollonius for Aristo).

² Children taking over the narrative: *Thieves of Ostia* 55 (Flavia to Nubia on Perseus); *Secrets of Vesuvius* 19-20 (the children exchange stories with Pliny the Elder); *Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina* 72-5, 90-91 (the children tell the story of Hercules to each other); *Colossus of Rhodes* 24-5 (children draw detailed parallels between the Argonauts and the current voyage).

³ In paratexts published alongside children's texts, childhood is often compared to the state of 'noble savagery' of the 'primitive' Greeks and Romans. For instance, Hawthorne refers to the ancient world as 'the pure childhood of the world' in his introduction to *The Wonder-book* (Hawthorne (1885 [1851]) 5-

dialogue's myth with an exhortation to the young Socrates to listen as if he were a child: Ἀλλὰ δὴ τῷ μύθῳ μου πάνυπρόσεχε τὸν νοῦν, καθάπερ οἱ παῖδες· πάντως οὐ πολλὰ ἐκφεύγεις παιδιὰς ἔτη. 'Then please pay careful attention to my story, just as if you were a child; and anyway you have not long left childish years behind.' Elsewhere, Plato worries about the power of myth over children: at *Republic* 2.378d-e he argues for the exclusion of problematic myths from the literature of the ideal society: ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἷός τε κρίνειν ὅτι τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὁ μή, ἀλλ' ἃ ἂν τηλικούτος ὦν λάβῃ ἐν ταῖς δόξαις δυσέκνιπτά τε καὶ ἀμετάστατα φιλεῖ γίνεσθαι: 'For the young are not able to distinguish what is and what is not allegory, but whatever opinions are taken into the mind at that age tend to prove indelible and unalterable.' We know that Socrates will always be asking awkward questions and that even Plato cannot control how children (and indeed adults) read myth. But what does it mean to read as a child, or to write for a child? Children change things; literature read in childhood is controlled and formed by adults in numerous ways, but the idea of children as readers creates a productive tension between teaching and exploring, domesticating and re-wilding.⁴

Scholarship in Classical Reception Studies (and before that in the Classical Tradition), as in classics and literary studies more generally, very often implicitly assumes an audience for its subject texts which is strikingly similar to the scholars and their own audience. At its most traditional, literary and cultural studies scholarship

6): 'The objectionable characteristics seem to be a parasitical growth, having no essential connection with the original fable. They fall away, and are thought of no more, the instant he puts his imagination in sympathy with the innocent little circle, whose wide-open eyes are fixed so eagerly upon him. Thus the stories (not by any strained effort of the narrator's, but in harmony with their inherent germ) transform themselves, and reassume the shapes which they might be supposed to possess in the pure childhood of the world.'

⁴ On childhood as an adult construct: Rose (2002); on the double audience of adults and children, Nodelman (2008).

takes a detached, ‘objective’ view which attempts to distance itself from personally, culturally, or temporally grounded perspectives. Temporal changes encompass not only changes from one era to another in how readers approach texts,⁵ but also changes in perspective over the lifetime of individual readers: the envisaged reader of texts analysed by the scholar is assumed to be relatively static, an adult with a fully-formed set of knowledge, experiences, and skills in reading and understanding texts.⁶ But one of the biggest and in some respects the most important bodies of texts to engage with the classical world—children’s literature and related cultural products—is in contrast read by an audience which is constantly and quickly changing as it grows; it very frequently features portrayals of change and metamorphosis (and in doing so it often draws upon the rich stock of classical and other stories featuring metamorphoses, particularly Ovid), including of a child protagonist or other child or childlike characters with whom child readers might identify; far more than most literary retellings or representations of the classical world and its stories, literature for young readers changes its subject-matter not only as a part of an unconscious artistic process but also very consciously altering it in order to make it ‘age-appropriate’, and sometimes deliberately imbuing it with more or less overt moral or other didactic lessons. Children’s literature and culture help to shape the experiences of the developing child reader, and whether through overt didacticism or not, they also participate actively in the processes of change they sometimes represent. There are, then, many ways in which metamorphosis and change are central to children’s literature, which itself transforms

⁵ Or audiences and users of other media and cultural products: for the sake of convenience we will use ‘texts’ and ‘readers’ in general.

⁶ Of course, some scholarship does acknowledge and attempt to account for some of these variables in the readership of its object, and in some cases even to bring into the open the personal perspectives and experience the scholar brings to it: see the essays in Hallett and van Nortwick (1996).

the classical world for a child audience. The present volume takes this association between metamorphosis, classics and children's texts as its starting point.

This book arose from a conference on Greece and Rome in Children's Literature, held at the University of Wales, Lampeter. It brings together contributions by scholars from Classics departments and English departments, along with art historians, authors, teachers, and children, to explore the various changes that construct the ancient world for young readers. It complements the recently published volume edited by Lisa Maurice in its emphasis on transformation and education as key to understanding the importance of Classics in children's cultures from the Victorian period to the present day.⁷ This volume does not attempt to be comprehensive - the field is impossibly large - but addresses key issues and raises questions for the future, such as definitions, voice, identity, with a particular interest in contemporary writing for children.⁸ The focus is primarily on Anglophone receptions; the conference included discussion of material from Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy and Greece, but different responses from different cultures is another subject, partly treated in a forthcoming volume edited by Katarzyna Marciniak.⁹ Our main interest is in literature and texts; although other media and cultural activities are equally fascinating, authors and books have a particularly close relationship with the ancient world, and ancient history has long been tied up with texts and philology.¹⁰

⁷ Maurice (2015) provides a useful overview of the field; the division into Greek myth and Roman history is complicated by the fact that much of the 'Greek' myth is derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

⁸ In this interest in more recent children's literature, the volume differs from the forthcoming jointly authored monograph by Roberts and Murnaghan.

⁹ Marciniak (2016) has a particular interest in the relationships between Eastern and Western Europe, and receptions of Greek mythology in different the national cultures of Europe and beyond.

¹⁰ On the value of literary approaches amongst cultural studies: Kidd (2002). When books are adapted for film, for instance, such as the Harry Potter series, much detail must be cut, and classical references

Why classics and children's literature

Children's literature and Classics has only recently taken off as an area of study. Why now, and why is children's literature particularly important for classics and classical reception studies? The most important reason is, indeed, bound up with the personal and where the personal meets the professional, in various ways: like most classicists, we can trace our own love of classical myth and literature, before any formal educational engagement with them, back to particular children's books and television programmes, of which some details (an illustration, a story, or a response evoked, though not always a title or publication details)¹¹ are far more vividly remembered than most books read in later life. The power of impressions that can be made in children's earliest encounters with the classical past and its stories cannot be underestimated in considering their survival in the modern world, from school and university syllabuses and scholarship to mainstream cultural products aimed at adults who fell in love with the classics as children. Popular culture shapes Classics and classicists: it should therefore be studied. From popular history books through edutainment products to games and films, popular culture sustains classics and forms its future students and scholars. One of the reasons for bringing together classics and reception studies with childhood in this particular way is to open connections and fruitful dialogues between

are often among the material cut. This is not just true in modern children's literature: HVL is surprised how many references to Classical history and mythology there are in Melville's *Moby Dick*, which do not surface in the many multi-media adaptations and retellings of the story, and serve mainly to characterise the narrator as educated.

¹¹ Tony Robinson's book retelling the *Odyssey* is one example for which OH can remember such details; there was a television programme, but since he didn't have a TV at home, he may not have seen much or any of it. For HVL, Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* was certainly important, as well as the Narnia books, and Robert Graves' *Greek Myths*, read in Latin lessons as a reward.

experts in literature and authors of children's books, and educational practitioners in schools as well as universities. We should acknowledge the dual or multiple capacities in which many people come to and engage with classics, and the ways that these internal as well as external interactions of personal identity affect the scholarship of those of us who are scholars. The promotion and ongoing existence of Classics as an academic subject is informed by, and (through the need to keep recruiting students) dependent upon, these kinds of engagement with children directly and indirectly through others whose work introduces children to the classics.

There are also very good academic reasons for bringing children's texts into the ambit of Classical Reception Studies: if a goal of Reception Studies is to understand how everything in each modern reader's experience constructs her own classical world, and to acknowledge rather than seek to strip away the centuries of intervening readings and interpretations which influence that, then surely a key starting point is the texts which begin each of our associations with the classics. Indeed, given the strength and endurance of the impressions such children's reception texts can make, often reinforced by multiple re-readings, they must be acknowledged as being far more likely than any post-classical to pre-modern cultural products to shape directly how the modern adult audience engages with the classical world. Thus children's texts can be highly illuminating concerning our own and other (previous and later) generations' first experiences with the classics, as readers on their own or with parents, as audiences of television and film representations, and as pupils encountering the classics at school. Children are also a minority, a subaltern voice, even if many will grow to be members of a privileged elite. There is therefore a strong political argument for extending Classical Reception Studies to include children's texts and cultures. The focus on

education and identity in this book, brought out in the theme of metamorphosis, gives one way in to the politics of classics and children's literature.

Now that 'Reception Studies' is a firmly established area within the study of classical antiquity, it has brought with it a great broadening of the reception texts (and other media) studied as compared with its predecessor, studies in the 'Classical Tradition', which focused far more narrowly on elite literature and other art forms. Where before one could read studies of Shakespeare's use of the classics or opera's use of classical settings, reception studies has included studies of modern reflections and refractions of antiquity in computer games, films, television programmes and graphic novels.¹² Now children's literature gives a new way of approaching the ancient world and its transformations.

In addition, the emergence and flourishing of Childhood Studies and of Children's Literature Studies as separate disciplines in recent decades means that there exists now a range of useful methodologies and approaches specific to children's texts as objects of study. It may not, though, be self-evident that children's literature, and classical reception studies based on it, need be a separate category. The answer depends a great deal upon one's methodology in approaching children's literature and culture.

One of the largest binary oppositions in Children's Literature Studies is that between adult- and child-centred methods,¹³ and the related but not identical opposition between

¹² See e.g. among many others: Kovacs and Marshall (2011) on Classics and comics; Thorsen (2013) on computer games; Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) and Winkler (2012) on film; Cyrino (2008) on television.

¹³ For examples of scholars whose focus is on the pleasure of the (child, or child and adult re-) reader see e.g. Touponce (1995) and Nodelman (2000, as an introduction to this aspect of his many related publications, especially 1992). Touponce (1995) 177 contrasts this approach with the "New Critical formalist-structuralist hegemony that still rules in discussions of literature", giving rise to many more

author- and reader-focused approaches.¹⁴ If the object of study is the text as product of the (adult) author, and her processes in producing it, then arguably the processes involved in an author engaging with and responding to—sometimes deliberately, sometimes more unconsciously—classical texts and their knowledge of the classical world, will be largely the same regardless of whether they are writing for primarily adult or primarily child audiences; in this case, similar questions will be asked of this object of study as of a text produced for adults.

Though these might be seen as more ‘traditional’ questions, we would argue that they are nonetheless worth asking, especially since they have rarely been asked in relation to classical reception texts aimed at children, or in some cases to the specific texts discussed in this volume. And in fact, in this author-focused kind of study, there are new questions to be considered: for there are very many books which are clearly aimed at a composite audience of children and adults, or at adults to read to children; and many more which, though not necessarily targeted at such a mixed audience are nevertheless read by a mixed audience, including adult readers and adults whose conceptions of the classical world are shaped strongly by memories of their childhood

traditional-looking analytical studies and catalogues of plots, styles, themes, and so on within children’s literature, citing Lukens (1990) and Nodelman (1988).

¹⁴ Hunt’s approach throughout his large *oeuvre* on children’s literature is strongly committed to the reception theory idea that the meaning of a text is created only by the reader; this approach is thus critical of widespread assumptions that only ‘objectively’ good or ‘literary’ children’s books—i.e., those that reflect adult readers’ and critics’ concerns and perspectives—are worthy of academic study or indeed (consequently) of reading in general: see e.g. Hunt (1995b) 234, contrasting “adult’s children’s books” such as *The Wind in the Willows* with “children’s children’s book” such as the work of Enid Blyton. One consequence of this approach is that the same kinds of questions can, and should, be asked of literature normally placed in the latter class as in the former, thus opening up children’s literature as a new, neglected set of objects for the practice of traditional literary criticism and analysis—paradoxically, the kind of approach often criticised by children’s literature scholars as reflecting adult readers’ concerns and perspectives.

books. The question of the ‘target audience’ is also an interesting one in this context: to what extent is each author writing with a specific age-range in mind for the audience of her adaptation of a classical story, or thinking of the ‘dual audience’ of parent and child, or simply writing a story she has in mind and leaving that targeting to the publishers and marketers? After all, different cultures may have very different ideas concerning what is suitable for child and adult audiences (as Hall shows, through the popularity of publishing Aesop’s fables as children’s literature in many modern cultures).

At the same time, there are many issues which are especially prominent in children’s studies: for example, there is a different range of literary genres within children’s literature, both in that there are genres to be found in literature for children and not for adults, and *vice versa*. for instance, alphabet books (discussed by Makins in this volume) and illustrated easy readers on one side, erotica on the other, discussed by Poe and Hawkins in relation to erotic art and child audiences in the ancient world. Further, the relative frequency of some genres will be far higher in one area than the other (e.g. collections of Greek myths retold for children are prolific, rewritten for every generation and written for every age range; their adult analogues—Robert Graves being the most famous English example—are far less numerous, presumably in large part because interested adults can read classical accounts of the myths at least in translation and are more likely to consult dictionaries of classical mythology, or internet reference resources). This different literary landscape means that, even without any separate scholarly questions specific to children’s literature, there would still be a set of recurring questions for scholars of reception in this area which would look different to the general picture.

On the other side of this major divide is the ‘reader-focused’ approach to children’s literature, which privileges a child-focused approach, but also encompasses consideration of the dual audience often seen as implicit in children’s books.¹⁵ This approach takes as its premise the idea that children may read books and experience stories in completely different ways from adults, and thus adopt different methodologies to take account of this:¹⁶ the attempt is to distance the implied reader from the adult scholar-reader who is usually addressed, more or less explicitly, by scholarly literary criticism. This child-focused approach to studies of children’s literature and related products will ask different questions of the material, trying to understand how the child audience experiences it, how it fits in with their other experiences, and what expectations and prior knowledge—naturally very different to the adult audience—they bring to it. Children’s cultures change with particular speed, as children grow up, look back, and reappropriate with their own children. Our transformations cover a wide period from the Victorians to the present day.

Both child- and adult-centred approaches have valuable insights to offer in understanding children’s texts and related media and their extremely diverse dialogues with the classical world: thus neither approach is prescribed to our contributors, rather, different chapters take from each approach as suits their scholarship and their subject matter. We bring in the voices of both authors and child readers through the medium of interviews: Hodkinson’s interview with author Michael Cadnum, and Lovatt’s

¹⁵ See e.g. the contributions to Beckett (1999).

¹⁶ Many studies come to the subject from developmental psychology, childhood studies and education studies and aim to consider the child reader within the framework of broader theories of childhood, e.g. Applebee (1978), Appleyard (1990), while others place case studies of real child readers at the centre, e.g. Crago and Crago (1983).

interviews with her children. Furthermore for some contributors, the assumptions underlying this dominant binary of children's literature studies are not valid.¹⁷

Defining children's literature

Since it is crucial to our discussion already, we pause here for consideration of the definition of children's literature before moving on to issues which it raises. Clearly no thorough and definitive answer can be presented within the scope of this introduction,¹⁸ not least because in several of the chapters below the status of their subjects as texts for children, not for children, or for a dual audience, is part of the discussion. We give a brief introduction to those discussions of what constitutes children's literature.

Defining 'children's literature' is, as the term itself implies, dependent on consideration of the audience of the texts, rather than (necessarily) any specific set of formal or content features.¹⁹ Children's literature as a separate concept is far more recent than that of literature in general: though children's texts existed earlier than this especially in the form of educational texts, children's literature proliferated in English especially from the Victorian era onwards.²⁰ Those learning to read would not be almost exclusively children, as is far more commonly the case today; and at the same time, there was far less concern in many previous eras with exposing children to certain

¹⁷ See n. 2 above.

¹⁸ For more detailed discussion of this question, see e.g. Nodelman (2008) especially 133-46; Rose (1984).

¹⁹ On the impossibility of defining children's literature, see Steig (1993); for definition by listing characteristics of children's texts, see further below. A persuasive intervention by Gubar (2011) argues that it is worth accepting a family resemblance definition, and allowing for disagreement, blurred boundaries and grey areas.

²⁰ See Hunt (1994), Hunt (1995a), Grenby (2008) for overviews; for the development from educative books for children to the advent of those aimed primarily at pleasure, broadly speaking from ca. 1750 – 1850, see Demers and Moyles (1982), Thwaite (1972).

themes and concepts which would today be considered unsuitable for them. The teaching of reading above basic literacy levels was also far less frequent in all eras before our own, and for many, it may have begun at a later age when a wide vocabulary and adult fluency in the spoken language had already been attained, unlike in many modern societies where it is learned alongside the spoken language. For these reasons, there was not until recently in the history of literature a category of literature defined by its target audience, children, as there is today.

The emergence over time of a clearly delineated category of children's literature has led to the current state of affairs, in which for many texts at least it is fairly easy to decide what counts as children's literature, since it is marketed as such, often even having target age-ranges printed on the cover; it is designated as such by the publisher in selling it to bookshops, which then display it in a specific section for children's books. 'Children's author' is also a distinct career, sometimes pursued in conjunction with writing for other audiences but often not. Authorial intention clearly comes into the target-audience-based definition of 'children's literature', then, but also or perhaps sometimes primarily, marketers' and publishers' categorisations.²¹ When it comes to earlier possible examples of the category which lack some or all of these types of information readily available for recent publications, other criteria, relating to form and/or content, must be used to posit an intended audience, with varying degrees of persuasiveness. Such features could include length (novels for children tend towards the shorter end of the range of novel lengths), language (e.g. avoidance of difficult words or of expletives), characters (child or young protagonists often feature), purpose

²¹ For the label 'children's literature' as the publisher's decision, see Townsend (1971) 10 "the only practical definition of a children's book today... is a book which appears on the children's list of a publisher"; see discussion in Hunt (1990) 57.

(e.g. an overtly didactic purpose in books aiming to improve reading skills; or an implicit moralising purpose), or kind (e.g. the *Bildungsroman* is commonly aimed at readers who could identify with its young protagonist)—to name but a few.²²

There are not only problems when it comes to defining earlier texts, though; even a text clearly marketed and sold as children's literature can be of ambiguous status, due to the kinds of overlaps noted above, in particular texts which are enjoyed by large numbers of both adults and children (such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series—which are sold in alternative children's and adult editions, the only difference being the jacket). Authorial intention, if one has evidence for it in a particular case, will give one answer. But this is rather simplistic, and only possible in cases where such evidence is available. Often authors' stated intentions, where available, suggest the need for more nuanced consideration of categories and definitions. For example, C.S. Lewis' popular *Narnia* series, though commonly thought of as children's novels, was intended by the author for readers of all ages.²³ There can also be a mismatch between authorial intention and marketing strategies; it is common now to push fantasy, myth-like and folktale-like literature (when it is not unsuitable for some reason) towards a younger audience, exclusively or at least in part. This is a genre-based decision rather than one that necessarily always takes into account an author's intention, and reflects prejudices and trends in some modern societies which elevate certain themes and forms by designating them as (unmarked) 'literature' and disparage others as being 'childish' and therefore potentially 'children's'.²⁴ Another type of mismatch is the case in which the

²² Approaches which attempt to define children's literature by listing frequently found characteristics include that of Nodelman (1992): he highlights: short, simple, often didactic, optimistic and with a happy ending; see also Nodelman (2008).

²³ Lewis (1966) 24: "a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story."

²⁴ See e.g. Butler (2014) on this similarity in the treatment of children's literature and 'genre fiction'.

author has not expressed any particular wishes regarding a target audience to a publisher, who must then take that decision for her. An example of this is Michael Cadnum, who states that he simply *writes*, rather than writing *for* a particular reader; his publishers then target their marketing as they see fit.²⁵ There are a range of factors which help to determine a text's status as children's literature or otherwise, then, and not a fixed formula for deciding; and even in some apparently clear cases, there can be complicating factors. In order to reflect this, we have not dictated a definition of children's literature, but have left it to the contributors to discuss and define the concept, wherever necessary, in whatever way they see fit. Children's literature as a category is subject to change and re-definition.

Approaches to reception studies

Our volume is interested in both the transformations enacted by texts and those enacted by cultures. Scholars of Classical Reception Studies can focus on the modern text and its author as the locus of reception of the classical world, on the one hand;²⁶ or on the cultural contexts of both the modern and ancient texts and how they influence the different ways in which the same stories are presented, and the variety of interpretations of the same texts over time, on the other.²⁷

²⁵ Discussed below in the first section, on Michael Cadnum.

²⁶ Cf. Hardwick (2003) 5, who defines this kind of classical reception studies as investigating “the artistic or intellectual processes involved in selecting, imitating or adapting ancient works.” This version of what ‘Classical reception studies’ means is characteristic of the work of Martindale: cf. especially Martindale 1993.

²⁷ Approaches to Classical reception studies which give more focus to the cultural contexts of both ancient and modern texts are more characteristic of the work of scholars such as Hardwick (2000, 2003; Hardwick and Stray 2008) and Hall (2008*a*, 2008*c*). Cf. Maurice (2015) 6 on Kant, aesthetics and context in Reception Studies.

The first type primarily does the same work that classical scholars do in interpreting classical literature, including its reconfigurations and reinterpretations of earlier texts (allusion and intertext, or ‘reception within antiquity’), but shifts the focus towards the modern receiving text, with classical literature and myth (either individual texts or more broadly) seen as being received and ‘used’ by modern authors. Does this mode of criticism go against the idea that “meaning is created at the point of reception”?²⁸ Should readers and receiving cultures, rather than authors, be the focus? Such a simple dichotomy between authors and readers is unhelpful, when the authors of modern texts both form a particular class of modern readers and receivers of classical texts and culture, and are part of the receiving culture. Authors, texts and contexts all play a role in this volume, from Hall's wide-ranging cultural history of Aesop to the specific analysis of Lear's education and context by Makins.

Authors - and the idea of the author - are particularly important in the study of children's literature, since arguably here more than in most modern literature, we can explore the tensions between authorial intention and audience reception. The authorial desire to engage with, and promote children's engagement with, the classics – sometimes with an overtly didactic agenda – is often in conflict with a need to censor, bowdlerise, or alter the classics to make them ‘age-appropriate’ (in itself a concept that

²⁸ Martindale (1993) in many ways defined the field of Classical reception studies; one distinction he makes is between strong and weak reception, where 'weak' refers to more general ideas of influence and appropriation, but 'strong' argues that not only is a relationship with the classical world impossible without intermediaries, but that receptions themselves create the classical world for us. Introductions to reception studies and reception theories in classics proliferate: Martindale and Thomas (2006); Hardwick and Stray (2008). Another distinction is between 'pushing' and 'pulling': in the former the researcher takes an ancient text as a starting point and looks for ways of understanding it through receptions; in the latter, the modern receptions form the starting point to look back on the ancient world. This book is of the 'pulling' persuasion.

changes over time and across cultures). Cultures influence authors: witness the proliferation and popularity of children's books in the UK set in historical periods prominent in the National Curriculum (e.g. Roman Britain).²⁹ Alternatively cultures can determine which books children are able to access and allowed to read, as authors may write what and how they like, but may not be published, let alone reviewed, or bought by school librarians or parents, if they do not successfully negotiate the combined goals of being entertaining and educational. They must also strive to be 'authentic' (as appropriate to the genre and the time) while satisfying prevailing cultural norms regarding what the target age range can handle or should be exposed to.

The present volume combines different approaches to Classical Reception Studies, and, with its contributions from practitioners and focus on education and didacticism, does not avoid focusing on the modern author and the text's (sometimes overt) aims in changing the classics for children. Rather, it asks questions of educational practitioners and authors about these processes and the decisions they entail. We acknowledge that each author would give a different answer to these same questions, so that we cannot make generalisations, but it is instructive to see a range of perspectives and processes brought to bear on the transformation of the classics for children in the modern period. While Michael Cadnum expresses surprise at how his work is categorised by age group and professes to give no thought whatsoever to this as a writer, authors overtly concerned with educating children in the classics through and with the help of their writing, such as Caroline Lawrence, represent a very different approach both to researching the classics to convey them authentically, and to changing them to be suitable for a specific target audience.

²⁹ Introduced following the Education Reform Act 1988.

The arrangement of the volume

The volume begins with an author's voice: Michael Cadnum writes about what it means to write for children, and in particular about his own adaptation of the Orpheus myth. Owen Hodkinson's interview creates a dialogue from this often elusive encounter. The second section focuses on broad brush-strokes: Aesop through the ages, from Edith Hall, and the changing faces of Roman Britain in the twentieth century, from Andelys Wood. The third section looks at the transformations of myth: Edwardian re-workings of the sexuality of Pan, by Gillian Bazovsky, and ancient erotic didacticism using the Narcissus myth from teacher Aileen Hawkins and art historian Alison Poe. Between these another Ovidian figure, Arachne, transformed in both texts and illustrations, in the chapter by Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah Roberts. Didactic agendas form the fourth section: from Lisa Maurice's exploration of gender and school stories, to Edward Lear's nonsense poetry and his own education, by Marian Makins, finishing with Lovatt's comparison of the didactic tactics of two Roman detective authors, Lindsey Davis and Caroline Lawrence. The volume ends with a case study of the transformations of C. S. Lewis's *Narnia*, with Ovid, by Geoffrey Miles, and Apuleius, by Niall Slater.

Recurring themes cross all sections: the definition of children's literature is at issue in several chapters. Some engage with the author's intention to write for children, and others with features of form or content which may be seen as particular to or appropriate for children's literature. Borderline or multiple audiences are seen in the nonsense work of Edward Lear and C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* novels (as discussed in the chapters by Makins and by Miles and Slater respectively). Both of these texts are typically associated with child audiences but both of their authors' aims—and in fact the reality of their

audiences—include adult readers. Michael Cadnum's books and short stories are marketed variously to different audiences by the publishers, but he says that the writing process includes no thought of a particular audience, as Hodkinson's interview shows.

Children or sometimes young adults as protagonists and/or other important characters, and the issue of 'identification' with the character feature in the *Narnia* stories; the *Roman Mysteries*; some of the works set in Roman Britain discussed in the chapter by Wood; the works set in schools discussed by Maurice; and the novels by Michael Cadnum. There is explicit discussion of young characters as a defining feature of children's literature in the chapters by Hodkinson, Maurice, and Wood, and reflection on processes of identification from children in Lovatt's afterword.

In Hall's contribution, the criteria used to categorise literature as 'children's' are examined in relation to Aesop, the ancient text most often presented as children's literature in the post-classical world. The role given to children's literature in moral education is seen most clearly in Aesop's great and enduring popularity, but the issue of moralising or other didactic content, whether implicit or more overt, is frequently a defining feature of modern children's literature. This can mean that a novel takes the form of a *Bildungsroman*, in which the young audience is encouraged to identify with a protagonist who grows and learns during her experiences in the novel, and thus to learn some of those lessons themselves. Wood's chapter discusses cases of this kind; she also raises the question of identity (a theme returned to later in this introduction, through the lens of Harry Potter) in this context, arguing that the conquering Romans (not the conquered Britons) are implicitly used as models for modern British citizens in some of her texts.

Another kind of moral agenda is seen in the *Narnia* novels, by the chapters of Slater and especially Miles; they argue for a reflection of classical myth and literature

deliberately altered by C.S. Lewis in order to remove or at least play down elements unsuitable for child readers; and also, following the Christian allegorical readings of classical texts and myths with which Lewis was familiar as a medieval scholar, they see a Narnia in which the good and the bad both get what they deserve, pairing the content influenced by familiar classical texts such as Ovid with a Christian moralising overlay influenced by medieval readings of them. Slater argues that there is an Apuleian as well as an Ovidian intertext for the metamorphosis of Rabadash into a donkey in Lewis' *The Horse and His Boy*, and attributes to Lewis a reading of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* which is deliberately morally ambiguous, with implications for the morality of his Narnia. The afterword finds that moral ambiguity and complexity is an attraction for some child readers, and that Lawrence's Roman Mysteries handle it effectively.

Classics has a particular significance for children's literature because it was an important part of the education system for centuries. Children's literature naturally reflects and depicts common children's experiences in various ways, and so school education is an important theme. This can take the form of stories set in schools, in which lessons in classical subjects are part of the everyday experience of the characters, reflecting the actual school curriculum in particular historical contexts. This kind of school novel is the focus of Maurice's chapter on the representation of learning classical languages in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. She points out that while the difficulty and uselessness of learning classical languages is a common perspective in such stories, this is in fact a gendered perspective. It is more common for stories set in girls' schools to portray the languages in a positive light than those set in boys' schools, since girls were given less opportunity to study the classics at that time; therefore aspirations to study them as the boys did was a matter of equality. Gender and

didacticism is also important in Lovatt's discussion of Lawrence in comparison to Lindsey Davis, and in the chapter of Poe and Hawkins, which shows radical differences between ancient and modern conceptions of what it is appropriate to teach children. Makins' chapter discusses not the representation of widespread classical language learning, but the importance of its existence for the popularity of literary nonsense, taking the example of Edward Lear, whose writings often play with Latin- and Greek-like word forms for puns or neologisms, thus depending to some extent on at least a low level of familiarity with those languages. The Latin language as language of both power and play is a feature of Lovatt's discussion of Harry Potter and her children's reflection in the afterword.

This leads us on to contexts for classical receptions more broadly than within schools; the historical, cultural, social, and other contexts in which a reception text is produced are of course significant for its effects on the modern text and on how the ancient world is reflected and shaped by it. Contexts are key in the chapters of Hall, Roberts and Murnaghan, Bazovsky, and Wood. One political theme addressed is military conquest and imperialism, treated through the Roman conquest of Britain and the Roman Empire. Another is class and cultural capital, addressed by Hall and to a lesser extent Lovatt on Harry Potter.

Attempts to encourage identification between readers and characters have already been mentioned as an important feature of children's literature, both to enhance the enjoyment of reading and also, sometimes, to facilitate the embedding of implicit lessons for child readers into stories. This relates to a broader set of issues concerning identity in children's literature: to what extent are the child readers of texts set in the ancient world encouraged to identify their own culture, society, political system, etc., with those of the Greeks, Romans, or other ancient peoples, and even to feel themselves

inheritors of a continuing Western tradition? And to what extent are they rather encouraged to read about them from a more external, distanced perspective? Wood's discussion of three novels set in Roman Britain from the 1970s and 1980s explores their identity politics. Lovatt finds a mix of domestication and defamiliarisation in both *Harry Potter and the Roman Mysteries*, and the children identify these tendencies as a key element of the appeal of Classical antiquity in their reflections in the afterword. Sexuality is another element of identity discussed in Bazovsky's exploration of *Pan*, whose generative power remains though his explicit sexual predation is suppressed. Poe and Hawkins argue that sexuality was key to ancient readings of *Narcissus*, while modern versions radically break from this in their embrace of explicit morality. Two different modes of reception compete: the mediation and continuity ('chains of reception') shown by texts such as the *Harry Potter* novels, or the *Narnia* books, in which Classical elements are read through medieval, early modern and modern receptions of those elements, and a clear break in which modern versions are strikingly different from ancient versions (*Arachne* and *Narcissus*).

Visuality is also an important theme in several contributions: Murnaghan and Roberts explore the tensions between text and illustration in versions of *Arachne*, while Poe and Hawkins argue that ancient visual representations should be set in dialogue with modern children's literature. Makins, too, explores *Lear* as visual artist, whose play on Classical ideas pervades art as well as text.

Humour is one of the main pleasures of reading much children's literature. It frequently arises from incongruity or displacement, from seeing something out of its proper context. In the instance of classical themes for children, humour can therefore arise from the unfamiliarity or alien quality of the classical languages and cultures; or from the incomprehensibility or lack of practical application of classics as a subject that

children must learn about. This feature is highlighted in the chapters by Maurice and Makins. Humour and playfulness are also a feature of Rowling's engagement with the ancient world. Roberts and Murnaghan identify a turn to humour as a feature of more recent receptions of Greek myth, part of a self-conscious distancing and textuality that the Lovatt children identify as an attractive aspect of books with Classical connections, such as the Percy Jackson series, and the works of Sulari Gentill.

Throughout the book the theme of metamorphosis surfaces in different ways, especially through engagement with Ovid, explicitly in the chapters of Hodgkinson, Roberts and Murnaghan, Poe and Hawkins and Miles. Ovid is not the only ancient source of metamorphosis, and Apuleius also surfaces in the chapter of Slater. Metamorphosis also comes to the fore through cultural adaptation, changing contexts, child development and education. We now bring these ideas together in a case study of education, myth and power in the Harry Potter novels.

Harry Potter and the Metamorphoses of Classics

The Harry Potter universe is a rich confection of various mythological traditions: fairy tale walks hand in hand with myth down the corridors of school stories.³⁰ The Harry Potter phenomenon is such an important part of recent children's culture that it would be impossible, even criminal, to ignore it.³¹ But more than that, J. K. Rowling took classical modules at university, and the text is scattered with classical names, classical references and Latin phrases.³² But what can Harry Potter tell us about the functions of reception of the classical world in children's literature? This book is about metamorphoses: about the way that we change the ancient world and it changes us; in particular, the close links between classics and education, which exist in reality as much as in representation, are productive for this volume.³³ Nostalgia, the discourse of purity,

³⁰ A goldmine of Harry Potter bibliography is available at Rémi (2004-14); despite the enormous volume of material produced, it is hard to distinguish between academic and fan discourse. Harry Potter is also a marketing phenomenon and the inspiration for many articles on education. I found most useful: Whited (2002); Fenske (2006); Heilman (2008); Nikolajeva (2010); Bell (2013), Lowe (forthcoming). On Harry Potter and school stories: Steege (2004), Galway (2012). On Harry Potter and fantasy: Webb (2015). Spencer (2015) makes many general observations, but is more concerned with story patterns and mythical archetypes.

³¹ This piece focuses on the novels; there is rather less classical reference in the films (or indeed the studio tour and merchandising), since much of it is in the detail of the novels. I intend to explore this difference further in a future article.

³² Sapiens (2002) 94 details Rowling's classical modules at the University of Exeter: she took Additional Greek and Roman Studies for the first two years of her four year French degree, including modules on: Greek and Roman Mythology and Historical Thought; Greek and Roman Narrative and Drama. She did not do Latin or Greek at school. A good summary of the classical elements of Harry Potter is included in Mills (2009), Casta (2014) and Lowe (forthcoming), who argues that there may well also be unconscious classical reminiscences, especially in the similarity of Harry's lightning scar and twice survived death curse to the story that King Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus twice survived a lightning strike. See also Rowling (1998) and Rowling (2001).

³³ Birch (2009) discusses the stereotypical teachers presented in Harry Potter, and the ways in which subject matter merges with personality and effectiveness; she underestimates the importance of parody in this portrayal. There is a certain irony in the fact that Binns, the ghostly history of magic teacher,

reflections on power and politics are all bound up with the ideology of education, and classics is equally implicated. It is hard to pin down precisely what ancient Greek and Latin mean for Harry Potter, even though *The Philosopher's Stone* has been translated into both.³⁴ This is one reason why it is useful to explore the phenomenon: there is no direct, clear relationship. Instead we must address the fuzziness, complexity and imprecision of classical reception.³⁵

As Peter Wiseman pointed out in 2002 before the publication of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, wizarding is envisaged as going back to the ancient world; Ollivander's 'have been making fine wands since 362 BC' (Sapiens (2002) 93), and the first two historical wizards Ron mentions to Harry as his most sought after cards in his Chocolate Frog collection are those featuring Agrippa and Ptolemy (*Philosopher's Stone*, 77).³⁶ There are many classical names: Sirius, Bellatrix, Minerva, Lucius, to name but a few. The pure-blood families, in particular the Blacks, choose names emphasising their elite status by evoking the Latin past: 'The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black' (chapter title in *Order of the Phoenix*) includes Regulus, Phineas Nigellus, Araminta Melflua, Elladora, Nymphadora, Andromeda, Bellatrix, Narcissa,

whom she finds the biggest stereotype, was said by Rowling in Sapiens (2002) to be based on a real ancient history lecturer; Gilderoy Lockhart has been alleged to draw on one of the Exeter Classics lecturers (see Lowe (forthcoming) 19 for details), and even Dumbledore has been thought to draw on another. For the latter, see 'Meet the kind old scholar who "became" Dumbledore', *The Scotsman*, 15 July 2007, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/celebrity/meet-the-kind-old-scholar-who-became-dumbledore-1-1420910>, accessed 12.11.15, quoting Prof. Tim Whitmarsh as source. On transformation in Harry Potter see Behr (2009).

³⁴ Rowling and Needham (2003); Rowling and Wilson (2004); there is also now *The Chamber of Secrets* in Latin: Rowling and Needham (2007).

³⁵ Lowe (forthcoming) 6: 'Greek myth is prominent--but not unique--among other world cultures.'

³⁶ On the Greek founding fathers of wizardry, see Lowe (forthcoming) 9-11.

and by marriage, Rodolphus, Lucius and Draco.³⁷ However, the relationship and the degree of closeness between the classical world and that of Harry Potter is often unclear. Quidditch was invented in the medieval period after the decision to use broomsticks for travel (presumably Classical witches and wizards would have used magic carpets - still popular in the Near East, according to *Quidditch Through The Ages*, and the reason why Quidditch is not played there). Is Classics, in fact, no more important in the wizarding world than it is in the world of Muggles? And to what extent is the Classical world percolated through the Medieval, Early Modern and Victorian receptions of it?³⁸

Oresteia epigraph

A clear signal that encourages us at least to ask the question (and for readers of the book to find out more) is the epigraph at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*. Rowling chose to begin the final part of her epic series with an epigraph from Greek tragedy, Robert Fagles' translation of Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 466-78:

Oh, the torment bred in the race,
the grinding scream of death
and the stroke that hits the vein,
the haemorrhage none can staunch, the grief,
the curse no man can bear,

But there is a cure in the house
and not outside it, no,
not from others but from *them*,
their bloody strife. We sing to you,
dark gods beneath the earth.

Now hear, you blissful powers underground--
answer the call, send help.

³⁷ On names see Lowe (forthcoming) 5.

³⁸ Cf the warning of Lowe (forthcoming) 13: 'it is important to remember that classical culture forms just part of an eclectic Western frame of reference among Rowling's source-texts'.

Bless the children, give them triumph now.

While its significance is debated, its presence is undeniable.³⁹ Are we meant to draw complex parallels, or does it mainly build a sense of cultural capital, darkening tone, along with an essentialising claim about human suffering?⁴⁰ The epigraph is paired with a quotation from a seventeenth century collection of Quaker aphorisms, *More Fruits of Solitude*, by William Penn, which has been excerpted and edited to speak about the immortality of the soul and the persistence of friendship beyond death. Mills has taken a rather negative approach to links between Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and *Deathly Hallows*, exploring kin killing in the Harry Potter novels, to find that there is not much present with the seriousness of Aeschylus.⁴¹ In fact she reads two ways in which the text moves in the opposite direction to the *Oresteia*. Most convincingly, closure is created in the epilogue when all the major characters are assimilated into the Weasley family, in happy nuclear family units, uncursed by any cycles of revenge. This underplays the closural force of the *Oresteia* itself, which ends with legal, religious and familial order re-established in the Areopagus, and the Eumenides brought onside.

³⁹ John Granger, aka The Hogwarts Professor has an interesting post on the significance of the two epigraphs at <http://www.hogwartsprofessor.com/the-aeschylus-epigraph-in-deathly-hallows/> (Oct 20th 2008, accessed 21.4.2015) in which he argues that the significance of the Aeschylus epigraph can be read on three levels: first, Harry, Ron and Hermione correspond to Orestes, Pylades and Electra as they prepare to tackle violence with violence; second, that just as Orestes must kill his own mother to avenge his father, so Harry must die to himself in order to kill Voldemort; third, that the importance of recognition in the Aeschylean scene shows that Harry is an incarnation of divine logos, moving towards the light of religious understanding. Granger's sophisticated and consciously Christianising readings are buttressed by his refusal to accept Rowling's statements of intent as limitations on interpretation - all of which I am happy to accept, except for the fact that he seems keen on a fairly univocal reading himself.

⁴⁰ Lowe (forthcoming) 13-14 on the increasing seriousness of engagement with classical texts as the series reaches its climax.

⁴¹ Mills (2009).

What is the significance of the epigraph for assessing the importance of Classics in Harry Potter? I found very interesting Rowling's statement in an interview that: "I really enjoyed choosing those two quotations because one is pagan, of course, and one is from a Christian tradition, ... I'd known it was going to be those two passages since *Chamber* was published. I always knew [that] if I could use them at the beginning of book seven then I'd cued up the ending perfectly. If they were relevant, then I went where I needed to go."⁴² Readers have jumped on the admission that Christianity is important for a reading of the books, but have not acknowledged the balancing effect of the Aeschylean quotation. This doubleness creates an openness to interpretation; Aeschylus offers an alternative, non-Christian way of reading sacrifice, afterlife and violence. The Classical world is a crucial counterbalance to the dualism of the overarching narrative. This is not just superficial: the complexity of the characters of Snape, Riddle and (particularly) Dumbledore, whose story is so crucial in the final volume, suggests that the Harry Potter story is not as straightforwardly polarised as it is often represented.

Further, the Aeschylean passage gives us a different slant on the nature of children: children are not just the target audience, powerless against the exploitation of adults, unformed, innocent and romanticised; children are the offspring of their parents, who must deal with the repercussions of decisions taken in previous generations. Hogwarts is the house from within which the cure must come, and Dumbledore an alternative father for Harry in more senses than one.

Latin and spells

⁴² 'Harry Potter Author J.K. Rowling Opens Up About Books' Christian Imagery', Shawn Adler, MTV news, Oct 17 2007, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1572107/harry-potter-author-jk-rowling-opens-up-about-books-christian-imagery/>, last accessed 22.04.2015).

Many of the spells in the Harry Potter series are derived from Latin, though many involve other languages, such as Greek, French or Italian.⁴³ Some brief examples from spells beginning with A: *accio* is a summoning spell and therefore likely to be from the Latin *accio*, 'I summon', however it is often pronounced as if Italian or Italianate church Latin; *aguamenti* produces a jet of water, and may be from a contamination of *aqua* and *augeo*; however it also evokes the English word *augment* and the Spanish *agua*; *alohomora*, opening spell, apparently West African; *anapneo*, clears airways, from the Greek, to draw breath or revive; *apparecium*, makes invisible ink appear, from *appareo*, but with some creative elaboration; *avada kevadra*, the killing curse, from Aramaic, according to Rowling; *avis*, creates flock of birds, can be used with *oppugno* to make them attack, both words directly from Latin.

Latin has a long history as a language of ritual and power.⁴⁴ In other children's wizarding stories, magic is often achieved by accessing some language that is imagined to have a privileged connection to reality: in Le Guin's Earthsea stories, for instance, one must learn 'real names' in order to do serious magic.⁴⁵ Latin can be seen as an appropriate language for magic because its age brings it closer to the origins of language, to an imagined pre-history in which signifiers and signifieds are linked by more than convention. The idea that learning a language can give you access to

⁴³ Casta (2014) starts the ball rolling on discussion of the significance of Latin in Harry Potter; on Latin linguistic formation (e.g. endings in *us*, *o*, imperatives, verbal adjectives), see 368-9. The list of spells on wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_spells_in_Harry_Potter, accessed 22.4.2015) contains some discussion of possible derivations, usually backed up by statements from J. K. Rowling, e.g. *Alohomora* is 'from the West African Sidiki dialect'.

⁴⁴ On Latin language and its role in European culture see Waquet (1998), Farrell (2001). Casta (2014) 360 evokes Latin's heritage as pan-European mode of communication and elite language.

⁴⁵ Casta (2014) 369-7 also points out the use of Latin in fiction aimed at teenage girls, where the use of Latin mitigates the otherwise banal nature of the story.

powerful insights about the world allows wizarding stories to access models of learning in which hard work brings a real step-change in the ability to understand and communicate, augmented by the powerful fantasy that this also creates an ability to affect and re-shape the world. The spells in Harry Potter are rather different: they are learnt piece-meal, and the language used to make magic is multifarious and complex. Use of correct wand movements, tone of voice and attitude of mind are just as important as words (and there is very little emphasis on deep understanding as a prerequisite). One effect of this different representation of magic is that young readers can also be initiated in it: they can learn the words, the movements, buy the wand, and do everything except the magic itself (as in Quidditch matches without flying broomsticks). This is in fact a popular activity among young Harry Potter fans, as seen in the WarnerBros Studio Tour, where you can not only experience what it is like to ride a mechanical imitation broomstick, but you can also be photographed and filmed learning a few basic wand routines. The cultural pervasiveness of the Harry Potter films and the nature of the Harry Potter merchandising empire makes immersive involvement with this particular story world peculiarly effective. One perhaps unintended effect of this is to introduce millions of children to a number of basic Latin words and to give them a (largely illusory) sense of the power of Latin. Harry Potter may not be intended to popularise the Classical world, but that is certainly one of its effects. Latin cannot actually do magic, but Harry Potter does perhaps also convey the importance of understanding Latin for understanding many wider aspects of European languages and cultures. Initiation into wizarding language can lead to initiation into wider cultural literacy. Understanding the spells of Harry Potter is at the very least a badge of belonging to a world-wide community of readers and viewers.

Education and power

The close connection between education and power in society is made even closer in the Harry Potter stories by the prominence of Hogwarts as a political institution. Hogwarts is the safest place to hide artefacts, the seat of the most powerful wizard, a major place of international engagement, and the site of the final defeat of Voldemort.⁴⁶ This congruence is particularly clear in *Order of the Phoenix*, when the Minister of Magic first appoints Dolores Umbridge as a teacher (183), then makes her High Inquisitor (274, functioning much as a school inspector) at Hogwarts, and finally uses her to replace Dumbledore as Headmaster (550). Further, much of the emotional narrative of this book revolves around the withholding of knowledge from Harry and the other children about the activities of Voldemort and the Order of the Phoenix, who oppose him.⁴⁷ The powerlessness of children in the face of adult injustice and protectiveness is a major theme in children's literature.⁴⁸ How does the classical world relate to this? In many school stories, Latin is a means of torture: but not in Harry Potter.⁴⁹ The lines that Umbridge cause to be etched on the back of his hand and written

⁴⁶ Artefacts: the philosopher's stone in the eponymous book; the diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw, encountered in *The Half-Blood Prince* and destroyed in *The Deathly Hallows*; most powerful wizard: Dumbledore 'considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times', *Philosopher's Stone* 77; international engagement: the Triwizard tournament, *Goblet of Fire*.

⁴⁷ He spends the time at the Dursleys' house desperately trying to get news, which is forbidden to him; Fred and George invent extendable ears to try and find out what is happening in the meetings of the order (73); Dumbledore does not communicate with Harry at all, explained in the chapter 'The Lost Prophecy' (723-44).

⁴⁸ Well expressed and discussed with regard to Harry Potter by Nikolajeva (2009): 'Children in our society are oppressed and powerless, having no economic resources of their own, no voice in political and social decisions, and subject to laws and rules that the adults expect them to obey without interrogation' (227)

⁴⁹ On Latin as torture, see Maurice (this volume).

out in his own blood are in the clearest English.⁵⁰ Rather, Latin in Harry Potter represents access to adult power and privilege, in that it is the ultimate performative language, the language of magic. History is denigrated, in the figure of Professor Binns, but intergenerational memory is deeply significant to understand the battle they are fighting.⁵¹

Umbridge stands for mindless bureaucracy, repression of student agency and opinions, and theory rather than practice. The scene in which Hermione confronts her about her aims dramatically brings the ideology of different types of teaching to life (*Order of the Phoenix*, 218-21). Hermione as a devotee of book-learning still emphatically sees the value of practical experience: 'There's nothing written up there about *using* defensive spells.' (218) Umbridge pulls rank and expertise: 'Are you a Ministry-trained educational expert, Miss Granger?' (218); for Umbridge teaching to the text is the main aim: 'to get you through your examination, which after all is what school is all about.' (219) The exercise of power in the classroom is emphatically brought out, not just by Umbridge, but also Snape; even McGonagall, benevolent in intent, still operates traditional pedagogical and teacher-centred models of teaching. Lupin and Hagrid (arguably Professors Sprout and Trelawney) stand out with their problem-based, practical learning. But the opposition between different types of learning is much less important than the opposition between permitted and withheld knowledge. Hermione is frequently to be found browsing forbidden books in the library; first-hand experience is the ultimate empowerment, and Harry's teaching of Dumbledore's Army shows a positive, literally student-centred pedagogy. Umbridge's denial and repression is represented as anti-educational, and despite the centrality of

⁵⁰ *Order of the Phoenix*, 241 'I must not tell lies'.

⁵¹ On the importance of memory see Clark (2013).

Hogwarts in the Harry Potter universe, the story ultimately goes beyond being a school story as they grow up and become warriors on the run in the outside world, even if they come back to Hogwarts for the final battle.

Classics in this world is not associated with book learning and dry but useless knowledge: in Harry Potter myth is living, performative, wild and powerful.⁵² Umbridge is finally defeated by mythological (and Greek) creatures from the Forbidden Forest, a resurgence of fantasy in the face of the banality and repression that she represents.⁵³ However, the centaurs which live in the Forbidden Forest are not just the noble prophets of C.S. Lewis but also the wild, untameable, potential rapists of Ovid (and Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series). When Harry and Hermione first meet the centaurs (*Philosopher's Stone*, 184), Ronan gazes at Mars and makes cryptic statements. Their threatening nature is not initially emphasised: instead, Hagrid emphasises the difficulty of extracting useful information from them: 'They're deep, mind, centaurs ... they know things ... jus' don' let on much.' (185) In this sense, they are rather like the ancient world: charismatic, impressive, elusive, offering the promise of enlightenment. Firenze breaks with the other centaurs not just when he helps Harry, especially letting him ride, but also giving him straight guidance (if in question and answer form) about what is happening (187-9). In *Order of the Phoenix* Firenze goes a step further by taking refuge from the other centaurs in Hogwarts and becoming the divination teacher (527), and an unlikely heartthrob. The wisdom of the centaurs, he reveals, is 'impersonal and impartial' (*OoTP*, 531) and operates over vast time periods.

⁵² The image of the ancient world coming to life has long been a powerful part of fantasy literature for children, such as E. Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), in which the statues in the garden of a great house come to life, and at the end of C. S. Lewis' *Prince Caspian*, in which Bacchus forms a *deus ex machina*. On Ovid and C. S. Lewis, see Miles and Slater in this volume.

⁵³ Harmon (2013) on otherness and the Forbidden Forest; on centaurs Maurice (2015).

His pedagogy surprises Harry, too: 'His priority did not seem to be to teach them what he knew, but rather to impress upon them that nothing, not even centaurs' knowledge, was foolproof.' (532) When Harry and Hermione succeed in luring Umbridge into the Forbidden Forest, knowing that the centaurs will not attack the young, but will not permit adult humans there, the books suggest a special relationship between the innocence of youth and the wildness of myth. Umbridge insults the centaurs by calling them half-breeds, and implying that they are of 'near-human intelligence' (664-5). Their reaction to her terror at their arrows reveals their wildness: 'The sound of their wild, neighing laughter echoed around the dimly lit clearing and the sight of their pawing hooves was extremely unnerving.' (665) Her cry of 'Unhand me, you animals...' (666) both continues her earlier rhetoric and suggests her powerlessness in the face of the (probably) sexual violence of the centaurs. The other centaurs are on the point of taking Hermione and Harry away to the same fate, with an assertion of independence: 'Perhaps you thought us pretty talking horses? We are an ancient people who will not stand wizard invasions and insults! We do not recognise your laws, we do not acknowledge your superiority' (667), only to be driven off by the blundering Grawp, giant half-brother of Hagrid. The initial politeness and majesty of the centaurs hides a deep violence and otherness; one might read this as an allegory of the ancient societies, which seem on the surface similar and attractive, but hide deep difference and violence, particularly sexual violence. The reference to the centaurs as 'an ancient people' seems almost like a metaliterary nod to the fact that Rowling has re-established the wildness of centaurs in contradiction to the traditions of children's literature, such as C. S. Lewis, which bowdlerises them by taming them.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ On the domestication of mythology in Narnia, see Harrison (2010). On otherness and identification see Nikolajeva (2010).

The centaurs of Harry Potter deconstruct the oppositions between knowledge and violence, civilisation, education and destruction. The untamed nature of the ancient world and mythology offers a creative force which can overturn the repressive structures of power and adulthood.

Conclusions

The Harry Potter stories engage with Classical languages, Classical myth and ideas about history, memory and identity. They transform Latin into a living and powerful language of magic, which allows children an initiation into adult power. It is difficult, though, to separate both language and myth from their later receptions: this is very much Classics in and as part of the European cultural tradition, part of the medieval and gothic heritage of Hogwarts. Classical languages and myth come to life and add an exotic otherness to the wizarding world, but one which is safe and comprehensible for all English primary school students (the Greeks and Romans are prescribed on the national curriculum in Key Stage 2), not to mention accessible for readers throughout Europe and the Americas. This process of defamiliarisation produces words and names that readers can pronounce (and often identify) but are unlikely to encounter as part of their everyday lives. The world of Harry Potter brings together myth, education and politics to transform the ancient world into a 'platform of resistance' available to children against adults, as to adults against hierarchy and banality.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Casta (2014) 362.

Summaries of chapters

The volume begins with a case study on a recent author who has drawn frequently on Ovid in his engagements with the ancient world. This section focuses on the question of what it means to write for children, and particularly the idea of adult and child voices, moving from Michael Cadnum's personal reflections on the nature of writing for children, to an interview with Owen Hodkinson.

Michael Cadnum's contribution reflects on the nature of storytelling, the self and the voice, and discusses how we can tell when a voice is young or old. He presents his novel *Nightsong* on the Orpheus myth as a story of a young man reaching adulthood, changing a young voice for an adult voice. Through various poems, the chapter explores what it means to be young and to be adult, and to be a writer.

This is followed by an interview with Owen Hodkinson, which pushes for more explicit reflection on engagement with the classical world, and shows the ways that authors, as do children, resist easy analysis. The interview asks about his earliest encounters with Greek myth, and his schooling: in response, Cadnum thinks about the relationship between myth and the Bible, the nature of myth, his use of Ovid's Latin in his reworking of the Daphne episode, use of Greek words and translations, Greek and Italian settings, and significance of Ovid. In discussing child audiences, Cadnum cautiously addresses the question of audience, through the idea of writing that speaks for itself. He does not deliberately avoid 'difficult' material but directs focus away from words, questions and issues that will distract from the main point of the writing, while the short length of much of his work is the result of a productive engagement with silence. Cadnum's careful and thoughtful responses suggest one author's reasons for engaging with the ancient world.

Changing times

The next part offers two broader perspectives, first Edith Hall on the connection between Aesop's fables and children's literature, through history and across class boundaries; second Andelys Wood on changing approaches to identity in novels about Roman Britain.

Edith Hall addresses many of our main themes and issues: first, the question of what really counts as children's literature, through the history of Aesop as a text used by and adapted for children, from the ancient world onwards. Secondly, she shows that Aesop can be changed in many ways by its contexts, particularly in response to political agendas and the interaction with Christianity. Finally, Aesop also problematizes the category of Classics, since the stories may well originate from Near Eastern cultures and have already been adapted by the Greeks; they have subsequently become part of world literature. Aesop can be used as an educational and political text, to change its readers, and has become part of the way that Classics changes the world.

In the following chapter Andelys Wood examines the processes of change in representations of Romans and Britons in novels by children's authors about Roman Britain across the twentieth century. Until the 1960s authors represented the Romans as a force of order to be imitated, while many of those writing in the late twentieth century espoused Celtic national pride and an entirely negative portrayal of the Romans. Wood looks at four novels from the late 1970s which break down the binary opposition between Romans and Britons, showing how a variety of narrative voices can go beyond stereotypes and engage with ideas about imperialism. Rosemary Sutcliff uses two narrators to create alternating perspectives, while Mary Ray's two narrators are both Romans; Ann Lawrence uses multiple focalisation to undercut the views of main characters; Clive King's child protagonist is an outsider to both cultures. These

books are not typical children's novels, several lacking child protagonists, often with dark endings. They show how the perspective taken by the author and narrator can change the attitude to and representation of the Roman empire, and how the Roman empire's place in children's fiction changes as modern societies struggle with post-colonial identity.

Myths of change

The second section presents three articles on particular figures from ancient myth: Pan, Arachne and Narcissus. The first chapter looks at classic children's texts (Hodgson Burnett, Barrie and Grahame) and the relationship between myth and historical context; the other two focus in on the relationship between image and text, ancient and modern.

Gillian Bazovsky traces the various uses of the figure of Pan in Edwardian children's literature, especially his tendency to change and engender change. She shows detailed similarities between Dickon in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Secret Garden* and ancient representations of Pan, particularly in the Greek novels. Set in the context of contemporary developments in thought and religion, we can see Dickon's kinship with J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and the characters of Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. Pan is domesticated, but also brings an element of the wildness of Classical antiquity into these children's texts, texts both more susceptible to wildness and more inclined to create a safe space than texts for adults. The sexuality of Pan comes through, but without the predatory colouring of ancient literature. The association of both antiquity and children with the mystical and wild is suggestive. This chapter also shows the importance of the gods in receptions of Greek and Roman culture for children.

In a rich exploration of the myth of Arachne in children's literature since 1850, Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah Roberts bring out metamorphosis in a number of ways:

how Greek myth is changed for children (de-sexualised, given an explicit moralising twist, made irreverent and playful), and how the modes of changing it have themselves changed over the last century and a half, from the explicitly moral to the deliberately ironic; the complex interplay between the visual and the verbal in both Ovid's version and later children's versions adds an ekphrastic twist to many modern versions; Arachne's tapestry becomes a way for modern authors and illustrators to reflect on their own processes of engaging with classical myth. Power, politics and education, and the unsettling boundary between god, beast and man, generate power and interest for child readers.

Aileen Hawkins and Alison Poe bring together two perspectives: that of teacher and art historian. They explore another Ovidian myth, the myth of Narcissus, and argue that the assumptions underlying many modern children's versions of the myth are confused. While children's authors almost always argue for strong continuity between ancient and modern attitudes, and offer highly didactic and moral interpretations of myth, ancient attitudes to children and to myth were very different from modern ones. They argue that a particular fresco of Narcissus found in Pompeian house V.4.a, which probably belonged to Marcus Lucretius Fronto, was intended for children. This is suggested by graffiti and children's portraits elsewhere in the room. If it was designed for a child audience, they suggest that one aim might have been to initiate the young son of the owner into male sexuality. This brings out a completely different attitude to children and sex in the ancient world, and reflects the lack of moralising in other versions of the Narcissus myth. The modern world has metamorphosed Narcissus into an emblem of self-love.

Didactic classics

This section considers the important relationship between classics, children's literature and education, beginning with a discussion of representations of Classics teachers and teaching in school stories aimed at both girls and boys, and moving on to Edward Lear's unconventional education and his aims in using Latin and Greek in his poetry, and finishing with an examination of the didactic mode in Roman detective fiction for adults and children. Both Maurice and Lovatt also address gender politics and education.

Lisa Maurice's chapter gives a clear overview of the changes in attitudes to Classics and Classics teaching in school stories across more than a century, starting with Rudyard Kipling and coming right up to date. One of the most striking changes is the de-gendering of Classics: in the first half of the twentieth century it is very much a boys' subject, regarded with negativity, fear and disgust by William, Molesworth and Jennings, because it is compulsory, difficult and irrelevant, while girls from the same period see it as a source of power and confidence. In the more recent books, responses to Classics are not gendered in the same way; most students take on the previously masculine perspective of dismissiveness, while 'Living Latin' features in Horowitz' *Groosham Grange* series, and Calypso of the *Calypso Chronicles* takes Latin at A-level because she has been told it is an easy way to get an A. Perhaps the differing emphasis in school stories for boys and girls on intellectual achievements for their own sake might go some way towards explaining the different cultures of boys and girls in the current education system. Boys' heroes traditionally scorn school and attempt to escape learning, rebel against the system like Dennis the Menace or Horrid Henry (or even Harry Potter), while girls' heroes combine success with popularity (as in Chalet School, Malory Towers, or in the case of Hermione Granger).

Schools are not the only contexts for classical education. Marian Makins explores the relationship between education, classics, class and power through the medium of Edward Lear's nonsense poetry and alphabet books. This rich exploration of Lear's engagement with the classics shows that he chose to pursue them outside a standard educational context, learning with tutors and friends and perceiving that learning as a source of joy and freedom. The way his love of the classics filters through into his work reveals a keen awareness of the beauty of absurdity, especially in the otherness of the Greek and Roman worlds, brought out particularly in the figure of Xerxes. Makins performs a survey of picture alphabets and how they tackle the letter X to show the ways that initial X is associated with Greek words. The essay also suggests that Lear's use of allusions without referents plays with the process of reading to inspire children to learn more about the world. Nonsense is a form of intertextuality that replaces knowledge with sound and play, a mode particularly suited to the linguistic otherness of the ancient world.

Helen Lovatt's chapter takes advantage of a fascinating body of material: the Roman detective novels of Lindsey Davis and Caroline Lawrence, which share a time period, many settings and a significant amount of material. It forms a case study of a pair of novels set in Alexandria around the Library, and allows a very direct comparison of how the two authors use their ancient material. There is a great deal of continuity between the two, which addresses the problem of children's literature as a category. However, differences in pace, depth and complexity are clear. Lawrence keeps her readers on their toes by moving fast and offering many puzzles to solve at each stage of the story, while Davis builds more slowly and leads with more subtlety. Both use similar material and play with problems of uncertainty and controversy in self-aware and effective ways. Davis presents learning as a more passive activity, dominated by

power and display, while for Lawrence learning is active and child-centred, but both present women as sources of knowledge and authority. This chapter brings out the challenges and opportunities for authors involved in transforming the problems of ancient history into the certainties of fiction.

Case study 2: C. S. Lewis and Narnia

The last section focuses on metamorphoses in the Narnia books of C. S. Lewis. Geoff Miles tackles the neglected topic of Lewis' attitude to and use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. He argues that while Lewis did not approve of Ovid he was well-versed both in his works and in the traditions of reading them, particularly the allegorical traditions of the Medieval period. In his criticism Lewis is dismissive of both Ovid and his readers, but in his children's literature he makes frequent use of the theme of metamorphosis, and tackles it using allegorical methods to make it fit with his ideas of both morality and childhood. Characters reveal their true identities through metamorphosis, or are justly punished for their actions; potentially distressing scenes are marked as comic. Lewis' use of metamorphosis thus forms a strong contrast with that of Ovid, which Miles sees as amoral and often arbitrary. Metamorphosis is a particularly revealing theme for thinking about the relationship between the ancient world and modern understandings of childhood because it brings to the fore the necessity of interpreting the wild and the fantastic, which is both the attraction and the problem of the ancient world. C. S. Lewis, with his strong didactic and Christian agenda, makes these tensions particularly productive.

Metamorphosis is not just Ovid: Slater's chapter takes one of the metamorphoses examined by Miles and looks at it in rather more depth and in relation to a different, later classical text of metamorphosis: Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, which he clearly shows

Lewis knew and appreciated. The key episode is the transformation of Rabadash the Calormene heir into an ass as punishment at the end of *The Horse and His Boy*. Slater argues convincingly that the conversion of Rabadash back from ass into human at the temple of Tash should be read against Lucius' transformation back to human form at the festival of Isis. Further the conversion of Rabadash from tyrannical warmonger to peacemaker can be read against the conversion of Lucius to follower of Isis. Slater argues that Lewis reads Lucius' conversion as problematic and potentially involuntary, by representing Rabadash as an unwilling, ridiculed peacemaker, trapped by his situation and his beliefs. Here too Lewis displays a deep belief in essential characteristics of people and cultures that cannot be metamorphosed.

The book finishes with a chapter from one of the editors in collaboration with her children. Helen Lovatt experiments with a methodology that places the voices of actual children into dialogue with the mainly textual approaches in the rest of the volume: in discussion with Jonathan, age 12, and Caroline, age 9, she explores why children like texts with Greek and Roman settings or elements. In three interviews, one with both children, and one each individually, they discuss their attitudes to authors who radically change their material, the attractions of textuality, power and control in both life and literature, and how their reading has changed them.

Chapter 1

Beyond the World: Gossip, Murder, and the legend of Orpheus

Michael Cadnum

There was a murder on the hillside near my home not long ago. A man was hit by what the police called "a blunt, heavy object" and he died. But I did not hear about this crime primarily from the news media—I heard about it from people I know. We had nothing but questions. Did you see the police cars? Did you see the police-line-do-not-cross tape stretched between the trees? Did you see them bring the body down in a body bag? Did you see the coroner's white van drive up the hill? Who was it? Why? And the big question behind all the others: who will be next?

There are two basic ways of telling a story.

One is to build a narrative tower, telling what happened, who did it, and where it happened. This structured way of telling a story is one we will use to deliver news, and it is one we would be wise to apply if we had to tell a story off the top of our heads. We might call this 'story as railway', a tower lying down and extending narrowly to the horizon from where we have begun.

The other way of telling a story is what we use when we gossip. By gossip I don't mean the malicious cutting down of someone's good name. I mean the more innocent, lively recounting of events. A better name for this is: Rumour. The method is circular. We tell stories in a roundabout manner, wheeling the narrative along, when we tell

stories among friends, explaining first why one shoe is red and the other blue, then showing off how our black eye is already healing, and then explaining how we got it. We don't begin at the beginning, or move toward the main drama, because we don't have to. We move back and forth from dagger to ghost to the hurricane to the dagger's edge.

The best way of writing fiction, or talking about it, is to combine the two approaches, moving in a roundabout way that turns out to be entirely directed—the way a hawk rises in circles to go up over a mountain.

This is how I found out about the recent murder. By questions, bits of information, and no one had the entire story. Until, by the time the news was actually published, the short, complete information trail constructed by a news writer was devoid of life compared with the fragments of narrative, incomplete but vivid with concern, recounted by men and women walking their dogs.

Some say that Orpheus was a real poet, an individual who actually lived. There is an evolution in the sort of tidings that begin as anecdote, become a legend, and develop at last into myth. We can easily imagine how such stories developed. Did you hear about the heartbroken poet, the conversation must have gone. He went into the Void, sang his best poetry, and yet he came back without his bride.

What we ourselves say and do matter, the stories we share, the opinions we offer. Over time and distance, a teacher's influence, for example, can become part of the personal legend of a student, and part of the intellectual legacy of a community. A teacher might think that he is simply trying to make it through Friday until the weekend, but his efforts to expedite enlightenment and show the limits of both patience and crankiness may be the beginning of the future for a fortunate student.

This also means that what we in our lives make of a great poet like Orpheus is a legitimate and living development of his work, and of the shadowy legends regarding his life.

I like to listen to people, wherever I go. I hear what people are saying. I am not talking about overheard telephone conversations. I mean fragments of what people say to each other, the awkward found poetry of real life.

I live in Albany, California, beside Albany Hill, a geological feature that is a sister, landlocked island to the more famous Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. There are many streets and sidewalks, places for people to talk. And for me to listen.

Recently I was walking down Solano Avenue when I heard a woman say to a child: the neck is the most vulnerable part of the body, actually. This segment of conversation has no context. I don't know what they were talking about, a mother, very likely, talking to her child. Why the neck, I wonder? Why was mortality being discussed as though the little boy was being trained to be a hit man?

I was in a coffee shop recently and a little boy was pretending to be a racing car—complete with the sounds of collisions and screaming brakes. And the accompanying adult—another mother, I believe, said: Be a *person* in the store.

That power to be something, of course, is the essence of our imaginative life. We start by pretending to be a racing car or a horse, a warhorse, galloping and tossing, and rolling our eyes—and over time through our imagination we learn what it is like to be someone else. A person. We learn what it is like to be a person. We learn what it is like to experience a joy we can only begin to share, and to participate in our neighbour's concern at the mice that have taken refuge in her kitchen.

The adult voice, and the youthful voice—this is one of my favourite subjects. My discussion here will be an exploration of the voice as we use it in writing, and how I used my discoveries about the voice to create my book *Nightsong*,⁵⁶ and how the writing of this book in particular has influenced and changed my life.

And then I'll turn to writing Greek and Roman myths in particular, and how writing from the point of view of a young person is enlightening and nourishing, and how it helped me to create my novel *Nightsong*. I will move from a depiction of the creation of this myth, to a sense of how we can communicate our love for such stories to young people, and to their elders, too.

I think we all sense a contrast between the point of view of a young person and the voice of adulthood. How do this adult voice and its observations differ from the perceptions of a child? By voice I mean more than point of view, perception, and emotional response. Although I mean those things as well.

By *voice* I mean the self as it speaks. The inner self, the mind as it touches and is touched by the world, and as this self reflects, considers, weighs, and recalls even those events that have just taken place. Creative writers use the word *voice* in this way—we hear of the voice of a poem, of a writer finding his voice, of a character's voice driving the narrative.

I want to take a moment to define self. I think too often we talk without explaining what we mean. Self is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as that “which in a person is real and intrinsic in contradistinction to what is adventitious, often identified with the soul or mind as opposed to the body, a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness.”

⁵⁶ Cadnum (2006).

The voice is that self speaking—in that sense we have a voice even when we are silent. That silent inner voice is often the unacknowledged subject of fiction and poetry. Here is a famous poem written in an adult voice, and which is hard to imagine being the expression of a child:

Will I cease to be
or will I remember
beyond the world
our last meeting together

Lady Izumi Shikibu (ca. 900)⁵⁷

This poem strikes me as a lovely expression of an adult awareness.

Here is a poem which seems probably adult, but yet which holds some qualities that make it possible as the expression of a child. This may be one of the most translated poems in the world. I created this version with my friend Don Morgan.

‘Night Thoughts’

Beyond my bed the moonlight
shines on the ground like frost.
Raising my head I see the bright moon,
and I bow my head in thoughts of home.

Li Bo (ca 750)⁵⁸

These poems are both, in a way, adult in nature. Both poems have a character of unsentimental nostalgia, and we feel that this open-eyed realization of loss and separation is a quality of adult perception rather than a young person's awareness.

⁵⁷ Trans. Rexroth 1955: 34.

⁵⁸ Trans. Don Morgan and Michael Cadnum 2009, available on www.michaelcadnum.com.

Although not necessarily. A poem written in a child's voice can be found in my book *The Lost and Found House*.⁵⁹ This illustrated book marketed for children is about a family that moves from one town to another.

All night I keep waking, and think:
I know where I am.
Because each time, I have forgotten.

Notice that I do not stress writing for children or young people. I stress writing through the voices of characters—through their various selves. I write to bring to life the observations of these human beings and their ways of seeing.

As a writer, to see clearly, I adapt a voice of the self speaking. The foundation of this voice has no age, and can sound both young or not young.

Once I understood that I was not writing for an audience but about a character, and his or her joys and fears, the rich—nearly infinite—world opened up to me. It is not too much to say that this world was not only equivalent to the real world. It was the world itself, and it had no limits. I was free to write about anything.

I am particularly interested in that arc of electric communication between adult and young person, the explanation or complaint, the youthful acceptance, or counter-proposal. In my novel *Peril on the Sea*,⁶⁰ for instance, the youthful passengers are wise to the challenges of their world, but powerless, just as Captain Fletcher is powerless before his reputation as a felon of the seas. The tension between voices, and the resolution of this tension, is an exciting subject in many of my novels.

⁵⁹ Cadnum 1997 (not paginated).

⁶⁰ Cadnum 2009.

I once wrote a poem about an act of violence perceived, and held in the mind, and marvelled at. It is a poem about a mass killing, and I cannot say that the voice of the poem is either young or old. The poem is called ‘The Morning of the Massacre’.

‘The Morning of the Massacre’

I noticed there were no birds.
I saw the boy
running too fast to cry.

He was blond as a splinter
and even when I saw what was
wrong I thought look
at that hair in the sunlight.⁶¹

In much of my writing I seek this foundation voice—not a young person, and not an adult. I seek this merely and entirely human voice.

And this brings us to the writing of *Nightsong*, a novel based on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth.

The book was written while my mother was ill with a long and lingering and ultimately mortal sickness. The essential meaning of the myth was kindled in me through her suffering and my awareness of what was happening to her. I discovered—and not for the first time in my life—that myth is not a fiction but a way of seeing the truth.

The novel has come to be seen by me as a story of a child's voice becoming, through trial, and loss of his beloved, the voice of an adult. In writing the novel I departed from

⁶¹ First published in Cadnum 1982: ****page no.?******; available on www.michaelcadnum.com.

the traditional story not through impulse—but by a serious reckoning of the materials in my hands. At the heart of the novel is the great poet's evolution from a loving, quick-hearted man, loyal to his own instincts and to his own talents, to an individual stricken mute by the insight he has experienced into the folly of his former faith in the gods and in himself. He undergoes an awakening of his powers again as he becomes not the innocent adventurer of his former days, and not the man embittered by the truth, but a new being altogether, not young and not old, given over to his love.

The [...] pack of wild dogs [was] fighting hungrily to swim the current, no doubt attracted by the [exposed] human infant's wail.

[...]

Not far downhill [...] they] shook dazzling moisture into the sunlight. And then they resumed their course, tumbling over one another in their eagerness.

Orpheus was nearly there, a stitch in his side, the muscles of his long legs burning.

[...]

[...] the poet gathered the wailing infant, wrapped in rough-spun wool, into his arms.

Orpheus took a deep breath, and sang the first words of the old lullaby, "Hush, dear one, the friendly sun is high."

She cried no longer, and [...] grew calm.
But at that moment the dogs were upon them.⁶²

Orpheus takes the infant safely on his travels, finds a home for the baby with the help of King Lycomedes, falls in love with Eurydice, and the story has that quality of inevitability we see when an accident is about to happen, and books topple slowly from a shelf, Eurydice is bitten and she dies.

⁶² Cadnum (2006) 5-7.

But through all of this, even in his greatest bereavement, Orpheus believes in his talent. He never questions his own powers. He is adventurous—he is brave and optimistic. He is young, and speaks with a young person's faith in his own abilities.

Until he speaks to the god of the Underworld, when as I imagine the scene—and it was as if I stood in the Void with Orpheus—he sees Hades for the first time.

[Hades] showed no sign of having heard—except to turn, almost imperceptibly, even farther away.

Persephone waited for her immortal husband to show some sign of permission, but at last turned to Orpheus and parted her hands.

There is nothing I can do.

Orpheus touched the strings, accidentally, as he turned away from the king and queen, ready to set down the silver instrument. This grazing touch, a chance chord, made such a sweet stir in this shadowy chamber that he could not keep his hand from plucking the chord again—a beautiful sound.

*The shadow of your hand,
Eurydice,
among the shadows of the birds
on a summer morning.*

Orpheus lifted this quiet verse to the murmur of the lyre.

He had not intended to sing at all, and indeed his voice was barely above a whisper. But this soft fragment of song, created in the moment, was enough to cause a drifting shape to scurry toward him, eyes sharp, joined at once by another, the Furies gathering, so fierce with curiosity that Orpheus nearly dropped his lyre.

He touched the strings again.

*I stir,
Eurydice,
thinking you have touched me—
forgetting.*

The Furies hurried into a circle around him [...] their black eyes [...] hungry, insisting to Orpheus, *Sing, sing.*

Their fierce attention prompted the poet to raise his voice, as his fingers remembered the chords he had learned from the lord of daylight.

The poet sang of Eurydice, and of his love. He offered verses that he would later find lost to memory.

When he was done, he stood with the lyre still vibrating from the last chord, and became aware again of the Furies around him, and the now-tearful eyes of Queen Persephone.

I came to sing poetry, thought Orpheus, and so I have.

He was resigned, in his sadness, to whatever requirements the powers of this kingdom might command. But Orpheus realized then what a deep silence now surrounded the palace.

The rumble of Sisyphus's boulder, the snapping squabble of the vultures had ceased. In the corridors, the shade of a human ghost, joined by several others, stood rapt to catch the last echoes of music that even then reverberated through the underworld.

At last the silence was complete, and Persephone turned and put a slender hand on the forearm of her husband—just once, a single touch.

For a long while nothing moved. No Fury made an utterance, and no shade drifted back to its resting place. The impassive Hades remained as he had been, and made no sound.

But then he moved, very slowly.

The veiled shape of Hades shifted on his throne, just slightly, turning back toward Persephone. The great figure lifted a single, blackly jeweled finger, and like a monarch that did nothing in haste, he leaned heavily toward the queen.

The veil fluttered softly before his lips.⁶³

We know what happens, even as Orpheus only just begins to see the truth: the immortal powers cannot be opposed. And in his subsequent bereavement, Orpheus cannot be consoled. We know this story. We have lived this story through in our own individual heartaches and the accents of our individual lives.

In the end, I departed entirely from the story as it came down to us from the past, and I rewrote the myth radically.

⁶³ Cadnum (2006) 96-99.

Orpheus was sitting indoors, listening to the energetic bickering of the birds in the eaves over his head. It had been a long time since he had taken any pleasure in the sound, and just now, for the first time in months, he had to admit that the feathered creatures made a pretty chatter.

"Young Norax, son of a tinsmith, fell off a roof, master," Biton said [...] "He was trying to retrieve a ball [...] and he slipped off and struck his head." The servant did not know how else to put it. "The temple prayers have not been heeded [...], and now the village hopes your songs might awaken the boy to life."

"It troubles me to hear this news," said Orpheus.

But of course I can do nothing, he nearly added.

[He thinks to himself "Perhaps I should try".]

He rose to his feet, tentatively, and found his way out of cool interior, standing under the bright sun.

[...]

The young servant ran, carrying the silver instrument, the frame and strings bright in the sunlight.

[Orpheus had not touched the lyre since the last day he saw his beloved, and he had no desire to hold it now.]

The grateful [...] crowd parted as Orpheus and Biton hastened toward the dwelling place of the injured child.

The young boy lay senseless, his mother gently soothing his forehead with a soft cloth, his father stirring a brazier of healing herbs.

The poet knelt beside the sickbed [...] Young Norax was much closer to death than Orpheus had expected, his breath slow and shallow, eyelids parted but his eyes unseeing.

[...]

Orpheus had thought that one of the jolly old verses, unaccompanied by the lyre—perhaps one of the many stories of goat-footed Pan and his adventures—would cheer an injured boy. However, this patient was beyond such childish ditties. The physician in the corner gave Orpheus a shrug: *What more can I do?*

The poet could not bear to see the child so close to death, or the parents, so cruelly caught between hope and anguish. Remembering all the other times the lyre and fervent poetry had shown power, Orpheus turned solemnly to Biton.

[...]

It has been long, thought Orpheus, since I have tried to play.

Too long, and my heart is far too heavy. [...]

He touched the instrument gently, nonetheless, feeling the familiar strings vibrant and supple beneath his trembling fingers..

He nearly dropped the lyre, shocked at what he heard.

The sound that lifted upward from the lyre was not a mere musical note, soft but sustained.

It was the unmistakable whisper, "*Orpheus!*"

[...]

It was the voice of Eurydice.

[...]

The poet plucked a new chord, and he heard her again: "*Orpheus, sing with me!*"

[...]

The others in the room waited, anticipation in their eyes, unaware of the presence that resounded in the sickroom only in the poet's ears.

Only Orpheus could hear her voice [...]

Orpheus found new music, plucking tenderly, listening with increasing joy to the sound of Eurydice. [...]

As he played, her voice surrounded him [...]

And [...] so Orpheus lifted his voice with hers.

*What is day,
what is night,
your footstep so close.*

Young Norax stirred on his sickbed, blinking. He rose to one elbow, his lips parted, caught by the poem.

The injured boy sat up, gazing at the source of the music, Orpheus and the shining lyre. [...] his parents knelt beside his sickbed, and gathered him into their arms.

From that day, and throughout the era of Orpheus's journeys that followed, into distant lands, each time he placed his hand on the lyre, he heard the voice of Eurydice.

And every day of the poet's life he sang with her.⁶⁴

Orpheus enters into the voice of his maturity by losing both his childish naiveté, and his subsequent bitterness, and letting his talent express his love for Eurydice and his devotion to life.

When I write about characters like this I am not striking a pose, or trying to write prettily. I am not fooling around. I am claiming the power of song, of poetry, of lucid speech, to do more than can be done by any other power that I possess.

Faith in life is not promised to any of us. To live is to discover an art of recovering from loss, and making a new future for ourselves.

The adult voice reminds me of the way we use global positioning devices. You get a much better and more accurate reading of where you are if you have more than one or two satellites communicating with your GPS. As adults we have many mental satellites guiding and responding to each moment, an emotional triangulation, which leads to an understanding of what the context of an event might be. The child's voice does not have such coordination—but it does have immediacy.

But there is a further dimension to this story that must be emphasized; Eurydice's point of view and her profound awakening to pain and a second death is not stressed sufficiently. In my version of the story Orpheus and Eurydice become, for the length of a song, one psyche. The young and the old share life. Eurydice and Orpheus share poetry.

⁶⁴ Cadnum (2006) 123-33.

But in writing my novel about Orpheus, and in preparing these thoughts for you, I have made a further discovery. This is a story of Eurydice, killed by a snake, and killed again by Orpheus's urgent need to see her as she made her way through the watercourses of the Void. This is not only the story of Orpheus recovering his lost love. It is the story of his lost love reclaiming him through song.

Some people believe that the world will end. Some people believe that we are making progress toward enlightenment. I believe that we have much more[?] in common with Eurydice than with[?] her impassioned husband. We are the ones who make our way into the daylight, and this time we find the open sky, and stay among the living. We achieve this through poetry.

We are the poem, and from now on we will be heard.

I conclude with a poem that amounts to a celebration of a discovered and yet imaginary voice, prompted by a conversation I overheard during a visit to Washington, DC.

‘Whales’

"The whales got too big and had to go back into the water."
A mother to her child, overheard at a museum

Even when we no longer ran,
for years, the hills
comforted, the pine-wood
brushed our broad, bony paws.
Sun kneaded the hair along
our spine, and rain
combed it warm
under the dawn.
Each taste of living food,

quick and hot, was strength
and daylight was a giant room.

Bird shadow whispered across our eyelids
and slow voles flattened
under the brow
of our jowls. It could not
bear, the grass, the rain-brushed
soil. Night was threadbare,

wearing thin, wearing through.
One more afternoon, we prayed,
one more sunrise.
Gravel parted hard
beneath our plowing
preludes, voice to voice.
And when the weariness began
we could not name it, we

who had coursed over
the hill, plunged valley,
tossed free in the cold
morning light. Years since we had
danced, we thought: we are dancers.
Until we could not pretend, until the stone

sky pressed, and each breath hauled a
quarry in, and pushed it out again,
each heartbeat the grinding of ore
on ore. Such rooted
exhaustion we could not lift
a song. Nosing the tang of foam-spume,

shivering, chest to surf.
We were tongues. We were wet
as eyes. No one would know
us, we would have no name.
Without a star we drank
the black salt. And began.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Reprinted from Cadnum (2001) 24.

Chapter 2

Interview with Michael Cadnum

Owen Hodkinson

Michael Cadnum (www.michaelcadnum.com), based in Albany, CA, is an award-winning poet and author of 35 books, including National Book Award (USA) finalist **<this sentence from ‘based’ to this point appears in blue and underlined in your revised version, but I can’t see any changes – I think this may just be a software thing, infection from the automatic blueing and underlining for the hyperlink just before, but let me know if anything else.>***The Book of the Lion* and two nominees for the Edgar Allen Poe awards for mystery fiction in the Young Adult fiction category.

Much of his prose writing has in common a setting in the mythological, legendary or historical past of various eras, and as a strand within that, the re-telling of stories from those settings with an innovative twist or a shift of perspective. Three short stories on classical themes are collected alongside those based on fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and others in *Can’t Catch Me, and Other Twice-Told Tales*: ‘Daphne’, ‘Medusa’, and ‘Give Him the Eye’. Comparisons could be drawn between the approach of his novels based on classical myths, *Starfall* (Phaethon) and *Nightsong* (Orpheus and Eurydice), and those set in the worlds of Robin Hood, pirates, or the Vikings.

His longer fiction tends to be placed in the Children’s or Young Adult market: the novels come with recommended age-ranges attached, coming both from the publishers

and from reviewers. By contrast many of the short stories in *Can't Catch Me* (a book with no recommended age range attached) were originally published in fantasy/SF anthologies not explicitly aimed at younger readers; they often rely on the knowledge of stories familiar from childhood, but as such they fall under the category of modern or retellings of traditional stories such as Margaret Atwood's and others' feminist 'updated' versions of fairy tales and other traditional stories, or Philip Pullman's recent retellings of the Grimm tales, for readers young and old.

As a reader I was first struck by the deceptively simple quality of Michael's prose – his poetic discipline has produced elegantly sparse prose, with not a word wasted and every one well chosen; the novels on classical themes are particularly short, not because of a target audience of younger readers, nor (of course) because of a lack of material in the underlying myths for his retellings. The short stories use the often exploited trick of changing the narrative perspective (changing the narrator and/or focaliser, in technical terms) of traditional stories to shed unexpected new light on the retold stories; the commonness of the device itself in no way detracts from the author's achievement in evoking a very different version of characters as diverse as Medusa, Ophelia, and the Gingerbread Man, while convincing readers familiar with the underlying story of the 'authenticity' of these versions.

As a scholarly reader, and teacher of a module on 20th-21st Century literary receptions of the classics, I have found Cadnum's short stories and novels, as well as what he says about their creation, useful to think with and to teach with. The different genres, the different 'appropriate' age ranges/target audiences (a product of marketers and publishers, not the author), economical retellings of classical tales with a range of kinds and levels of manipulation of the 'received' texts, sometimes with authorial statements of which precise version of the classical myth it is based on, sometimes with

no such simple answer about a source – all of this has been particularly helpful in illustrating and discussing many points in several seminars over the years. As with any kind of reception, the question of what changes might be made in the receiving text to the classical myth *specifically out of sensitivity to a particular audience* – of 20th/21st century English-speaking teenage readers (say), or any other permutation of imagined readers – inevitably raises its head. What makes children's literature special in this regard is that (at least sometimes) authors confess to writing for specific audiences, and to considering what is suitable for this very special kind of audience. And even when they do not, their publishers and marketers, their public (of buying parents, school librarians, teachers) and their reviewers, will all have their say over what is appropriate and inappropriate for readers of certain ages in late 20th-early 21st century USA, in a way that will sometimes affect how certain elements of classical myth must be adapted for that audience, or removed altogether. Cadnum's works are suitable for or marketed to a wide range of audiences, from primary school through to adult audiences but with most in the secondary/high school and teen/YA markets. Considering the texts themselves can be fruitful for exploring the transformations of classical and other narratives for different audiences in different ways.

When it comes to consideration of the creative process of the author, as ever the processes of scholarship become more complex. It is no original insight in itself that literary scholars frequently think about and analyse texts in ways that bear little relation to how authors (and readers for pleasure – non-‘scholarly’ readers) usually think about them – sometimes deliberately, sometimes not, and certainly not through ignorance, but rather through a compartmentalisation of ways of thinking about text that enables us to do our job at one time, and still to suspend disbelief while wrapped up in a good ‘page-turner’ at another. As a classical literary scholar with no opportunity to engage with the

thoughts of the authors outside the text in most of my professional life, this is even more true. It is of course not the case that all scholarly writing about literature is author-centric; nor do they all start from assumptions that would make our interpretations based on our experiences of reading the text invalid if we suddenly discovered the diaries of Homer or Virgil and found out what the author was thinking while he composed the text. But it is certainly the case that we make tacit and sometimes explicit assumptions about authors' intentions and creative processes when talking of children's literature using terms such as 'overtly didactic', 'target audience', 'age appropriate', and so on. In this interview with Michael Cadnum, I explore the author's perspective on such assumptions, and bring them into contact (and into creative conflict) with the ways in which we might interpret those of his works that we might label receptions of classical myth and literature – and other modern works of that kind – as a kind of corrective or check on our assumptions. This is not to say that what is valid for one author's creative processes, views on target audiences, and so on, will hold for others; but that this kind of consideration needs to be part of the picture in a volume such as the present one, juxtaposed with other approaches to the study of classical reception in children's literature, and perhaps inserting a note of caution to proceedings.

Classical influences

OH What were your earliest encounters with classical myths? – or what early encounters were evocative enough to stay in your memory?

MC The earliest contact I had with a Greek and Roman myth was “The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice,” in *My Book House*, edited by Olive Beaupre Miller.

I was four or five years old, and loved these beautifully-illustrated books—they had belonged to my mother as a girl. I did not think very highly of the Greek and the Romans as a child, their myths seemed stilted and pretty thin stuff. Aesop's fables were impressive, of course. And Androcles and the Lion—what a wonderful story!

OH What further early myths do you recall?

MC The first actual Roman I ever heard about was Pontius Pilate. Bible story books were a staple of my childhood—along with many other books. I want to point out that early on I was learning from traditional Christian stories about myth more than Greek and Roman sources. The story of David and Goliath was my kind of story as a child, and Noah's Flood and Samson bringing down the temple—this was the variety of myth that I responded to. The bible was all color and life to me, even when I matured and rational skepticism framed the bible stories.

OH You say that it was Bible stories, rather than classical myths, that formed the staple of your childhood reading. Have you read (perhaps *since* childhood) any of the many modern retellings of classical myths for children - Hawthorne, the D'Aulaires, or their successors? If so, do any particularly stand out for you?

MC The poets of the great Christian tradition were an exciting experience for me: *Paradise Lost*, and the poetry of John Donne and Gerard Manley Hopkins. And in recent years I have been reading Jane Kenyon and Jack Gilbert, poets heavily influenced by the pith and joy of faith. But there has been a radical change in the way I view myth and in fact religion too.

I think our daily perceptions are colored by myth much more fully than we generally realize. By myth I don't mean a fictitious tale involving the supernatural, a god or a hero. Although those are myths of a kind, surely. I mean a story, or insight, that describes or explains something about life, but which may not be true. That means, of course, that myths abound—they are everywhere.

Many people live from myth to myth, believing as young people that they are in a period of turmoil and search called Adolescence, which will be resolved when they Find their True Nature, and with luck meet their True Love. Their professional lives will be satisfying if they Follow their Bliss, and the relations with co-workers will be fruitful if they learn to be Assertive rather than Aggressive, and learn Emotional Intelligence as well as how to forgive. Adolescence is a myth, romantic love is a myth, the Hero as Artist—or do I have it backwards. The Artist as Hero. It is a myth, which is to say maybe true, maybe not.

What troubles me is that we accept these highly flavored motifs without realizing that they are fantasies, and we can spend years of our lives living out false hopes without realizing that they are hopes that are in fact not necessarily true. The myth that men are very different from women, for example, is only partly true, if meaningfully true at all, and the myth that children are innocent or innately wise, or whatever else we might think of childhood, is also mythic in nature.

Perhaps true, perhaps not. The belief that writers write for an audience is a myth. And like most myths, the suppositions deserve to be discussed. The myth that there are artists who Create For Themselves is also a myth. Generally, I think we swap one myth for another as we grow. Faith for skepticism, cynicism for acceptance. But what we are really doing is changing the mental key, metaphorically speaking, in which we

sing. I think we should recognize these useful fictions for what they are—only a way of seeing, not unnecessarily elemental and universal truths.

OH What is your scholarly background, if any, in the classics?

MC I studied Latin for three years in high school. I was a very poor Latin student. But when I turned to Ovid as an adult I was able to muddle my way through some of the original Ovid myself, and in particular I rendered into English the passage in which Daphne turns into a tree. I enjoyed translating that. But it struck me that the Latin sentence is so very different from an English sentence, and I had trouble reconciling the two languages.

Much later, I wrote my own version of the story, and I had to put my translation to one side and forget it. I made a fresh start.

OH What about the pursuit of Daphne, and her transformation into a laurel, that caught your imagination?

MC It's just such a powerful scene. I have always have expected to feel a heartbeat in things that don't have hearts.

And in my view, she is still alive. She breathes to this day.

Transformation is in the essence not only of writing and translating, but of so much else. Even this exchange we are having now is a kind of translation. An interviewer asks questions. I try to be truthful, and interesting, and suit the answer to the question. It's all transformation from one room of my mind into another. Some further vividness is gained as I put feelings and memories into words. But something might be lost.

OH What translations of Ovid did you encounter?

MC I first read *The Metamorphoses* in a translation by Horace Gregory, and of course I have run across other poets trying their hands at this great Latin poet. My discovery of Ovid, translating and studying, was long before I came to write my two mythic novels, or my short stories based on pagan material.

OH You use some Greek words in *Starfall* and *Nightsong*—why?

MC I wanted the reader to hear the voices of the characters, and I wanted to hear their voices in my own mind, so I included a few Greek words from time to time. I was eager to find Latin words that were rooted in Greek. I wanted the voices of the characters to come to life.

When I write I feel I am really there, in the world of my characters. A word, the rustle of a garment—they help to bring me into that world, and the reader is brought along with me.

OH What other early influences on your classical writing can you recall?

MC I read Robert Graves on the myths years ago, and his book about the white goddess at one point, and so Graves was an early influence.

But my travels in the Greek islands and throughout Italy have also been an exciting source of insight in the Classical World.

OH Yes: the reader certainly gets a strong sense of the Greek and Roman settings - the landscapes and the temples and the kinds of houses found there, for example. Are there any particularly evocative locations that you may have been visualising (consciously or not) in picturing settings for your stories?

MC When I write I make an imaginative cocktail, mixing places together. Perhaps I blend my characters the same way. But, as an example, I think I see some of the magical beaches of Samos, the waves and the rocky shores, in my story 'Medusa'.

OH To come back to the choice of 'sources' for your classical myths: Why Ovid?

MC There is something commanding and accessible about his work: this was a writer, I felt, for whom the gods are alive but also like colors on a pallet, great pictures to be celebrated in the light. And created anew. The Christian tradition is there to be interpreted, but you aren't expected to invent new episodes for Samson, and certainly not new life-events for Jesus. For Ovid, and the other pagan writers, reinvention of the divine was an important freedom.

OH But many writers have created such life-events for biblical characters, from Andrew Lloyd Webber to Nikos Kazantzakis. You still haven't answered the question: why Ovid?

MC An actress once told me that playing Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's *The Rivals* was like actor candy. Maybe Ovid is writer candy.

OH But why? In what way?

MC We've learned that just a few subatomic particles make the difference between zinc and gold, and I imagine that only a few chromosomes make the difference between a penguin and an asp. I think we have always felt that we were part of the same material as the world around us, but now we see the lines of separation between individuals as chalked-in, like the temporary lines of a playing field. We understand Ovid's power to move from a fleeing woman to a spreading tree—a tree with a persistent pulse. I think Ovid realized something true about the world, and lets us in on the secret.

Child readers: a target audience?

OH You've said in a previous interview that when writing you do not think of a particular age-group or audience, and you elaborate on this a little in the chapter for our book,⁶⁶ referring to writing *through characters* rather than *for specific audiences*. As a wordsmith in a variety of forms, whose prose has been praised for its poetic qualities, and whose writing has been marketed to a quite different audiences even when there are strong similarities between the works, this focus on artistic process and on finding your own and your characters' voices, rather than on the target audience of the end product, certainly rings true.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ This volume, p.000.

⁶⁷ Putting an age category on a work obviously entails subjective judgements about what is 'appropriate' (in various senses, including reading level) for particular ages, and frequently leads to varied results: so for instance *Starfall* is listed on www.amazon.com among the publication details as for ages 9-12, but the *School Library Journal* reviewer recommends ages 12-14, and that of *Booklist* 11-17; one member of the public reviewing on the same site says "the story lingers a bit too long on the sexual relationship between Clymene and Apollo for me to be comfortable having a 1st or 2nd grader [age 6-7] reading it -- fine for older kids, though."

Could I push you to elaborate a little more on this question – knowing your reluctance to speak of ‘target audiences’ or to recognise the terms of analysis that I and others like to apply to the writing process, please frame it in terms that you *do* recognise!

MC When I talk about audiences, and what audience I am writing for, it might be helpful to start by explaining how I feel about this interview.

I feel happy to have an exchange of ideas, and I welcome stimulating questions. But I see myself as speaking to you, Owen, a friend and colleague. I realize that your questions are designed to make me explain myself, however, to an audience that is invisible, people I will never know.

And so I proceed with a degree of caution. To give a frivolous and entirely false example, if I said that I wrote a poem or a story while I was in jail for shooting a man in Phoenix, this remark would color the way just about any reader might approach the story in question. My statement would give rise to speculations about my character, gun control, and jurisprudence in the state of Arizona. And more—every reader would search each sentence of every paragraph for a telltale hint of gunplay and incarceration.

And this would naturally give rise to a very powerful misreading of the piece of writing in question, all because of a possible careless or devilish remark on my part.

If I have faith in my writing—and I do have faith—this commitment is rooted among other things in my sense that my work can speak for itself. That each story, and each character in each story, deserves a life in the mind of a reader. And even more than this—even without being read, my stories and poems still have three-dimensions, and the writing in a sense has a pulse. Even without a reader, I believe that there is a life to

my writing, just as the creator of a forest believes in the spirit of his living sanctuary even if it is midnight and there are no visitors.

This does touch on the question of audience, but in a way opposite to what a reader might expect. I ask myself: How can I write in a way that makes my words live? One way is to remember those wonderful mentors we have had, those speakers who talked to us when we were young, and who did not speak down to us—who talked to us person-to-person, from their imagination, and communicated their joy in learning.

One very important reason to have a young person as a protagonist is to discover again that open-mindedness, framed with suspicion, that we all have, young and old, when we embark on a new adventure—a new job, a new school, a new neighborhood. A young protagonist looks to me as an author. He says—make me believe I am really alive. No—more than that. Make me live.

And so, to the best of my ability, that is what I do. Young characters have courage, but they also have doubts, and this bravery and this often naïve skepticism, touches my heart.

I can hear Biton, Orpheus's servant in *Nightsong*, telling me, in a tone of hopeful challenge: I am a minor citizen of your tale, and not a god or a hero. I think you will probably not give me much life, will you?

Biton, is my response, have no fear.

Age Group and ‘Age-appropriateness’

OH You don’t shy away from dealing with difficult topics for younger audiences, such as death (including the ancient practice of exposing unwanted infants, discussed in *Nightsong*); is this purely because you are not writing *for* younger audiences in the first place? Or are you conscious of dealing with topics which might be difficult for younger readers, and of deliberately treating them sensitively or in an age-appropriate way? Of removing or toning down certain features of the violent and/or sexualised settings of traditional myths and legends because of such considerations?

Features of the ancient world—slavery, for example—are sometimes elided: we might naturally read Biton in *Nightsong* as Orpheus’ slave, but you make him a servant and avoid mention of slavery. Within this same relationship, a reader aware of the place of ‘Greek love’ in classical myth might suspect something more than just friendship between the two men,⁶⁸ but this is perhaps not conducive to writing for younger readers...?

MC The classroom has an important role to play in teaching students to read. This duty is so important that it is understandable that a teacher will want to know what novel or story might be, to put it simply, too hard. Or what story poses too many intellectual challenges.

⁶⁸ Ovid’s narrative of Orpheus, the admitted model for *Nightsong*, includes this line: “Orpheus preferred to centre his affections on boys of tender years, and to enjoy the brief spring and early flowering of their youth: he was the first to introduce this custom among the people of Thrace.” (Innes, Penguin translation) In your work I’m thinking particularly of the exchange on p.40: “ ‘You will have your hair dressed with oil of nard,’ said Orpheus, ... ‘and in that embroidered mantle no one will have eyes for the groom, let alone the bride.’ ‘That’s all to the good,’ said Biton. ‘Because then perhaps I’ll attract the attention of a new master.... Surely you won’t be needing the attentions of a servant named Biton once you are married.’ ‘Biton, I give you my word,’ said the poet with a smile. ‘You and I are spun together, like two strands of rope.’”

But my life as a writer is not addressed to the classroom. I am surprised just now when I read your descriptions regarding the prospective age groups for my novels. I have no idea who decides what piece of writing is appropriate to what age.

I am aware of the marketing literature that accompanies a new novel—there is usually, I think, a suggested audience, but I am never consulted about this question. And if I were, my opinion would not be any help at all.

My adventure as a writer consists of entering the lives of my characters, to know what it is like to be them, what they see and hear as they live. This is also my obligation. To the characters and, when the day comes, to the reader that may eventually follow.

On the question of slavery: I avoided the word “slave” because the word has a particularity stark and abject connotation. What the wages or vacation leave, for instance, of a servant might have been in the classical era I have no idea. We know from the biblical tradition that sometimes entire people portions of nations were enslaved, and this must have been a sorrow and a hardship. I think Biton was a servant to Orpheus, although I don't know what his monthly stipend might have been.

On the homosexual question, I think modern perceptions of homosexuality probably don't apply in the classical world. I think sexual matters might have been more flexible in the ancient Mediterranean than in our modern era, or at the least very different.

OH Can I try to push you further on the slavery question? Of course, older children (teens?) and students who learn about the classical world are well aware of slavery in the Greek and Roman worlds, and also perhaps able in some ways to double-think, in accepting that as part of the story-world they're entering as readers, and yet still identifying with or thinking in positive terms about characters who would undoubtedly have owned slaves. Is there a

sensitivity to younger readers in your decision not to put them in the position where they have to do this?

And on the homosexuality question: you're right, of course, to say that this was perceived very differently in antiquity, and more flexibly.⁶⁹ But again I'd like to try to push you some more on this, because it's so often, throughout the entire history of post-classical translations and receptions of the classical world, been a site of tension between the ancient authors held up as worth reading and studying and retelling, and the need to excise major, sometimes central, features of these supposedly worthwhile texts and stories, because they go against the accepted norms of the society reading the retellings and translations.⁷⁰ <<This, like other such sticking points, seems to be something authors have to make a conscious choice about – and is perhaps extra important when publication for/including younger readers is envisaged, or changes the decision made. You can leave out anything hinting at it, or hint, or include more openly but in some way explain differences between our society and theirs, hedging them around with educational language (in prefaces, authors' notes, etc.) which thus makes it clear that it's ok to find a character sympathetic even though some of what they do is not acceptable to the prevailing norms of the audience's society and times. **Michael, you've marked this section between double <> for deletion. I'd like to keep some of this in some form (though there's some repetition in it that could be got rid of easily)--in part because the “ ‘hinting’ solution in the next sentence picks up on this bit directly; partly because it's one of the central issues about authors vs literary scholars' perceptions of their work that I pick up**

⁶⁹ Reference from Blackwells companion to ancient sexualities/ etc <These things like this note and the following could of course be removed from an online version of the interview, but are here for the academic reader without any background in classics, to point them to where to find the info without having to take up space with it here.

⁷⁰ Compare slavery, the treatment of women in ancient myth, non-consensual sex acts, and so on: Reference some scholarship on various possible approaches to sensitive topics in children's/YA literature in general.

on in the chapter to follow. But let me know what you think when you see them both together – I'd be happy to find any solution that works to please us both! >> The relationship I referred to in the previous question, that of Orpheus and Biton, does seem very much like a version of the 'hinting' solution, rather than excising, leaving something in there which is overtly present in your Ovidian source but making it less clearly visible so that only those who are aware of the original or the idea of 'Greek love' will see it.

MC I do avoid the word slave when it comes to servant. But this is not necessarily a preference for euphemism. The word slave is so pejorative for me, understandably, I think, that to use the word might make a story necessarily about slaves and who they were and what was done about and for them. Some servants in the ancient world might have been employees, some might have been apprentices, some might have been indentured servants—and the economic nature of the ancient mediterranean falls outside the focus of my stories.

The sexuality issue is actually more pertinent.

<Michael, you've marked for deletion from the beginning of this answer to this point: my chapter has references to euphemism and the word pejorative both of which pick up on this bit, so I'd like to be able to keep some of this, in some form, or else find some other solution to keep the chapter and interview tying up on these points – see what you think about the chapter on this too.>

I draw a curtain across the intimate physical loves of my characters, I think because these details would distract both a young reader and a mature reader too. But I do hint at the loves and loyalties of these fictional people, and we can easily and knowingly accept my characters as the warm-hearted, affectionate beings that I understand them to be.

If I described one of my characters as a sexually active slave, well, then the novel would soon be about sex and slavery. A subject worth writing about, no question, but beyond the

already fraught stories of chariots in the sky and underworld journeys that I am setting forth to recount.

There is another reason to set aside the sex lives of these characters. The stories of Phaeton and Orpheus come from a part of our psyche where sex is mythic and not graphic, where love is joined with loss, where the sky is not far above us, and in which the sun is a wheeled vehicle of fire. This mythical world is pre-sexual, speaking to a part of our imagination before we had sexual partners. But this reality is also post-sexual, speaking of an existence where our lovers vanish into the underworld, and longing and grief can do nothing to bring them home.

To this aspect of the psyche song is an expression of passion, and the power of art to heal and make new is itself an act of love.

OH *Nightsong* and *Starfall* are short (c.125 pages each, with loosely-spaced text), and have short chapters; in this way as well as in the language they use they are quite accessible to a younger audience, perhaps more than some of your other novels and than what is often labelled Young Adult fiction, and the age range of 9-12 listed for each (though acknowledging that this does not come from you!) does not seem unreasonable—as a lower end, of course, not as the only age that can appreciate them. But on the other hand the episodes and characters in them are elaborated and expanded from far shorter episodes in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, preserving much of the detail in the original (which is certainly not ‘aimed at children’) and adding to it rather than omitting details; so these books could be seen as belonging to the long tradition of adaptations of stories from the *Metamorphoses* both in prose and poetry (in this case quite poetic prose, with snatches of song and verse ‘quoted’ by the characters here and there). Is their length and poetic quality more to do with their status as adaptations of Ovid’s poetic episodes than the age range they are ‘for’?

MC I search for the right kind of silence in my life, and I feel that good writing is close to this hush. I marvel at the way white space, like silence, supports and emphasizes our words. Nearly every day I destroy something I have written—if it is not alive enough, I feed it back to the quiet. The white space surrounding paragraphs and stanzas, and the slenderness of some of my books, acknowledges the presence of the silence. I delete much, and take care to shape my writing.

I often start off one of my novels with a very short poem. I like to think that the poem acts as a preface—an oblique, minor-key way of introducing the major chords of the longer fiction. I also see the short poem as weighing as much as the novel—even though the poem is so slight you can see through it, so to speak. So on a teeter-totter, the haiku and the fiction would balance.

Here is the poem that begins *Nightsong*:

stretching
among the pear trees
silent deer

Now that I look at the poem, I see that I describe the deer as silent. Most deer are silent, most of the time. Some varieties of deer do make a sharp little bark at dusk—such as one of my favorites the roe deer. But when I see this poem I don't think the reference to their quiet is an unnecessary description. I think it is the silence I am noticing, not just the deer, and I am perhaps hinting at the silence that stretches all the way through *Nightsong*, both the painful silence of sorrow, and the joyful silence in which we can hear Eurydice's whisper once again.

<On your note on paragraph lengths – yes, we can certainly revisit that for a web version of the interview and make all the long ones much shorter as appropriate to the

medium, and we'll double check when we get the proofs how long they will actually look on the page in this book and can insert any extra paragraph breaks needed then.>

Changing Times

Chapter 3

Aesop the Morphing Fabulist

Edith Hall

In his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), the philosopher John Locke said the child had a need for ‘some easy pleasant book... wherein the entertainment that he finds might draw him on,’ and recommended Aesop's Fables as ‘the best, which being stories apt to delight and entertain a child, may yet afford useful reflections to a grown man.’⁷¹ Locke here seems to approve of Aesop as the provider of ethical instruction for the very young. But he subsequently published a version of a selection of the *Fables* as an example of an ideal text for instruction in Latin by any individuals seeking to teach themselves, *Aesop's Fables, in English & Latin, Interlineary, for the Benefit of those who not having a master would learn either of these tongues*.⁷² Aesop, for Locke, was therefore good *either* for teaching children, because he could function as a vehicle for ethical examples imparted without tears, *or* for individuals at any age desirous of learning a language. Ideally, perhaps, the *Fables* could impart ethics and linguistic skills at the same time. But Aesop's *Fables*—in different selections from the several hundred transmitted from antiquity in the manuscript tradition—were, within not much more than a century of Locke's version, also destined to be presented as the content of what is widely regarded as the first ‘children's book’ in the fully modern sense, that is as a volume designed to appeal to the imagination of a child and stimulate his or her powers of visualisation. The book was William Godwin's *Aesop, Fables, Ancient and Modern, Adapted for the use of*

⁷¹ Locke (1910 [1693]) 265.

⁷² Locke (1703).

Children from Three and Eight Years of Age, which first appeared in 1805, under the pseudonym of Edward Baldwin.

Godwin's publishing ventures, and in particular his *Aesop*, took the discussion of what children should be given to read forward by several strides from the Lockean analysis. He added to the classical literary critical notions of the pleasurable (*hēdu, dulce*) and useful (*ōphelimon, utile*), which are explicitly referenced in Locke's discussion, the revolutionary new concept that a children's story might have an appreciably different narrative rhythm from that which might appeal to adults. Even more innovative was Godwin's desideratum that a book for a child would also stimulate his or her reflective and imaginative capacities:

Fables then should not be dismissed in a few short lines, but expanded in language suited to the understanding of children: If we would benefit a child we must become in part a child ourselves. We must prattle to him: we must expatiate upon some points: we must introduce quick unexpected turns which if they are not wit, have the effect of wit to children. Above all, we must make our narrations pictures, and render the objects we discourse about, visible to the fancy of the learner.⁷³

It was through thinking how to rewrite the ancient fables in a more extended way, which stimulated the Romantic notion of 'fancy', that Godwin developed his new style and mode of expression, perfectly complemented by the suggestive engravings of William Mulready.

It is instructive to compare Godwin's treatment of any particular fable with that of his Aesopic precursor Samuel Croxall, whose 1722 Anglican and decidedly Whiggish version, not explicitly aimed at children, was the most famous at the time in Britain. Croxall's Aesop swiftly supplanted Sir Roger L'Estrange's much larger and more ambitious collection of translated fables (1669), and became the version of choice in the English-speaking world for

⁷³ Godwin (1805) 'Preface', iii.

the entire 18th century. (Nor did it yield immediately to Godwin's book: it still had a major impact on the childhood imagination of the poet Robert Browning.⁷⁴) In 'The dog in the manger', for example, Godwin's narrative moves at a leisurely pace that allows the reader to see clearly how the roles of the characters are fulfilled, and the characters themselves, rather than a stern godly 'voiceover', draw the moral through what they say and do: 'Silly dog, says the little boy, if I were as naughty as you, I should give you nothing to eat, as you prevented papa's horse from eating. There is a plate of meat for you; and remember another time, that only naughty dogs and naughty boys and girls keep away from others what they cannot use themselves.' Moreover, Godwin's characters are more flexible and psychologically developed than in any previous version of Aesop. Godwin's dog in his manger finally gives in, defeated by hunger, while Croxall's 'envious ill-natured cur, getting up and snarling at him, would not suffer him to touch it'. In his preface, Godwin explains that he had tried to adapt the material to make it appropriate to the emotional and cognitive needs of the child:

I have fancied myself taking the child upon my knee, and have expressed them in such language as I should have been likely to employ when I wished to amuse the child and make what I was talking of take hold upon his attention.⁷⁵

Godwin's combined household with his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont, contained no fewer than five children, so it may not in practice have been difficult to find one to put on his knee.

Despite one reviewer objecting to the extent of the alterations in the original fables, and even to the possible anti-Christian implication that could be drawn from one tale,⁷⁶ Godwin's Aesop did very well, running through at least nine editions before 1821. Rewriting Aesop

⁷⁴ Leighton (1891) 26.

⁷⁵ Godwin (1805) 'Preface', iii-iv.

⁷⁶ Anon. (1806).

fundamentally shaped Godwin's views of storytelling for children. Three years later, in 1808, he commissioned and published Charles and Mary Lamb's *The Adventures of Ulysses*, the first *Odyssey* written specifically with children in mind.⁷⁷ Indeed, Aesop's *Fables* and the *Odyssey* have subsequently been turned into more children's books than any other ancient texts, by a very wide margin. They are also the two ancient texts that have been most susceptible to transformation into other media – there were Aesop and Odysseus animated cartoons by 1950, and they can both be watched on television, listened to on audiobooks, and seen in all kinds of theatre. Aesop and Odysseus have arrived on playing cards, porcelain, and postage stamps. But when it comes to depth of cultural familiarity and ubiquity, Aesop actually knocks the Homeric *Odyssey* out of the water on almost any criterion of measurement. Aesop has been read by children at earlier ages, for further back in history, and has produced many more rewritings and printed editions. Aesop has achieved the kind of talismanic status that makes him susceptible to translation even into dead languages, including ancient Aztec (by a group of scholars based in Germany led by Gerdt Kutscher, in 1987).

For these simple little tales for children, as they are commonly stereotyped, have been regarded as supremely important by an extraordinary string of famous thinkers, from Hesiod, Democritus and Socrates,⁷⁸ to Martin Luther, who believed that good Protestants should be able to read Aesop as well as the bible in their native tongue.⁷⁹ Writers who have turned their pens to rephrasing Aesop—often through the intermediary of the Latin slave-fabulist, Phaedrus—include the twelfth-century poet Marie de France, Aphra Behn, Henry Fielding, and

⁷⁷ On which see Hall (2008a) 26-7.

⁷⁸ For the appearances of Aesop in archaic and classical Greek literature, see Hall (2013), and the earlier chapters in the magnificent study by Leslie Kurke (2011).

⁷⁹ See Simon and Schultze (1983).

Samuel Richardson.⁸⁰ Admirers have included Richard Bentley, William Congreve, John Vanbrugh, Charlotte Bronte, and John Stuart Mill, who read Aesop in Greek when still a small boy, the first Greek author he ever studied.⁸¹ At the end of this article the argument will turn to Aesop's remarkable claim to a position amongst the top handful of books in global history, conclusively beaten into second place only by the Christian bible. Yet Aesop has always had a complicated and fluctuating identity as well as a massive presence, so this article explores four of his *Fables*' mutations, or shifting historical aspects, as they have interacted with thinking about literature for children.

First, almost from the minute they appear in the Greek historical record, in a world where learning to read was by no means automatically connected with childhood rather than adulthood, it is often difficult to determine whether Aesop should be included in the category 'children's literature' at all. Secondly, his *Fables* have carried heavy cargo in the form of their associations with another social boundary in addition to that between illiterate child and literate adult—I mean the boundary between different social classes. Thirdly, from the moment that the New Testament began to circulate in Greek, the apparent similarity of some of the *Fables* to the form of the parable in the gospels led to Aesop being equated or identified with Jesus, even if the parallel was always an unsatisfactory one. Fourthly, their adoption on the Christian elementary curriculum resulted in their exportation around the European world empires from the Renaissance onwards. To attempt a cultural history of Aesop would be to attempt a cultural history of the human race, at least in the West and wherever Europeans have travelled. Aesop has more of a claim to be a global cultural property than any other ancient Greek or Roman

⁸⁰ For Marie de France, see Mann (2009); for the text Behn supplied for the second edition of Francis Barlow's illustrations to Aesop in 1677, see Hodnett (2007); for Fielding, see Brooks (1968); for Richardson, Whitley (1997).

⁸¹ For Bentley, Swift and Congreve, see Lewis (1991). For Mill, see his autobiography, Mill (2009) 8.

text or author. Indeed, judging by the inventories of books distributed in the New World by the Spanish in the 16th and 17th centuries, Aesop has been taken very quickly wherever Europeans have gone: according to one scholar, ‘Aesop was one of the authors most read in the New World’.⁸² This international dissemination in turn underlay the prevalent impact they have had in encouraging parallels to be drawn the world over between Aesop’s *Fables* and indigenous traditions of storytelling, especially about trickster figures and talking animals. By illustrating these four specific facets of the cultural history of the consumption of Aesop’s *Fables*—age groups, class distinctions, Christianity and internationalism—I hope to stress the instability, in terms of the theory and practice of cultural history, of the borderline between the phenomenon of ‘children’s literature’, and literary history more widely.

First, although Aesop’s *Fables* are intricately bound up with the history of the teaching of literacy, literacy has not always been something normally or necessarily considered to be acquired exclusively in childhood. That the ancient Greeks and Romans saw Aesop as an author to be read as early as infancy *may*, however, be implied by an important story in Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.15. The story reports that the art of fable was bestowed upon Aesop by Hermes, the god of words himself, because the Horai had told Hermes a fable about a cow when he was still in swaddling clothes; as he gave Aesop the gift, Hermes said, ‘You keep what was the first thing I learnt myself.’ Some critics make no bones about their view that there was children’s literature even in Greco-Roman antiquity, and that it included Aesopic Fables: the structure and language used by Seth Lerer whenever he addresses antiquity in his influential study, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (2008), imply that he recognizes no distinction between one and the other. But, frustratingly, we can’t actually prove that Aesop was part of the curriculum of children until they were rather older,

⁸² Torre Revello (1957) 175.

at a stage when class, status, leisure and access to education begin to interfere with the picture in a society where literacy may have been as low as fifteen or twenty per cent of the total population. The composition of a fable (*muthos*) was certainly the first exercise attempted by students beginning their studies of rhetoric and Quintilian (2.4.4) says that grammarians were beginning to encroach on the rhetors' territory by teaching fable. Raffaella Cribiore has written brilliantly on the importance of Aesop in the Greek-speaking communities of Hellenistic and Roman ancient Egypt.⁸³ She has also pointed to the significance for later centuries of the *Hermeneumata* or *Colloquia*, medieval school handbooks in Greek and Latin that probably derive from third-century Gaul; they are preserved in eight different manuscripts, but were originally composed by Eastern Greek teachers rooted in an ancient school tradition.⁸⁴

In classical Greece, too, it is probable that Aesop was used to teach small children literacy, for example at Athens where citizens needed to be able to decipher at least basic civic documents. But we lack a clinching piece of evidence that Athenian citizen boys were taught to read (a duty which traditionally devolved on their own fathers⁸⁵) with the help of written collections of fables. We do not even know whether a physical collection existed as early as the fifth century BC. The earliest certain recension and collection was made by Demetrius of Phalerum (perhaps during his regency at Athens of 317-307 BCE), at least according to Diogenes Laertes' biography of Demetrius (*Lives* 5.80). This collection, which has not survived, may have been a repertory of fables designed for consultation by rhetoricians (see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.20). The Athenian local colour to some Aesopic fables may also be attributable to the Demetrian recension.⁸⁶ The question of whether reading Aesop was

⁸³ Cribiore (2001) 179-80, with the evidence of Cribiore (1996), nos. 230, 231, 232, 314, 323, 409, and 412.

⁸⁴ Cribiore (2001) 15.

⁸⁵ Hall (2006) ch. 9.

⁸⁶ So Keller (1862) 369-70.

primarily associated with the distinction between childhood and adulthood, or with socio-cultural status, depends on how we interpret a particular passage in Aristophanes' *Birds*. In this comedy an Athenian named Peisthetairos, who has taken himself off into voluntary exile, wants to persuade the birds to rebel against the supremacy of the Olympian gods. Here he proposes to the chorus of birds that they, rather than the Olympians, had once ruled the universe (466-75):

Peisthetaeros I feel great pain on your behalf, because you were once kings.
Chorus We were kings? Who were our subjects?
Peisthetaeros Everything that exists—first me, then this man here, and Zeus himself. You birds are more ancient than Chronos and the Titans and Earth, and prior to them.
Chorus Even prior to Earth?
Peisthetaeros Yes, by Apollo,
Chorus By Zeus, I never knew that!
Peisthetaeros That's because you are so under-educated (*amathēs*) and unquestioning and have never studied your Aesop (οὐδ' Αἴσωπον πεπότηκας). He is the one who tells us that the lark was the first creature to be born, even before Earth. His father died of disease, but Earth did not exist then, and so he lay unburied for five days. The lark, at a loss for a solution, gave his father a grave in his own head.

Peisthetairos here elaborates an aetiological story about the origins of the universe which sounds like a parody of theogonic poetry. His aim is to flatter the birds' sense of their species' historic importance. Manipulating myth in order to buttress the contingent political claims of a particular city-state or ethnic group was of course customary in classical Greek diplomacy, and Aristophanes is certainly here creating humour out of the absurd lengths to which such argumentation could go. But in order to impress these allegedly under-educated birds, the authority he chooses to cite is an Aesopic fable, rather than Homer or Pindar (or, like the Sausage-seller in *Knights*, an Apolline oracle).⁸⁷

⁸⁷ See further Hall (2013).

The verb used here, πεπάτηκας, may conceivably be a joke referring to the birds' lack of hands and fingers with which to handle a papyrus, since the primary meaning of *pateō* is 'tread'. Many translators choose to retain here the idea of physically handling a text, by translating πεπάτηκας as, for example, 'thumbed'. But there is a direct parallel, indeed a Platonic one, for the *pateō* meaning, purely metaphorically, 'study' a book: in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates remarks to Phaedrus that he has studied his Tisias very carefully (ἀλλὰ μὴν τὸν γε Τεισίαν αὐτὸν πεπάτηκας ἀκριβῶς, 73a).

The birds are so very uneducated, the implication seems to be, that they haven't 'even' studied Aesop, which in turn suggests that Aesop may have been regarded as an element in rudimentary education.⁸⁸ Perhaps he was regarded (as he was in later antiquity and is again today) as an author to whom little children were introduced at the same time as they learned their alphabet. If this is the case, then the reasons become obvious for the popularity of Aesop amongst the least educated of the Athenian citizenry—the ones who were perhaps only just functionally literate; the 'default' or bottom-line text to which orators, oracle-mongers or comic poets alike could refer, because they could assume their audience were familiar with it, was the Aesopic fables, in whatever form they were available in the fifth century BCE.⁸⁹

On the question of the date at which written collections of Aesop became available, further illumination has often been sought once again in Plato, this time in the section of the *Phaedo*. When Cebes is prompted by the imprisoned Socrates' proposed 'Aesopic' aetiology

⁸⁸ This is how the text is interpreted by Lerer (2008) 37.

⁸⁹ See Perry (1962) 287. But most scholars accept, on the evidence of Herodotus 2.134, that there had been very specific information circulating about Aesop in the fifth century (so West (1974) 25), and indeed many assume on the strength of this passage in *Birds* that there was a book on Aesopic wisdom of some kind available at Athens in the late fifth century (West (1984) 119-21).

for pleasure and pain to ask him about his recent poetic compositions--versions of Aesop's fables and a hymn to Apollo—Socrates answers (61b),

So first I composed a hymn to the god whose festival it was; and after the god, considering that a poet, if he is really to be a poet, must compose myths and not speeches, since I was not a maker of myths, I took those of Aesop, which I had at hand and knew, and turned into verse the first I came upon (διὰ ταῦτα δὴ οὗς προχείρους εἶχον μύθους καὶ ἠπιστάμην τοὺς Αἰσώπου, τούτων ἐποίησα οἷς πρώτοις ἐνέτυχον).

My interpretation of this passage is not that Socrates has a papyrus text of Aesop available to him in prison, like a bible in a Mormon hotel, but that Socrates uses Aesop because these are stories which he, like everyone else, knew off by heart, and this is something which Cebes would immediately understand. Christopher Rowe translates, 'I just took the stories that I had to hand and actually knew, which were Aesop's, and turned into verse the first ones that happened to occur to me',⁹⁰ and he has confirmed that he interprets the passage as I do.⁹¹ Although 'the first ones that occurred to me', *hois prōtois enetuchon*, could just mean 'the first ones I lighted on in my text', this interpretation of the Greek seems quite unlikely since one would naturally come across the first items in the text, and *hois prōtois enetuchon* isn't the obvious way of saying 'I started at the beginning'). But it is much more telling that the evidence for Plato's use of *procheiros* ('at hand') shows that *procheiros* for him has no tendency to imply physical proximity: for example, at *Theaetetus* 200c, something is metaphorically 'at hand' because it is available in the intellect (*dianoia*). But the fact that Socrates knows some Aesopic fables off by heart, as I would imagine almost all of his fellow citizens did, does not mean that there was no written collection of the fables available in late fifth-century Athens (see below). On the contrary, I would imagine that the one cultural phenomenon would very likely go in

⁹⁰ Rowe (2010) 91.

⁹¹ Email of Monday 11th October 2010.

tandem with the other, at least as soon as writing technologies had become accessible and used in elementary education.

To fast forward nearly two millennia, to the era of printing, the question of whether Aesop should be imagined as the literature of childhood becomes once again academically contested. Lerer, while arguing that Aesop must always have appealed to children, insists at the same time that ‘Europe’s first printers used Aesop’s Fables not just to sustain a literary heritage or offer guidance to the young, but to affirm their own authority as makers of the texts of culture’.⁹² During the 1470s and 1480s, Aesopic volumes with elaborate illustrations were amongst the very first books published in European vernaculars – German, French, and Caxton’s influential English edition, with famous woodcuts, of 1484. One group is easily identifiable as designed for school work. A Latin school book printed between 1512 and 1514 by Wynkyn de Worde at Westminster is entitled *Aesopus. Fabule Esope cum Comento* [sic]. The title page woodcut shows a schoolmaster teaching three boys or youths, who are seated on a school bench and holding books from which they read. These boys, however, are certainly not very young, and they are learning not English but Latin. Their Aesop is equivalent to that other mainstay of the medieval and early Renaissance school curriculum, *The Distichs of Cato*. Both Cato and Aesop were enormously helpful in teaching Latin, the mother-tongue of nobody by the time of Chaucer, and they were often treated as a pair.

The intended readership of the other early printed Aesops, those in modern languages, is unfortunately much less easy to define. There is no hard and fast rule for distinguishing between those meant for the very young, and those aimed at a much wider age group including adults. A controversy rages over the intended readership of Caxton’s edition; Warren Wooden thinks that the coordination of picture and text, the ‘pithy little dramas usually featuring talking

⁹² Lerer (2008) 52.

animals, and the simplicity of style’, made it ‘a natural book for children’.⁹³ Ellis, however, sees John Ogilby as author of ‘the first version for children’ in his verse edition of 1651,⁹⁴ followed by L’Estrange. But Aesop, with its suitability to visual illustration, has been used since before the invention of the printing press to learn to read mother-tongues as well as Latin or Greek, and has always been introduced much earlier in any individual’s education – and here an important point needs to be made. ‘Much earlier in any individual’s education’ does not automatically signify early childhood. The automatic connection of the act of learning to read with juveniles is itself a dangerous one to make when speaking of other times and places. Teaching tools for encouraging basic literacy are definitely not phenomena that can be studied under the exclusive heading of elementary children’s literature. People have always learned to read at all ages, especially in cultures with high levels of adult illiteracy, and have always acquired radically different functional levels of reading ability.

The tropes of social distinctions by age and by class, in relation to knowledge of Aesop, frequently became confused in the rhetoric of later ages. Take this frontispiece engraving to Philip Ayres’ 1689 *Mythologia ethica, or, Three centuries of Aesopian fables in English prose: done from Aesop, Phaedrus, Camerarius, and all other eminent authors on this subject*. The image depicts a rural idyll, with Aesopic animals looking on in the background. Cheiron the centaur is teaching the young Achilles, and the implication in conjunction with the title page is that he is teaching him the fables of Aesop. The Latin inscription beneath the engraving comprises two verses (418-19) from Germanicus Caesar's translation of Aratus’ Greek astronomical poem, *Phaenomena*, where the poet is describing the constellation Centaurus: ‘*Hic erit ille pius Chiro, iustissimus omnes / Inter nubigenas, et magni doctor Achillis.*’ (‘Here

⁹³ Wooden (1986) 7.

⁹⁴ Ellis (1968) 194.

will be seen that virtuous Cheiron, the most upright of all the cloud-born ones, and teacher of great Achilles'). But it will be noted that Achilles in the picture, far from being a small boy, has the stature, appearance and clothing of a refined young man.

Ever since the first printed editions, Aesop often featured in the biographies of prodigious self-educators who succeeded in learning to read, often in adulthood, and consequently to extract themselves from poverty and obscurity. A French teenaged farm-boy from Lorraine, by name of Valentin Jamerey-Duval, was illiterate until he came across an illustrated edition of Aesop's *Fables*. So drawn was he to the visual images that he asked some of his fellow-shepherds to explain the stories, and subsequently to teach him to read the book. As a result he developed an insatiable appetite for reading, and became a librarian to the Duke of Lorraine.⁹⁵ At the other end of the social scale, however, the future Edward VI began reading his Latinised Aesop at the age of seven years old, and a Christmas theatrical entertainment called *Aesop's Crow* was prepared for his amusement in 1552.⁹⁶ These last examples underline the question of whether it is even legitimate to talk about 'children's literature' or 'literature for children' as a recognised or recognisable category at all, at least prior to the late 18th century. What is the precise difference between a school book that teaches a child to read, whether in his or her native tongue or in another language, and a specimen of 'children's literature'?

An important piece of documentary evidence here is the 'Medici Aesop', a beautifully illustrated 15th-century manuscript collection of fables now in the New York Public Library (Spencer MS 50). It has been cogently argued that it was made for a Florentine child, the eight-year-old Piero de Medici (son of the most powerful man in the city, Lorenzo di Medici), in order to help him learn Greek.⁹⁷ But it is that very pedagogical function which (according to

⁹⁵ Lyons (2001) 49; Hall (2008*b*) 316.

⁹⁶ It may have been a satirical assault on his sister Mary's insistence on hearing the Mass: see Campbell (1934).

⁹⁷ Fahy (1989) 10.

some theorists) disqualifies these early Aesops for children from the category of what we understand by ‘children’s literature’, since the text is primarily a medium through which another language could be learned, indeed, for learning another language regarded as vital to a formal training that will turn Piero into an unusually educated man and humanist qualified to take up his position in the Florentine elite. The same could be said of Aesop being used to teach royal princesses the language appropriate to their gender and class in late 17th-century England: French. A fascinating volume by Pierre de Lainé, tutor to Princess Mary (the future Queen Mary) and her sister Anne, published in 1677, includes a telling collection of texts under the title *The Princely Way to the French Tongue*. There are extracts from the bible transposed into dialogue form, *Together with a larger explication of the French grammar, choice fables of Aesop in burlesque French, and lastly some models of letters in French and English*.

Literacy, whether in classical languages, acquired modern languages, or mother tongues, has just as often signified differences in social class as stage of development towards adulthood. This takes us into the second of the four aspects of Aesop which have been most unstable in the course of the reception of his *Fables*. The slippage between these two boundaries confuses our understanding of the social role of the *Fables* over the centuries. Yet the question of the ideological import of the *Fables* has always been rather fraught. There seems to be little doubt amongst classical scholars that the fables reflect at some level their prehistoric origins as ‘low’ or ‘popular’ culture, oral stories generated and circulated by slaves and lower-class individuals in antiquity. The biographical tradition which construed Aesop as a slave, especially as recorded in the *Life*, has of course fuelled this reading of his *Fables*. But agreement stops there as to how ‘progressive’ the ideology of the fables is. Some, such as Kenneth Rothwell, have identified Aesop’s *Fables*, especially in the classical period (he is discussing Aesop in

Aristophanes), as the literature of the underdog, with a slightly subversive content.⁹⁸ But Page DuBois in *Slaves and Other Objects* has argued persuasively that the *Fables* operated in antiquity in a rather reactionary way. She thinks that in ‘naturalising’ what are actually human social inequities by comparing them with inherent biological and natural differences between animals, the stories suggest that human inequities are immutable and unchallengeable as well.⁹⁹ My own view is that the *Fables* actually worked in both ways – they are indeed expressions of the tensions that underpinned a society based on slavery, but expressed that tension dialectically in ways that spoke with an equally loud voice to people on both side of the power divide. Moreover, I would argue that it is in the lucid crystallising of this tension that they were recognised as important in antiquity and have gone on to maintain their status as a classic almost ever since.

Yet the trouble with dialectically complex texts which crystallise the tension between different social perspectives—a tension which some people used to call an ideological manifestation of class struggle—is the ease with which they can be appropriated *by either side* in their subsequent reception. But more than any other ancient text, including Greek tragedy, the *Fables* of Aesop reveal a wholly divergent and contradictory reception in political terms. On the one hand, DuBois’ argument about the reactionary naturalisation of what are actually social divisions and hierarchies has been demonstrated in countless conservative or elitist readings. These include the witty Jacobite Aesopic satires well discussed by Hanazaki and Patterson.¹⁰⁰ They also include such horrors of Nazi children’s literature as *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid’ und Keinem Jud bei seinem Eid!* (‘Don’t trust a fox, or the promise of a Jew’)

⁹⁸ Rothwell (1995); this is the underlying assumption of much of Kurke (2011).

⁹⁹ DuBois (2003) 170-88.

¹⁰⁰ Hanazaki (1993-4); Patterson (1991).

by Elvira Bauer, which sold at least 70,000 copies, and is ‘horribly sadistic.’¹⁰¹ On the other hand, partly because Aesop and his Roman admirer and epigone Phaedrus were (or were said to be) slaves themselves, and partly because the appeal of the *Fables* transcended social boundaries maintained by the acquisition of literacy, they have proved magnetically attractive to radicals and revolutionaries of a much more modernising kind.

Sometimes this has directly affected the way the *Fables* have been retold. Walter Crane, for example, was not just a brilliant graphic designer and chromolithographer, but an ardent socialist, close friend of William Morris, Marxist and Trade Union supporter. *The Baby’s Own Aesop* (1887) uses short, rhymed versions of the fables, which Crane says in his Preface he has reproduced from a manuscript kindly lent to him by the wood-engraver to whom he had been apprenticed, William James Linton. Crane adds, however, ‘I have added a touch here and there’. But since Linton was as radical in his own Chartist-nationalist-republican way as the more socialist-internationalist-Marxist Crane, it is virtually impossible to tell which of them is responsible for the very individual character of the morals, embedded within the frame of the picture and text: King Log and King Stork, for example, demonstrates simply ‘DON’T HAVE KINGS’; the reader is told firmly that ‘The Farmer’s Treasure’ shows that ‘PRODUCTIVE LABOUR IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF WEALTH’. This kind of reception of Aesop reached its zenith in the revolutionary Marxist Hugo Gellert’s *Aesop Said So* (1936), in which the fables are retold to address their North American context, from an extreme leftist perspective.¹⁰²

The demonstrable susceptibility of the *Fables* to such radical political reinterpretation – to support any type of political agenda -- does not, however, fully explain their popularity across time in books designed to manipulate the political opinions of adults rather than children. This

¹⁰¹ Hürlimann (1967)183.

¹⁰² See Monoson (forthcoming).

has, I believe, far more to do with the sheer familiarity of the texts, which allows Nazi ideologues or Crane or Gellert (or more recently Malcolm X, who read them in Charleston State Prison and recommended them to his followers¹⁰³) to make their points through a set of metaphors to which a large proportion of their readership had access as very small children indeed. To reformulate an Aesopic fable is therefore to reawaken ancient infantile memories, and ancient narrative patterns, providing both the pleasure of the remembered and the memory of the authority which the printed word and the contents of books can exert over developing minds. It may also actually reactivate knowledge of stories absorbed in the more formal context of a school curriculum.

The third shifting aspect of Aesop's *Fables* has been their relationship with Christianity. Aesop's fables were so widely approved as constituents of the Medieval and Renaissance syllabus partly because they were felt to be compatible, like the Stoicism of Cato, with Christian morality. Martin Luther, briefly mentioned above, changed the course of Aesopic history in terms of the attractiveness of the *Fables* to Protestants when he translated twenty of these fables in 1530, expressing his great admiration for them in the Preface, and was urged by his collaborator Philipp Melanchthon to complete the whole. Gottfried Arnold, the celebrated Lutheran theologian, and librarian to Frederick I, king of Prussia, mentions that the great Reformer valued the Fables of Aesop next after the Holy Scriptures.¹⁰⁴ Aesop has ever since been found – to my mind, rather puzzlingly given its rather brutal, even Nietzschean, conception of power relations -- compatible with the education of Christian readers. This is partly because the morals can be made to sound similar to commandments delivered to the Jews on Mount Sinai, which makes Aesop a bit like Moses; a good illustration of this type of

¹⁰³ Malcolm X (1965) ***

¹⁰⁴ Schirokauer (1947).

parallel is the underlying moral, ‘Thou shalt not envy’, as expressed in Benjamin Harris’ telling of ‘The Hawk and Birds’ in his *The Fables of Young Aesop* (1700).¹⁰⁵ Another factor is the parallels people have always heard between the idioms of the parables of the New Testament as told by Jesus and the idiom of the *Fables*.¹⁰⁶ Such coupling of Aesop with the bible was still common enough in the 1950s: Pamela Travers, the author of the ‘Mary Poppins’ books, was once asked what stories she would recommend for contemporary children and she replied: ‘The nursery rhymes, the fairy tales, the Bible, and, of course, Aesop’s Fables.’¹⁰⁷

A further reason why Christian educators liked Aesop was certainly its lack of what they saw as dangerous supernatural elements. In a world where Christian fundamentalists can still try to get Harry Potter banned on the ground that it promotes witchcraft and occultism, it should not be forgotten that Aesop must have seemed a safe alternative to the fairy tale tradition of stories for children. This is certainly one reason why John Newbery (sometimes said to be the founding father of children’s literature in the earlier 18th century, even though his books are thoroughly didactic) thought fables were so ideal: he not only included several in his seminal *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* of 1744, but subsequently published his own *Fables in Verse* under the Greco-Hebraic pseudonym ‘Abraham Aesop’ (1765). He disliked intensely the idea of misleading young minds with the irrational or the fantastic. Newbery was the main conduit for the dissemination of the rational, enlightenment Lockean idea of educational reading for children in the USA, and it was his influence that led to one or two extreme ‘rationalising’ reactions to Aesop’s *Fables*. Take one anonymous book published in New York in 1815 but much influenced by the Evangelical educationalist Hannah More, for example, a collection of children’s reading entitled *The Happy Family: or, Winter Evenings’ Employment* (New York,

¹⁰⁵ Harris (1700) 36-7.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. the discussion of Beavis (1990).

¹⁰⁷ Griswold (2005).

1815). It includes a retelling of ‘The Lion and the Mouse’, adorned with one of the beautiful Aesopic woodcuts by the Northumbrian artist Thomas Bewick. But in a section inserted before the fable, entitled ‘THE LION,’ the children learned about actual lions—their rage, fearlessness, and horrible roaring. They learned that *in reality* a lion would devour a mouse, not befriend it.¹⁰⁸ The fable was probably reprinted because of its instructive fable that (Christian) charity would receive its reward. But towards the end, the author returns to the admonitory tone, and states that children must be careful of any lions they actually encounter in exhibitions of fauna.¹⁰⁹ This realistic explanation was felt to be necessary to prevent children being misled by the unscientific nature of fiction.

The ease with which Aesop could and can be accommodated to Christianity also explains the ease with which his *Fables* have spread with European colonists and imperial administrations all over Planet Earth. Aesop’s status as a ‘world author’ as well as a children’s author is the last of his aspects to be discussed here. As mentioned earlier, Aesop in Spanish went to the New World in substantial quantities even in the 16th century. British imperialists not only took Aesop in English abroad wherever they went, but were always concerned to provide versions in the native languages of the people they conquered, or with whom they otherwise interacted commercially, in order to foster literacy among them. Aesop had made it into Chinese by 1850, Pushto (Afghanistan/Pakistan) by 1871, Japanese by 1872, Maori, Korean, Swahili, and Turkish by 1900 and Fijian by 1902.¹¹⁰ British imperial educators and missionaries in India were particularly convinced that their native targets needed to read Aesop in their own languages: besides John Gilchrist’s 1802 polyglot Aesop in Hindi, Persian, Arabic,

¹⁰⁸ Anon. (1815) 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ Anon (1815) 10.

¹¹⁰ Thom, Robert (1850); Raverty (1871); James (1872); Aesop (1883); Methodist Church (Fiji) (1902).

Bengali and Sanskrit of 1803,¹¹¹ Marathi, Kannada, and Gujarati printed editions were all published by 1852.¹¹² Some of these were retranslations of canonical earlier editions such as that of Croxall or LaFontaine. Across the Atlantic, in 1893, some earnest North Americans decided to translate into the Sioux language Dakota, in a single volume, Aesop's *Fables* and a life of Abraham Lincoln.¹¹³ To trace the history of the translation of Aesop more recently, during the postcolonial period and in tandem with the rising nationalisms that followed the breakup of the Soviet Eastern bloc, is to trace an *equally* political history, since ethnic groups and nation states wishing to assert independence and an autonomous cultural identity often manifest this in the cultural sphere by translating Aesop into their language – Tamil in 1969, Bosnian in 1994, Macedonian in 1996, Kurdish in 2002.¹¹⁴

Aesop should therefore be celebrated as one of the ancient authors with the greatest claim to the status of 'world literature' as defined by David Damrosch—namely, an author who has risen above all linguistic and historical boundaries, and has proved infinitely linguistically translatable—and culturally transferable—to the most divergent national and ethnic traditions and milieux. He must be granted a supremely honoured place in what Pascale Casanova has inspiringly entitled 'the world republic of letters'.¹¹⁵ Aesop's *Fables* have completely transcended not just national or 'Indo-European' traditions of literature, but geopolitical and

¹¹¹ Gilchrist (1803).

¹¹² Bombay Native Education Society (1837); Elliot (1840); Aesop (1852).

¹¹³ Garvie, Kitts and Cox (1893).

¹¹⁴ These dates *ante quem* have been established solely by searching under the relevant languages on the Worldcat database at <http://www.worldcat.org/advancedsearch>. It is possible that earlier versions in each of these languages exists, but even if that is the case, it is still significant that Aesop was translated at this precise historical moment.

¹¹⁵ Damrosch (2003); Casanova (2004).

linguistic barriers of a much more global kind. They have also interacted with and stimulated new initiatives in the compelling and timeless generic form of the fable and the ‘Aesopic’, cryptic, faux-naïve fabulist-narrator. Fables have since the medieval period appeared alongside, or even merged completely, with fables from non-classical traditions, beginning with the twelfth-century fables of Reynard the fox. The cultural presence of ‘Aesopic’ fables has certainly encouraged the collection of indigenous fables in other traditions, such as the Swahili animal fables of Kenya and animal-dominated allegorical wisdom stories of the poor of Haiti, who largely originated in Africa; these stories are held by some of them to have descended directly from Aesop himself, presented not as a Greek but an African, by etymologising his name as a corruption of Aithops.¹¹⁶

What makes the ‘World Literature’ status even more appropriate is that the *Fables* of Aesop, who (the Greeks said) was an Asiatic barbarian, take us back far beyond the Greeks to the cradle of world storytelling in the lands around the eastern Mediterranean. Fables similar to those associated with Aesop appear in the Aramaic papyrus of about 500 BCE recording the story and sayings of Ahikar. The papyrus was found in 1906 or 1907 in the Jewish temple at Elephantine, Aswan. The dialect in which the sayings themselves are expressed is however of greater antiquity, belonging to southern Syria in the 8th to 7th century BCE. The very antiquity of this papyrus makes it more likely that at least some truth lies behind Clement of Alexandria’s claim that sayings from the story of Ahikar were known, from a stele in Babylon, to none other than the philosopher Democritus (*Stromat*, i. 15, 69.4 = Pseudo-Democritus 68 B 299 D-K). Ahikar’s stance is that of adviser to his nephew, whom he has adopted having been unable to

¹¹⁶ See Ivy (1941) 493.

beget a son himself. The boy, according to the story, did not take kindly to being hectored by his adoptive father.¹¹⁷

Yet it is to even further back in time than Syrian wisdom literature that we can trace at least two of Aesop's *Fables*. One example is a proverb about she-dogs in a hurry giving birth to blind puppies, quoted in 421 in Aristophanes' *Peace* 1075-9. The same proverb, amazingly, is partially preserved in a collection of Sumerian proverbs published in 1958: 'The bitch is weakened... the puppies' eyes will not open.'¹¹⁸ The fable of the eagle and the fox in *Birds* 651-3 has also been traced to an archetype in Mesopotamia.¹¹⁹ Given the transformations, but also the sheer stamina and universal appeal to all age groups of the Aesopic *Fables* in world cultural history, it is difficult not to endorse the following conclusion drawn by Jerry Griswold, former Director of San Diego State University's National Center for the Study of Children's Literature, in an influential discussion of children's literature: 'If people had to choose only one literary work to send in a rocket ship out to distant galaxies and as representative of our lives on earth, that work might likely be Aesop's *Fables*.'¹²⁰ The next stage in the transformation of Aesop's *Fables* may take him from literature of the world to literature beyond our galaxy.

¹¹⁷ Kottsieper (2008); Hall (2013) 297.

¹¹⁸ Gordon (1958) 69; see especially Moran (1978).

¹¹⁹ Williams (1956).

¹²⁰ Griswold (2005).

Chapter 4

Perspective Matters: Roman Britain in Children's Novels

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Until at least the 1960s, Rome in children's books about Roman Britain typically represents order, discipline, and self-control: one need only think of Kipling's upright centurion Parnesius in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) or the straight roads and sturdy walls still marking the English landscape. When native Britons such as Kipling's painted Picts appear, they are outlandish and childlike. As Henry Treece's author's note to *The Eagles Have Flown* (1954) makes clear, child readers of these books must aspire to be more Roman: he announces that the book is 'about people rather like ourselves—all except those who were more like Apache Indians and gangsters!' (9). For writers like Kipling, the historical evidence was all one-sided, written by the conquerors; besides, Roman values thought necessary to civilize a savage people could also perform the didactic mission of encouraging unruly children to become responsible adults.

As archaeology made more details available about the everyday lives, art, and beliefs of the early Britons, writers of historical fiction for children could plausibly portray British characters who uphold their own values of individual freedom and creativity, often turning Rome into the cruel, faceless enemy, the insensitive imperial power insisting on total conformity.¹²¹ In several versions of the life of Boudica for younger readers, many responding to the 1988 Educational Reform Act that assigned Roman Britain to ages 7-11 in the English National Curriculum, a focus on 'Celtic national pride' (Watson (1986) 55) leaves room only for bullying Romans. At

¹²¹ See Longworth et al. (1986) for the contribution of aerial photography to the discovery of rural settlements (54-55); and Hingley (2000) for ideological shifts that led to increased interest in everyday lives of indigenous people in general and ancient Britons in particular.

the same time, these picturebooks and chapter books still convey the message that Boudica's rebellion failed because she was insufficiently grown up: in Emma Fischel's *Boudicca* (2000), for example, pictures by Peter Chesterton show her playing and dreaming of battle as a child but then never holding a weapon as queen while men around her wave spears and swords.

So far, whether from a Roman or British perspective, these books illustrate what Perry Nodelman (2008) has identified as generic characteristics of children's literature, especially foregrounding of binary oppositions such as child-adult, powerless-powerful, wild-civilized, female-male, innocence-wisdom (227-32). Ancient Briton-Roman neatly follows such a list. However, four novels from the late 1970s challenge the neatness of this classification. Rosemary Sutcliff, Mary Ray, Ann Lawrence, and Clive King all wrote for young readers, but in these four books, multiple perspectives encourage a more balanced view of both Roman and Briton. Lawrence's *Between the Forest and the Hills* (1977), Sutcliff's *Song for a Dark Queen* (1978), Ray's *Rain from the West* (1980), and King's *Ninny's Boat* (1980) all show how a variety of narrative voices can explode the stereotypes and also raise questions about imperialism.

Of the four, Sutcliff's *Song for a Dark Queen* is the most conventional, but it is strikingly different from her other books about Roman Britain, where Rome does represent the light-bringing, civilizing influence on the darkness of early Britain.¹²² In the others, the focalizing characters are usually young Romans, overcoming obstacles to prove their manhood, but here the portrayal of Boudicca and her time is split between two character-narrators, only one of whom is a young Roman. As Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan (2012) point out, in the 1954 *Eagle of the Ninth* Sutcliff promotes an understanding of the cultural differences between Roman and Briton through the 'close *personal* relationship' between Marcus and his slave Esca

¹²² See Wright (1981) and Roberts (2007) for insightful analyses of Sutcliff's more familiar novels about Roman Britain and of Kipling's influence in them. Neither considers *Song for a Dark Queen*, however.

(29, italics in original), but in this darker novel, the British and Roman characters never meet. For the first six chapters, the perspective is all British, through the eyes of Cadwan, an older man who has been harper for two generations of the royal family and is thus professionally responsible for telling the story of their deeds. His non-Roman values are illustrated by his favourable judgment of Prasutagus, the man chosen to marry Boudicca, based on the young man's skilful handling of horses, his appearance of strength, and his gentler qualities of laughter and thoughtfulness. 'He had a fighter's face,' Cadwan muses, 'but a thinker's also' (23). Cadwan's role as harper takes him to meet the emperor Claudius, whom he also judges favourably for similar reasons: although the emperor seems small and weak, 'like young Prasutagus, he had a thinking face' (37). For the harper, the influence of Rome is seen in objects like mosaic floors, Samian pottery, and bronze lamps, even in the glass cup that Prasutagus presents to Boudicca as a bride gift (the cup, which sounds like the Lycurgus Cup in the British Museum, could not have existed as early as the first century, but Sutcliff makes it a memorable object in the novel). He also notes the oppressive combination of 'pot-bellied officials' and soldiers, the 'Red Crests' who give authority to government orders to disarm and pay tribute (48).

After the intensity of Boudicca's grief when Prasutagus dies, the shift to a cheerful, young Roman narrator offers some relief. While the harper speaks directly to readers, Agricola is writing a letter to his mother in Southern Gaul; what seems normal and customary to the harper is strange to the young tribune. Newly arrived in Britain, he looks for Roman amenities like wine shops. While he does not understand what readers have already learned about British customs and assumes that the death of Prasutagus with no surviving sons means the end of the royal line, his negative reaction to his host, Decianus Catus, anticipates the coming conflict. His assessment of the procurator focuses on the man's self-serving greed: 'Catus is in fact the soul of hospitality; but only, I should judge, to those he thinks may be in a position to repay

him in one way or another in the future' (65). Agricola does not witness the procurator's outrageous treatment of Boudicca, but Cadwan does.

Through the alternation of the two narrators, Sutcliff increases the effect of foreboding and leads to the dark conclusion. Cadwan remains at the center of activity while Agricola reports from a distance, becoming less cheerful as he comes closer to the fighting. Both accept killing in battle but are repelled by what they see as excesses of their own side. Cadwan describes the death of the last defenders of Camulodunum with respect for their courage but then refuses to tell about or remember the death Boudicca ordered for the women; Agricola reports taking 'personal pleasure in killing the man' (147) who cuts down his horse but then stops just short of criticizing the governor for allowing the soldiers to massacre 'everything that moved' (162) after the final battle.¹²³

In the end, Sutcliff's narrative must follow the documented order of events, but the device of two narrators allows readers to understand and sympathize with Boudicca while still not blaming Rome. Agricola, who as Sutcliff points out in an author's note at the end did become governor of Britain, recognizes the fault of Roman officials, especially the procurator, in provoking the rebellion and is determined not to make the same mistakes if he ever has a chance to govern. However, there are no winners: after the battle, Boudicca avoids Roman capture by drinking poison from that same Roman glass cup that was Prasutagus's bride gift and then shattering the cup on the hearth stone, a gesture that undercuts Agricola's hopefulness. And technically, neither narrative even exists: Agricola finishes his last letter determined to destroy it, to spare his mother from its unpleasantness, and Cadwan's song ends with the words 'Nothing any more' (174) and his death. In this novel without child characters (except in

¹²³ Carolyn Williams (2009) discusses Cadwan's reaction but not Agricola's (157-58), while also highlighting the device of two narrators as Sutcliff's way of exploiting historians' 'uncertainties' about moral identification with Romans or Britons (189-90).

Cadwan's stories of Boudicca as a child in the first two chapters), no one preserves innocence or returns to a safe home, and the ending is far from happy. The less-than-200-page length and the historical subject make it a children's novel, but not a typical one.

Mary Ray's *Rain from the West*, set about ten years later, also has two character-narrators. They both speak from a Roman perspective, outsiders in Britain, but emphasize how the Empire extended beyond Rome. The two narrators are identified by name in headings, with no internal implied narratee: the young tribune Flavius is like many of Rosemary Sutcliff's protagonists, needing to prove himself after an unsuccessful first military posting in Germany, but the other narrator, Pyrrha, provides the new perspective of a young wife from Corinth whose arranged marriage to a Greek scholar has brought with it responsibility for an eleven-year-old stepson. While Ray includes no documented characters like Boudicca or Agricola, readers of her earlier books have already encountered the two narrators and two men who are or become important to both, the freedman Hylas and the senior tribune Camillus.¹²⁴

Through these four characters, Ray makes clear that an imperial power on the frontier must learn from or adapt to native ways if it is to succeed. Flavius's first encounter with native Britons sets the tone: he has been wondering what Roman conquest has meant to ordinary people when their wagon accidentally runs over a small boy playing in the road. Because Hylas and Pyrrha's husband, both interested in healing, immediately begin caring for the injured boy, there is no incident as Flavius thinks there would have been in Germany. Hylas suggests that they have not taken the usual imperial approach: 'I suppose the people here are used to soldiers who throw a coin to the parents to pay for the hurt and drive straight on' (39). These Romans cause the injury but then save a life, expressing the doubleness of imperial conquest.

¹²⁴ Pyrrha's mother tells her story to *Pyrrha in A Tent for the Sun* (1971); Hylas and Camillus are introduced in *The Ides of April* (1974) and feature in *Sword Sleep* (1975), which introduces Flavius as a thirteen-year-old; and Hylas' story continues in *Beyond the Desert Gate* (1977).

Neither Flavius nor Pyrrha is a child—both already have adult responsibilities at the beginning of the novel—but both are interested in learning, and both do learn, in a pattern much like that of many Young Adult novels. Flavius gains physical strength and confidence in his own judgment and ability to lead, so that he is eager to continue his military career even after an accident has forced his hero Camillus into civilian life; Pyrrha follows a pattern more typical of females, experiencing brief independence after her husband's death and both giving support to and receiving it from a young British woman, also newly widowed, but then gladly marrying Hylas when she realizes that he loves her. For both, though, learning to connect with other people and to recognize that power brings responsibility is important. The ending of *Rain from the West* can be hopeful where that of *Song for a Dark Queen* is not, Ray suggests, because at least a few men like Camillus wonder about Roman right to rule. As Pyrrha muses, Camillus is intensely loyal to Rome but is also 'a man who questioned what he did, who did not accept the standards of the men he worked with without questioning them' (107). The last words of the novel balance the benefits of imperial rule against the possibilities of change represented by the rain. Flavius is the narrator of the last section and looks forward to the army's project to bring peace and good roads to the frontier farm where the others are settling, but Pyrrha counters: "But the rain will still come from the west," said Pyrrha, smiling' (175). There are no winners in *Song for a Dark Queen*, but here everyone wins by leaving greed for wealth and power behind. Is it a children's novel or not, then? The characters are making a new home that promises security but also change, which will certainly include more death—the only child character, Pyrrha's stepson, is marginal—but again, it's historical fiction, under 200 pages.

Ann Lawrence's *Between the Forest and the Hills* is set at the end of Roman Britain rather than the beginning and raises even more questions about perspectives toward the Roman Empire and the connections between Rome and children's books. Lawrence's setting is about 400 years later than the time period chosen by Sutcliffe and Ray and even farther away from

Rome, but the characters are more concerned with maintaining Roman values, seeing themselves as preserving something in the face of change, which in this time is coming from the pagan Saxons. As the title suggests, place is almost as important in this novel as character or plot: one character sums it up when he says 'So the Saxons may outnumber the Britons in the end—so what? It's the land that makes the people. In another hundred—two hundred years *They* will be *Us*. All we have to do is hold things together until the process is complete' (220, italics in original). In this established Roman town somewhere in the west, between forest and hills, holding things together means preserving family and religion, teaching Virgil and Cicero to the young, repairing mosaic floors, drinking Falernian wine, and wearing the toga (no matter how inappropriate to the climate) at official functions. But although customs differ, Lawrence portrays the Saxons' values as much the same as the Romans'. For example, each group even has an elder statesman who regards every public meeting as an occasion to drone on in platitudes: 'As the proverbs rolled out one after the other, it gradually dawned on the Iscians that they were in fact listening to exactly the same speech as the magistrate had made, only translated into Saxon aphorisms' (200). The fact that no actual Roman province called Iscium existed historically makes it possible for Lawrence to speculate about what might have happened in such a place—the 1999 U.S. reprint has the label 'A Historical Fantasy' on the cover, apparently to make sure readers are not misled.

Also contributing to the importance of place is the absence of a clear protagonist, either child or adult. The character who speaks about holding things together is Sextus Julius Frontalis, the head of the Roman government in the province, and his listener is Malleus the bishop—both grown men with adult offspring and both important characters, but neither having the status of protagonist. Unlike Sutcliffe's and Ray's books, Lawrence's has two important child characters, but they are not protagonists either, although they are the ones who bring Roman-Britons and Saxons together. Ten-year-old Falx decides to run away because he feels

supplanted by his brother's new baby and finds younger Ulna, who has run away from her Saxon family because she feels crowded out by step-siblings. A typical children's book would focus on them and their safe return to loving families, but this one is not typical, with its emphasis on larger concerns of maintaining peace between warring cultures. That emphasis means that many characters focalize the events, giving readers the perspectives of children and adults, Romans and Saxons, Christians and pagans. While the perspectives of Frontalis and Malleus are privileged—the novel begins with a sort of historical narrative 'Concerning the Constitution of the City and Province of Iscium' by Frontalis and ends with conversation between the two men and the external narrator's descriptive comment—they are constantly opposed or undercut by other views.

Also undercutting the serious adults is the presence of humour and fantasy in the person of a one-eyed traveling merchant known as Quintus Pronator Teres, who also plays an important role in averting bloodshed between the two cultures. He helps Falx and Ulna find the way back to Iscium, arranges her return to her father, and invents strategies that rely on his knowledge of the distant future, often following a remark with 'as someone will say one day' (the first time, he is quoting the trickster Autolycus from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* 69). Most entertainingly, he teaches the Iscians to sing the Hallelujah Chorus, which the Saxon leader hears as 'a sound at once powerful and outlandish' (139) and decides not to attack. After the negotiation that establishes peace, though, Teres speaks for a Rome that Frontalis thinks has decayed, representing 'dignity, order, reason.' He reassures Frontalis: "Rome isn't a place," said Teres, swirling the wine round in his cup. 'Rome is an idea. And it still exists all right. It exists here. It is what we've been playing at, and it'll go on as long as someone goes on playing the same sort of game'" (209-10). Taking the long view, he even sounds like Sutcliff's very serious Roman characters, with Roman order as bringing light to darkness: 'The longer people live side

by side in peace, the more likely they are to go on doing it. The longer you can keep the light burning, the shorter the time will seem to the dawn' (210).

As in Sutcliff's *Song for a Dark Queen*, an object like the British Museum's Lycurgus Cup combines light and dark to bring conflicting perspectives together (and such a cup is more likely to have existed in the fifth century than in Boudica's time). When Ulna first finds the cup in a deserted villa and they discover that its green color changes to red as it is held to the light, it is unusual for both, but Falx can put it in a context: 'Falx had never seen anything like it before, but it was certainly in keeping with the style of the villa,' the external narrator comments (64). The description suggests a mythological subject even though Falx doesn't recognize it: 'It seemed to represent several casually draped men and women and a couple of children completely naked, all dancing among trees' (64). As Ulna starts learning about Christianity, though, she decides that the figures represent Jesus, his family, and some angels, and the bishop's son, knowing their pagan origin, thinks she has a point. He says 'It's one of those things that seem to have become more than their makers intended. I think I feel the same about it as Ulna does. She calls it the Cup of Light' (195). So the pagan, Roman object is installed on the altar of the Christian church because of its meaning to a pagan, Saxon child, neatly providing a symbol of the conflation of the cultures. For Lawrence, what is usually known as the Dark Ages might as easily be seen as 'an age of miracles.... Of saints and heroes!' (220), as Frontalis says their children will see it. With its imaginary Iscium, *Between the Forest and the Hills* is the only book I have found about the end of Roman Britain in which the threatened violence never happens.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Contrast, for example, Sutcliff's *The Lantern Bearers* (1959) and *Sword at Sunset* (Peacock edition for young adults 1965); Vera Cumberlege's *Carry a Long Knife* (1970); Henry Treece's *The Eagles Have Flown* (1954).

As Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan (2012) point out, most books set in this period include some version of King Arthur, and they mention Lawrence in an endnote as 'one of the exceptions' (187). Lawrence certainly does explore the 'processes of integration and assimilation, matters of obvious relevance in multicultural Britain' that they find in Sutcliff's earlier books (46). Another late-1970s writer who foregrounds the idea of cultures learning from each other and questions the imperial project (while also including a glimpse of King Arthur and the final battle) is Clive King in *Ninny's Boat* (1980). While this is a more typical children's book than the three discussed so far in that the focus is on child characters, King also calls familiar binary oppositions into question, especially *Us* and *Them*.

The outsider perspective prevails in the character-narrator, a boy who does not know how old he is or where he belongs: at the beginning, Ninny is a slave to Angles in what is now Denmark, but the voyage to Britain leads to the discovery of his home among Picts and his name, Ninian. His ideas of the Roman Empire are negative, coming from Angles who were slaves like the builder Wryght, who learned superior skills from the Romans but rejects those that depend on slave labor (100). When Ninny meets a Roman in a villa with a mosaic floor, the Roman is a dark-skinned boy who is identified as one of 'the Brits' and says that his 'father came from Africa to help run the Empire army' (195). He continues, 'It was the best Empire there has ever been, and now you people have spoiled it all' (195). That arrogance, his habit of referring to 'my *pater*,' and his mangling of Elfrida's name make him sound like a posh Victorian schoolboy or the kind of Roman who is central to many children's novels before 1960. For example, Geoffrey Trease's *Message to Hadrian* (1955; *Word to Caesar* in the U.K., 1956) has a fifteen-year-old Roman narrator who calls his local girlfriend Barbara rather than attempt to pronounce her name, and in Joan Selby-Lowndes's *Bronze Eagles* (1946), the Roman protagonist, also fifteen, renames the fair-haired northern slave he is allowed to buy Leonardus. While both characters do learn some respect for local culture, neither novel

suggests that learning others' names is important, and Selby-Lowndes's external narrator continues to use the name Leonardus after the slave has become a leader of his own people. However, by letting readers see events through the eyes of a non-Roman, King puts imperial arrogance in a less flattering light. For Ninny, the dark-skinned Roman-British boy just adds to the diversity of his newly rediscovered home.

Further, Ninny's companion on the journey is the Angle Elfrida, whose ability to climb trees and eagerness to go with them makes Ninny question his own assumptions about gender. He and the Roman-Briton both laugh at her vision of 'an Anglish queen of a British *Empire*!' (196, italics original), her way of countering Roman arrogance, but what distinguishes Ninny is his unwillingness to participate in any of the rivalries. He is pleased when Pictish Mab identifies him as 'one of us' (183) in a language he remembers, but he doesn't join in her toast to 'The ones who got here first!' (197). Even after he has finally found his true name of Ninian, after the man who preached Christianity to the Picts, and his own people, he chooses to return to the Angle-folk, to remind them that the land can belong to all. His last words repeat what he said at the beginning when trying to save himself, a dog, a cow, some chickens, a cat, and an old woman from the flood: 'There's room for us all if we don't rock the boat' (243). His discovery about whose land it is can apply as well to the twenty-first century as the fifth, and would also have been timely in 1980.

For Rosemary Sutcliff, Mary Ray, Ann Lawrence, and Clive King in the late 1970s, a decade marked in the U.S. by the aftermath of the Vietnam War and in Britain by IRA violence, strikes, and conflict in former British colonies in Africa as well as the rise of postcolonial studies (see Bradford (2007) 97), writing about Roman Britain provided an opportunity to explore the limits of imperial power. In their different ways, all four express much less certainty than earlier children's books set in Roman Britain that the imperial power was right to impose its values on indigenous people. Further, all produced books that are not typical of children's novels:

Sutcliff, Ray, and Lawrence give predominance to adult characters and concerns, and all four show acceptance of change even when it brings uncertainty and pain and blur binary oppositions like winning and losing, powerful and powerless. Any affirmation of Roman values like discipline and order is balanced by implied condemnation of Roman arrogance and greed. Daphne Kutzer (2000) has shown how the idea that empire is 'natural and good' has been promoted in classic children's books from Kipling through the twentieth century (xvi), suggesting that avoidance of such an imperialist stance might keep an otherwise excellent book from attaining classic status. These four novels, with their questioning of imperialism, can still speak to us today, and they deserve to be better known.

Myths of change

The Paradox of Pan as a Figure of Regeneration in Children's Literature

Gillian Bazovsky

Metamorphosis is a powerful ingredient of Pan the goat-god's literary presentation, and two tales of Pan and his music are recounted by Ovid: the first (1.689-712) features the nymph Syrinx who by way of escaping her goatish pursuer runs into the reeds and is transmuted into the musical instrument with which Pan is forever associated; the second (11.146-93) relates to Midas' acquisition of asses' ears for choosing Pan's earthy syrinx playing over Apollo's heavenly lyre.

This traditional depiction of Pan as an uncouth deity who inhabits the wilder boundaries of human behaviour would seem to make him quite unsuitable for children's reading; and yet Pan figures feature in four Edwardian works: *Peter Pan*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Secret Garden* (the central text to be explored here) and *The Crock of Gold*. This chapter reveals how regeneration of old mythic forms could render an avatar of Pan acceptable for inclusion in the genre of children's literature at a time when some were seeking to replace aspects of conventional Christianity with an alternative Arcadian vision.

Pan and his reception

Pan was originally a Greek deity, a divine version of the animal the Greeks call 'husband of goats', or perhaps an archetype of both goat and herdsman, his name stemming from pastoral origins in Arcadia, *pan* being the root for *paōn* 'pastor', 'herdsman', 'pastoral' and *pabulum*

'nourishment'.¹²⁶ However, the genitive form *panos*, identifiable with *pan* meaning 'all', forms an etymological pun, allowing interplay between his humble origins as a country goat-god and a cosmic significance as described in the *Orphic Hymn to Pan* (1-5).¹²⁷ Furthermore, Pan was frequently identified as the son of Hermes (*Homeric Hymn to Pan* 19.25-40) and, according to Herodotus, gained status in the wider Greek world by helping the Athenians to defeat the Persians (6.105).

The goat-god's connections with childhood can be dated to a tradition that told of his presence at the birth of Pindar in the sixth century BC, recorded in Philostratus' *Imagines* (2.12). The roots of Pan's literary presentation can be traced to early Greek hymns. Some lines (25-45) from the anonymous *Homeric Hymn to Pan* believed to date to the fifth century BC describe Pan's own childhood, his comic disposition and his strange appearance that terrifies his nurse, and affords a glimpse of his musical skills as a youthful syrinx player at the centre of a circle of dancing nymphs.

Pan is a threshold god who stands at the boundary between the primitive instincts of childhood and the civilised behaviour of adult society, thus he is found in novels of the Greco-Roman period in episodes about gender and relationships of adolescent characters. His transformative qualities are described in Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* at 8.6 where a tradition presents Pan's music as a source of affirmation for protestations of virginity. Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* depicts Pan as a deity interacting with human events, whose attributes at times (1.24.1, 1.20-21, 2.37, 2.39.5) merge with those of male characters such as the young herdsmen Daphnis and Dorkon. In Longus' inset narratives Pan is described in his familiar role as a potentially threatening force to maidens and critically as an agent of metamorphosis: Pitys becomes a pine-tree (1.27.2); Syrinx is transposed into the musical instrument of Pan's

¹²⁶ Hillman and Roscher (1972) 21.

¹²⁷ 'All' derived from *pantes*, *Homeric Hymn to Pan* 19.46.

sublimated desires (2.34.1-3); we might add Echo, whom Pan causes to be violently dismembered by shepherds (3.23.1-4). Yet, it is significant that in this novel, at the behest of the nymphs, Pan also becomes Chloe's protector rather than pursuer, a guise which partially matches his brief appearance as benign counsellor to Psyche in Apuleius' tale of 'Cupid and Psyche' (5.25). In Virgil's *Eclogues*, Pan is both pitiable, as a love-lorn god defeated by Eros (10.69), and respected as dignified guardian of both sheep and shepherds (2.39). Thus in classical mythology and literature Pan is both an agent of metamorphosis and a multiform god, attributes which shape his future appearance in English literature.

From the Renaissance onwards Pan quickly migrated from his classical roots, and his appeal both as a disreputable piping comedic figure as well as an awe-inspiring universal deity no doubt contributed to his standing as the most popular classical deity to be found in English literature.¹²⁸ In his essay 'Pan's Pipes' Robert Louis Stevenson later observed that 'Pan is not dead, but of all the classic hierarchy alone survives in triumph'.¹²⁹ The Romantic poets created new perceptions of Pan, who symbolised an alternative to traditional religious values. In April 1817, the month when Keats began the first book of *Endymion* which included the 'Hymn to Pan', pagan religion was extensively discussed in the columns of the *The Examiner*. Keats read at least one of these articles, 'To the English People: Letter VI', and praised it in a letter to Hunt (who was then staying with the Shelleys at Marlow) as a 'Battering Ram against Christianity' (Letters, i.137).¹³⁰ A cult of Pan had been celebrated by Shelley and his circle in the 'Arcadian' setting of the woods surrounding his house in Marlowe, alluded to in the

¹²⁸ See Law (1955): '106 items (listed) under heading 'Pan'; his nearest competitors are Helen, Orpheus, Persephone, and Aphrodite, with 68, 63, 60, and 57 references respectively ... it is the spate of Arcadiac poems between 1895 and 1914 that account for Pan's commanding lead.' Merivale (1969) 118.

¹²⁹ Stevenson (1878) 5.

¹³⁰ Roe (1998) 81.

correspondence between Shelley and Thomas Jefferson Hogg as well as between Hogg and Leigh Hunt:

‘I hope you paid your devotions as usual to the Religio Loci, and hung up an evergreen. If you all go on so, there will be a hope some day that old Vansittart & others will be struck with a Panic terror, and that a voice will be heard along the water saying “the Great God Pan is alive again”, - upon which the villagers will leave off starving, and singing profane hymns, and fall to dancing again.’¹³¹

Oscar Wilde enlisted the figure of Pan to lament stifling conventions.¹³² The final quatrain from ‘Pan. Double Villanelle’ echo the appeal of Sicilian Daphnis to Pan in Theocritus *Idyll* 1 to leave the mountains of Arcadia:

‘Ah, leave the hills of Arcady,
Thy satyrs and their wanton play,
This modern world hath need of thee....’

and was identified in terms of Pan's demise by Alfred Douglas in 'Hymn to Physical Beauty' following his imprisonment in 1895. Elizabeth Barrett Browning delivered a passionate renouncement of the attractions of paganism in her long poem ‘Dead Pan’. The topic stemmed from Plutarch's *De Defectu Oraculorum* 17 where a ship's pilot in the reign of Tiberius reported a mysterious voice announcing that Great Pan was dead. Such examples nurtured a tradition of equating Pan with the devil and this thematic demise of Pan, converging with other strands arising from the rejection of conventional Christianity, provided a context for interpreting Pan as an Edwardian symbol of regeneration along a spectrum of both sacred and secular meaning. However, with the emergence of Edwardian children's literature the image of Pan, although still exploited sensationally in adult fiction, was about to be replenished.

Pan in Edwardian Children's literature

¹³¹ Letter October 1821. Scott, Hogg, Peacock (1943-44).

¹³² Wilde (2000 [1883]) 140.

James Barrie and Kenneth Grahame were both beneficiaries of a classical education, while Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of *The Secret Garden*, and James Stephens, author of *The Crock of Gold*, were eclectic readers, familiar with classical texts, and each can be demonstrated to have plundered this rich store to adapt, miniaturise and refresh an image of Pan to suit the needs and tastes of their readers, arising from 'a change of attitude towards children' that began in the middle of the nineteenth century; a view which acknowledged childhood as a precious Arcadia, an alternative to the grown-up world, encapsulated by Kenneth Grahame in *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898).¹³³

The Arcadian goat god's rebirth as Peter Pan as he first appears in J.M. Barrie's novel *The Little White Bird*, forerunner of the stage production *Peter Pan* in 1904, was inspired by Matthew Arnold's poem 'Lines Written in Kensington Gardens', depicting the Gardens as a place where the breath of the rural Pan could be captured in childhood. Such was the euphoria of his reception then and ever afterwards that Humphrey Carpenter has suggested that 'Peter Pan is an alternative religion' and analysed Peter Pan as a Christ-like figure.¹³⁴

Kenneth Grahame, in rejecting his conventional religious upbringing, drew inspiration from the Romantics' idea of paganism presided over by a vision of the rural Pan expressed in his essays *Pagan Papers* which appeared in 1898.¹³⁵ This was the same year of publication as *Dream Days*, sequel to *The Golden Age* (1895), ground-breaking books which addressed both parents and children, describing adults as Olympians who frequently treated children merely as animals. *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) depicts a world in which animal characters are presided over by Pan. Grahame's friend and mentor, F.J. Furnivall, a prominent figure in the new 'muscular Christianity', influenced the appearance of the Piper as focalised by Mole, the

¹³³ Carpenter (1985) 9.

¹³⁴ Carpenter (1985) 181.

¹³⁵ Grahame (1898 [1894]).

animal equivalent of a young adolescent for whom the Pan figure externalises powerful forces, displaying '..rippling muscles..long supple hand...splendid curves of (shaggy) limbs disposed in majestic ease.'¹³⁶ The author's inclusion of the 'stern hooked nose between the kindly eyes', an uncharacteristic feature of Pan, who is traditionally depicted with a snub nose, evokes the appearance of Dr. Frederick Furnivall, founder of the Early English Text Society and 'wild man of letters'.¹³⁷

The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett began writing *The Secret Garden* in 1909 under the title 'Mistress Mary'.¹³⁸ Although she was a member of a Christian congregation, Frances later became attracted to the New Thought movement which emphasised the power of the mind. Her contribution to the survival of Pan is similar in importance to that of J.M. Barrie, since Dickon is another juvenile Pan-figure; yet, unlike Peter Pan who is trapped by his immortality, the rustic Dickon provides regenerative nourishment for the old order and creates a therapeutic political and spiritual space through his role of preceptor.

It is of some significance that *The Secret Garden*, like *The Little White Bird* in which the theriomorphic Peter first appeared, was initially serialised for adults. Burnett described Dickon as 'a sort of Faun who charms wild creatures and tame ones.'¹³⁹ An earlier story by Burnett was entitled 'The Little Faun' and some correspondence of idea may be assumed between the 'common cottage boy' of *The Secret Garden* and the prototype lower class faun of that story. Dickon is so close to the animals that he too seems, like the faun (and Pan), as if he is part-

¹³⁶ 'Muscular Christianity' was the name, given in 1858, to a group of Christian Socialists led by F.D. Maurice. Carpenter (1985) 31-34.

¹³⁷ Green (1982) 53-56.

¹³⁸ Gerzinger (2005) 261.

¹³⁹ Gerzina (2005) 262.

animal. Furthermore Dickon's ability to overcome social barriers resembles the behaviour of the 'wild' little faun who gate-crashes the class system when he charms his way into the narrator's garden and introduces his joyous dancing to two 'tame' children who then become fauns by association, as Mary and Colin in *The Secret Garden* become closer to the natural world through Dickon's influence.

In 1881 Robert Louis Stevenson had published two highly influential essays, 'Pan's Pipes' and 'Child's Play', which gave expression to Stevenson's vision of the spirit of youth that perceives the child as 'harbouring the pagan energy of the forest deity'.¹⁴⁰ Through the association of childhood with the natural, animal state, and as a solitary figure who inhabits the wild moorland whose bestial bond with 'creatures' verges on the theriomorphic, Dickon most resembles Pan and provides healing in the children's lives.

Dickon represents the emerging trend of reducing Pan into a suitable form for child readers. He retains the god's potent energy, thereby conserving something of his pastoral significance. His relationship with the other children in *The Secret Garden* is as fruitful as that of Puck with Dan and Una in Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Indeed the role of Kipling's hairy-footed faun as a prototype Doctor Who conducting the children through history is matched by Dickon's power to conjure the immediacy of the natural world.

Hints of sexual elements in the portrayal of Dickon emphasise his regenerative role. The Yorkshire idiom 'wick', used to refer to the life which Dickon restores to the garden, may be related to the word 'wick' as used of candles. A seventeenth century Blackletter ballad illustration 'The Merry Mad Pranks of Robin Goodfellow' depicts a figure with goats' legs and horns, bearing a candle with lighted wick. Dickon renders the lifeless secret garden 'wick'. Dickon's name may also have sexual connotations: Burnett first conceived of the name 'Dick'

¹⁴⁰ Stevenson (1924[1881]).

for Dickon. This slang word for penis was first recorded in 1891. As a young Pan, Dickon is master of propagation for both vegetation and animals, and he introduces potency not only into the neglected garden but also to Mary as a pre-pubertal girl who knows nothing of boys. Thus Dickon mimics Pan as an ithyphallic fertility god by enthusing Mary with an ecstatic joy for life, and together they succeed in recalling her cousin Colin from his crooked, unhealthy state.

Dickon's role in *The Secret Garden* provides a key to the reception of a benign, but not asexual, Pan figure in a work of children's literature. Dickon, despite his human feet, lack of horns and consistently equable temperament, displays qualities that mark him both as a 'Pan figure' and as an 'embodiment of Pan'. His duality as a charismatic figure who exudes superhuman power while yet remaining an earthy Yorkshire lad is emphasised throughout the book.

Mary is primed for her first meeting with Dickon through the mediation of the maid, Martha Sowerby, performing the role of priestess of her brother's cult. Martha's tales about Dickon (19-20, 21, 32, 37, 42, 49, 51, 66) arouse Mary's interest so that she longs to see him. This preparation is completed by the skipping rope sent by 'mother' Sowerby (44) whose mythic function is akin to an earth goddess. To Mrs. Sowerby children are young animals and her gift is to encourage Mary to 'play out in th' fresh air askippin' an it'll stretch her legs an' arms ...' (43). It is apt that Mary is skipping when she first hears Dickon's pan-pipe (57). Skipping is characteristic of lambs in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* (1.9.1-2), and mimics the activity of Pan's flocks. Through the movements of her limbs, Mary is transformed into a young animal who, like his other creatures, instinctively responds to Dickon's pipe:

‘...she heard a low, peculiar whistling sound and wanted to find out what it was. It was a very strange thing indeed. She quite caught her breath as she stopped to look at it.’ (*The Secret Garden* 57)

Dickon's piping, and Mary's reaction, recalls the spell cast over Chloe, not only by the piping of the invisible Pan (2.28.3), but by Daphnis in Longus' novel (1.13.4). In both works

young pipers who mesmerise animals also become guides at the level of nature and instinct for the heroines in the stories.

The order of hearing the piping before seeing the piper mirrors the experience of Mole and Rattie in *The Wind in the Willows* (150). Like Mole's trembling at the sight of the goat-god, Mary's breathlessness stresses the shock of encountering an extraordinary being:

‘Sitting under a tree, with his back against it, playing on a rough wooden pipe. He was a funny-looking boy about twelve...his nose turned up and his cheeks were as red as poppies....He had a wide, red curving mouth and his smile spread all over his face..’
(*Secret Garden* 57)

His appearance is considerably more elaborated than that of Burnett's ‘Little Faun’ for, although Dickon displays no ‘hooves and horns’, his odd appearance and smile identify him with the classical Pan described in the *Homeric Hymn*:

‘...a boy who from birth was a marvellous sight
..... his chuckling noise and delight.’ (19.36-7)

Dickon's features are compatible with traditional iconography associated with Pan,¹⁴¹ and his ‘turned-up nose’, smiling lips and colouring are emphasised by repetition throughout the text.¹⁴² He exudes the ‘clean, fresh scent of heather’ (58), recalling Daphnis’ observation during ‘the beauty contest’ with Dorkon in *Daphnis and Chloe* that Pan, in spite of being more than half goat, does not exude an animal smell (1.16.3).

¹⁴¹ *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary*, to which the young readers of ‘The Little Faun’ are referred by the author, records that Pan has a ‘ruddy complexion’ and that ‘his nose (is) flat’. A prose work, *The Plea of Pan* (1901), emphasises the snub-nose by describing Pan's face as ‘like the bust of Socrates’ and his smile ‘the sweet human smile’, a similarity between Pan and Socrates. His snub-nose indicates his goatish appearance in Virgil *Ecl.* 10.6 and *Ecl.* 10.27-28 also gives a description of Pan's red colouring. The ruddiness of the god's complexion was described in allegorical presentations of Pan's anatomy, such as Isidore of Seville (CE 636) [?after Servius] in Merivale (1969) 10. Dickon's ‘wide, red, curving mouth’ conforms to the description of Pan's ‘curved lip’ (*Anth. Pal.* 16.17).

¹⁴² *Secret Garden* 57, 58, 59, 65, 66, 110, 140.

Dickon's 'rough wooden pipes' and their mesmeric effect on Mary and the 'wild things' that surround the boy:

'...as if they were all drawing near to watch him and listen to the strange, low, little call his pipe seemed to make' (*Secret Garden* 57)

identify him both with pastoral herdsmen and with Pan who is rarely depicted in the iconography without either syrinx or pan-pipe.¹⁴³ Reports of the moor boy's fabled power to hypnotise animals by his pipe later enthrall the invalid Colin, who becomes eager to meet Dickon and submit his own animal nature for transformation because Dickon is: 'a sort of animal charmer and I am a boy animal' (*Secret Garden* 90). The control of animals through music is an archetypal activity of the god described in *Daphnis and Chloe* (2.27-29) and also displayed by the herdsmen in the story where pipe-playing before Pan's image resonates with tunes suitable for each type of animal (2.35.4).¹⁴⁴

Just as the herdsmen in *Daphnis and Chloe* sometimes enact the role of their divine patron Pan (1.24.1, 1.20-21, 2.35, 2.37, 4.28.1), so the character of Dickon functions on two levels: both as a boy in a cottage-dwelling family, and also as a solitary figure who inhabits the wild moorland whose bestial bond with 'creatures' verges on the theriomorphic, reminiscent of Peter Pan's 'half and half' 'betwixt and between' status: '...Sometimes I think p'raps I'm a bird, or a fox, or a rabbit, or a squirrel, or even a beetle, an' I don't know it' (*Secret Garden* 59). Others also speak of Dickon as if he were partly animal, 'as strong as a moor pony' (112) or 'a boy animal hiding in his hole' (90). Dickon sees himself as inseparable from otters, badgers and

¹⁴³ A 'young Pan' playing the syrinx dated to end of 5th/beginning 4th Century BC, The Cave at Vari: Marble Relief 3, 7. Pls. 5, 9, Thallon (1903) U22, U26. A crater dated to 490BC shows Pan, entirely caprine standing upright on hind legs, and playing the double pipes. Volute crater frs. (2), Attic bf. Amsterdam, Allard Pierson 2117/8 – Brommer 1.15 fig.14.

¹⁴⁴ Demonstrated by the effect of the 'imperious summons' of the Piper's 'intoxicating melody' on the animals in *The Wind in the Willows* during the demi-god's epiphany in 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn' (149).

water-rats (118) and all animals whose cyclic life and moorland habitat he shares on equal terms. Similarly Grahame's Piper in *The Wind in the Willows* occupies a position that elevates him to the status not only of a demi-god among the animals but also that of a Christian figure, glossed by Patricia Merivale:¹⁴⁵ 'So Grahame's animals say something for human beings that human beings could not say for themselves: if we were as good and simple as they, we too could worship such a god.'

Pan's traditional role as god of 'little flocks' is emphasised by Dickon's revival of a lamb: 'I found th' little un half dead wi' cold and clemmin' (118). This act not only serves as a metaphor for his role in the book as saviour and herdsman-cum-good shepherd for animals as well as children but binds him to 'his wild things on th' moor' (26). It would not have escaped Burnett's readers that, as with the Piper's rescue of the little otter from the whirlpool in *Wind in the Willows*, this powerful image is reminiscent of that of Christ, the good shepherd.¹⁴⁶

Christine Wilkie suggests that Mary's secret garden can be interpreted as the site of 'oppositional paradoxes' uniting 'Arcadian pressures' and 'Edenic...innocence': '...there is nostalgic longing for Christian innocence and goodness with an emphasis on the seasons, regeneration, and good health that sits side by side with ancient fertility rite, incantation and the occult.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Merivale (1969) 149.

¹⁴⁶ This motif is symbolic of the role of shepherd in both Christian and pagan mythology and early Christian iconography sometimes seems to fuse the image of a Pan figure with the good shepherd, for example, *Il buon pastore*, Istituto Salesiano san Callisto – Roma. <http://catacombe.roma.it/> 16/07/07. The motif of 'the great shepherd' rescuing one of his flock is reflected by the Piper's rescue of Portly, in *The Wind in the Willows*, equated by J. D. Moore with Bernhard Plockhorst's *The Good Shepherd* depicting Christ as a shepherd in a landscape at sunset in front of a flock of sheep, holding a shepherd's crook in his left hand while cradling a lamb within his right arm. Bazovsky (2007) 272.

¹⁴⁷ Wilkie (1997) 78.

Dickon unites aspects of both traditions, offering a solution to those who, with Swinburne, perceived Christianity as having cast a shadow over life's joys.¹⁴⁸ Not only does Dickon 'intoxicate by the strain of his shepherd's pipe' but his music also penetrates minds so that he is for the other children (to quote Keats' 'Hymn to Pan') an 'opener' of 'mysterious doors leading to universal knowledge'. As a creature in tune with the rhythmic cycle of nature beyond the boundaries of the regulated estate, Dickon's intimations of immortality emphasise his archetypal status on the physical plane as a template mediated by Mary for the sickly Colin to regain his health:

“Lie on your back and draw in long breaths...That's what Dickon does when he's lying on the moor. He says he feels (the fresh air) in his veins and it makes him strong and he feels as if he could live for ever and ever.” (*Secret Garden* 115)

Stephen Roxburgh equates the moors with the secret garden as part of Pan-Dickon's territory: 'The world of the Yorkshire moors and the "secret garden" is an animistic, magical, spirit-inhabited world, in which the Pan-like Dickon roams.'¹⁴⁹ The laurel-hedged walk that leads to the wood where Mary discovers Dickon provides a corridor between the wild territory and the secret garden, which bypasses the cultivated estate of the manor. Pan is a liminal god and the walled garden becomes a transitional space where his potent regenerative power is active, a space that will be matched by the 'surrogate garden' of Colin's tomb-like room inside the manor house where Dickon brings his animals.

Dickon mimics Pan as the bringer of fertility, but not order, to the garden which he insists must remain a 'wilderness': 'It's nicer like this with things runnin' wild, an' swingin' an' catchin' hold of each other.' (63) His gardening displays skills suggestive of Pan's caprine

¹⁴⁸ 'Hymn to Proserpina' (35) *Poems and Ballads* 1905.

¹⁴⁹ Roxburgh (1979) 120-130.

nature, since goats are much in demand for clearing away weeds.¹⁵⁰ The garden, although a wilderness, has been secretly kept alive by the old gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, whose name suggests a shepherd's crook, and his function as guardian of the secret garden mirrors some lines of an epigram attributed to Macedonius where the speaker dedicates his 'well-worn crook' to Pan.¹⁵¹ The gardener's encouragement of Mary's reverence for Dickon (40) recalls the herdsman-turned-gardener Philetas in *Daphnis and Chloe* who first brings Pan to the children's notice (2.3.2). Furthermore '[s]urly...uncompanionable' Weatherstaff's initial grumpiness towards Mary reflects the moody, unpredictability of Pan at the opening of Theocritus (*Idyll* 1.15-18).

In *The Secret Garden* old Weatherstaff, who has been all but banished from Misselthwaite Hall and retained only because of the late mistress's attachment to him, is balanced by the revitalising figure of Dickon, 'tough as a whitethorn knobstick' (63). Ben, as a 'Yorkshire moor man' (25), shares with Dickon the 'moor boy' and his 'creatures' (163) an attachment to the wild country outside the cultivated gardens of the hall. Both display aspects of Pan, Dickon representing a fresh expression of the pastoral deity, in contrast with Ben as dying or banished god of the past. This duality suggests that the author was exploiting the paradoxical motifs of Pan's death and revival as a feature of *fin de siècle* literature, in which two antithetical literary currents ran momentarily together. Both of these were evident in the work of Oscar Wilde: the gospel of art *against* nature and the gospel of nostalgia *for* nature in an industrial age, with Pan as a unifying figure of these currents.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ *Reasons to manage weeds with goats*. 'Goats Eat Weeds', <http://www.goatseatweeds.com/>, Ecological Restoration Weed Control Green Alternative (accessed 1/10/15).

¹⁵¹ Trans. Mackail in Vinci (1993) 102.

¹⁵² Irwin (1961) 159-167.

Evidence of Dickon as a Pan figure challenges readings of the text which diminish his mythic status as the significant regenerative presence in the book. Dickon *is* the ‘other’ who represents a mysterious and compelling figure for Mary, as he does later for Colin. He presents the anthropomorphic face of nature which contrasts with the impersonal and controlling aspect of the wind: ‘..which rushed at her face and roared and held her back as if it were some giant that she could not see’ (*Secret Garden* 27) At first Mary finds the moor a disturbing place where the wind as a prelude to the sound of the robin (23) and Dickon’s pipe ‘whistle[s] and make[s] strange sounds’ (14). But despite Mary’s antipathy to the natural world, she is nevertheless irresistibly drawn by tales of Dickon’s affinity with the moorland animals.

It is crucial to Dickon’s role in the story to emphasise that his mystique is instrumental in motivating Mary to venture outside the house into the grounds where she later discovers the secret garden: ‘It was really this mention of Dickon which made Mary decide to go out...’ (21). It is clear that Mary is lured outside because she longs to meet this mythic boy. Later, following her discovery of him in the wood, Dickon becomes a potent force who provides the seeds and the sweat that revitalise both the girl and her secret rose garden. Dickon is both the catalyst of the story and the agent of regeneration for the two children.

Metaphors that create a link between the secret garden and virginity provide a context that heightens the delicate eroticism of the dialogue between Dickon and Mary. Dickon enacts the role of Pan as fertility deity: ‘I’ll plant them for thee myself...’ (59) Their first joint visit to the overgrown garden endorses the ‘images and language of penetration’ as ritualised regeneration.¹⁵³

Perhaps it is no wonder that the book had first been targeted at an adult audience:

‘... he touched a shoot which looked brownish-green... Mary touched it herself in an eager, reverent way. “That one?” she said. “Is that one quite alive – quite?”
“It’s as wick as you or me,” he said ...

¹⁵³ Wilkie (1977) 80.

“I’m glad it’s wick!” she cried out in her whisper ...

She quite panted in her eagerness, and Dickon was as eager as she was ... Dickon carried his knife in his hand and showed her things which she thought wonderful ...’ (*Secret Garden* 62)

The boy’s knife is suggestive, not only of the penis, but also of the *thyrsos* that Pan carries in the iconography of Dionysiac *thiasos*.

““When it looks a bit greenish an’ juicy like that, it’s wick,” he explained, “When th’ inside is dry an’ breaks easy...”

“They went from bush to bush and from tree to tree. He was very strong and clever with his knife ... and when he cut through a lifeless-looking branch she would cry out joyfully under her breath when she caught sight of the least shade of moist green...” (62)

The budding of the garden extends the metaphoric ripening of Mary’s fruitfulness, emphasising Dickon’s dual role as pre-pubescent boy and chthonic deity: ‘He showed her swelling leaf-buds on rose branches that had seemed dead. He showed her ten thousand new green points pushing through the mould’ (62). The language, rich in symbolic meaning, invokes Pan’s deific fertility role as a function in the arousal of Mary’s reintegration with instinct and the natural world, while also mirroring the metaphor of Peter Pan’s ‘breaking through’ and exciting Wendy’s insatiable mothering instinct in *Peter Pan*.¹⁵⁴

However, unlike Peter Pan, Dickon *can* be touched and his animal magnetism dictates Mary’s gestures:¹⁵⁵ ‘She didn’t mean to put out her hand and clutch his sleeve’ (*Secret Garden* 59); ‘(She) put her hand on his arm again without knowing’ (61). The sustained erotic charge of mood and language aligns the natural world with alienated human society through the mediation of this benign yet overtly potent young Pan as he draws Mary closer:

““See here!” said Dickon. “See how these has pushed up...” He threw himself on his knees and Mary went down beside him. They had come upon a whole clump of crocuses....Mary bent her face down and kissed and kissed them.’ (92)

¹⁵⁴ The ‘mother’ theme is one that changes radically between the published version of the play *Peter Pan* (1904) 98-99, and the novel *Peter Pan and Wendy*. See Barrie (1911) 90 with Routh (2001) 57-75.

¹⁵⁵ On Peter Pan’s untouchable nature, see Barrie (1904) 98.

Mary is paradoxically taught about human love by one who feels himself to be more animal than human: 'I've kissed mother many a time that way ... kissing between people is natural' (92). The uninhibited relationship between mother and son is a reminder that Mrs. Sowerby, like her son, has a divine function in the plot as a wise, nurturing 'Great Mother' presiding over her extensive family. She is reminiscent of the Pindaric pagan goddess Cybele with whom Pan is closely linked.¹⁵⁶ Such a strong female figure, as Christine Wilkie observes, represents the celebration of amoral appetites of archaic ritualism at odds with 'the Christianised version of "Mother" nature'.¹⁵⁷ Burne-Jones' painting *Earth Mother* (1882), depicting a pagan goddess against a background of a wild wood with a small boy sitting at her feet embracing a wolf cub, coincides with the mythic roles of both Mrs. Sowerby and her son in *The Secret Garden*.

'It's Mother!' is the title of the penultimate chapter (26) in which Mrs. Sowerby enters the garden for the first time. Before her arrival a curious scene takes place in which Dickon, at the suggestion of Ben Weatherstaff, leads the singing of the doxology: 'Praise Him all creatures here below...' The introduction of a Christian hymn sung by a character associated with a pagan deity suggests the diminution of the pagan status of Dickon's role. It appears that his musical powers must now be tamed and reduced to the status of a choir boy under the new order. Dickon's singing of the doxology within the garden towards the end of the book and the arrival of his mother, dressed in a blue cloak symbolic of the paintings of Virgin Mary, seems to draw these two pagan deities closer to the central figures of Christianity, as if to correct the theological balance.

¹⁵⁶ Strabo (10.3.15-17) lists Pans among the guardians, dancers and temple servants dedicated to Dionysos or Rhea-Cybele (Mother of the Gods).

¹⁵⁷ Wilkie (1997) 74.

Thus in an interpretation of the mythic structure of the novel as a transition from the traditional Dionysian cult of nature to the Apollonian male rationalism of Edwardian social norms, Pan-Dickon's role as a preceptor has ended. Through the medium of his healing power both Mary and Colin have flourished by reconnecting with the fruitfulness of nature but it is Colin in these final chapters who emerges as the central figure of the story. There is, however, an interim stage when Colin describes a picture that closely matches Keats' description of the rites of Pan in *Endymion*: '...crowds of lovely people and children with garlands and branches with garlands and branches with blossoms... everyone laughing and dancing and playing on pipes' (122). Colin regards the animals, whom Dickon treats as equals, as 'the whole busy underworld' (119). Pan's role as musician in Dionysos' train may be seen as indicative of what Dickon's position will be in Colin's adult world.

Later, Colin declares 'I shall be a Scientific Discoverer' (143) and initiates a quasi-religious service suggesting that they all sit cross-legged under a tree, as if in a 'a sort of temple'. His declaration that: 'I am going to be as strong as Dickon, as strong as Dickon!' seems to coincide with a decline in Dickon's power, as Colin, leading the chanting, takes on the aura of 'a sort of priest' and even a religious figure. At this point the metamorphosed Colin is described as seeming like 'a strange boy spirit' (141), recalling Mary's description of Dickon as 'a wood fairy' (66) or 'a Yorkshire angel' (110).

Afterwards, walking with the support of both Weatherstaff and Dickon, Colin confirms that the 'Magic' has worked, claiming his new found strength as 'my first scientific discovery' (142). The demeanour of Dickon who represents the curative wisdom of the natural world has been eclipsed by Colin's hubristic claims to scientific discovery. The real world beyond the garden seems to be already asserting itself in Colin's newfound self-motivated cure.

Keats' *Hymn to Pan* from *Endymion* provided a Romantic precedent for the blending of the pastoral Pan with the 'great Pan' as a god who represents 'all' nature, and in *Endymion* a troop

of garlanded children join the celebrants on the lawn in the forest clearing where Pan's 'woodland altar' (127) stands. In *The Secret Garden* Dickon, as a Pan-figure, is a less frightening prospect than meeting the great universal Pan himself. In Keats' hymn, Pan is recognised not only as the guardian of animals, saving lambs from threatening eagles, as Dickon does, but also as the power who can engender 'new birth' in mental as well as in physical realms, a theme that has relevance for analysis of the influence of Pan in *The Wind in the Willows*.

Dickon is both the physical and narrative agent of Mary's transformation, the power with whom she 'aligns herself narratologically' (84-87, 90, 98, 108-110) in order to befriend Colin. Yet Dickon is destined to return to his own liminal territory. This aspect of Pan's mythic role is mirrored in James Stephens' novel, *The Crock of Gold* (1912), when the young girl Caitilin, having been inducted into love-making by Pan in his cave, chooses to leave him for another god. Dickon has been described 'a juvenile fertility god' in *The Secret Garden*.¹⁵⁸ He assists Mary in making her garden 'wick', synchronising preparation for human fertility with that of plants. However, Dickon-Pan's power also concerns transitional spaces and in this respect it is significant that the potentiality of the regenerated garden and 'Nest Building' corresponds with Mary's pre-pubescent state. As the embodiment of a deity whose epiphany coincides with Mary's wish to cultivate her secret wilderness, Dickon's role is necessarily a temporary one in the plot, a factor that has disturbed some critics:

'Dickon, the working-class child who has been central in the regenerative process, is completely forgotten in the finale's emphasis on reconciliation between father and son Similarly the social hierarchy of prevailing English class...division is perpetuated by the unashamed return to the status quo...' (Gerzina (2006) 360).

¹⁵⁸ Gerzina (2006) 360.

Dickon awakens Mary's creative instincts and is even described by some critics as the hero of the book. However, like Pan in the myths of Syrinx, Pitys and Echo, he is not destined to become Mary's sexual partner in her maturity. Dickon's role is restricted to that of a deity who intervenes and provides a template for the psychological and physical recovery of the children. Edwardian English social conventions meant that the relationship between them could only function because of Dickon's mythic and ephemeral status as healing agent, yet it perhaps prefigures a more democratic society in the future of the type with which Burnett, as an Anglo-American was familiar.

The manuscript 'Mistress Mary' which became *The Secret Garden* reveals that Dickon was originally conceived as lame, a deformity which would have increased his physical resemblance to the goat-god:

“‘Everybody knows (Dickon). Dickon's wanderin' about everywhere. Th' very blackberries and heatherbells knows him. I warrant th' foxes shows him where their cubs lie an' th' skylarks doesn't hide their nests from him. They feel as if he wa one of 'em when he goes swingin' by on his crutches.’”¹⁵⁹

In *The Devil on Two Sticks* (*Le Diable boiteux*) Cupid appears as diminutive lame monster with goat's legs, pictured in an accompanying illustration leaning on a crutch, a conflation of Cupid and Pan. A comic myth about Pan, exploited in English literature, was the Ovidian tale of the musical contest with Apollo where: 'his uncouth song entranced the king (Midas)' (*Met.* 11.161-3), a tale which casts Pan as an inferior god. Such an ironic presentation masks the wilder aspects of Pan's nature under the guise of his unsuitability for civilised society. Burnett utilises this theme by following the democratic mood of Shelley's *Hymn of Pan* in which Pan presents himself as Apollo's equal. In *The Secret Garden* the lower class rustic Dickon is depicted as the equal, if not the superior, of his social betters for his knowledge of the natural

¹⁵⁹ Gerzina (2006) 193.

world. The cruel energy of Pan is transmuted into the fabled power that Dickon wields over others as an 'animal tamer'. This is also symbolised when the robin focalises the scene of Colin's arrival in the garden, noting 'skins of wild animals' that cover 'the boy creature in the wheelchair'(152). This symbol of man's dominance over wild animals serves as a reminder that hunting was a pursuit linked with privilege and polite society, a world away from Dickon's affinity with the animal life on the moor. There is irony in this reversal of roles since both hunting and herding were traditional activities associated with Pan. This aspect marks a significant difference between Peter Pan and Dickon, since it is of note that Peter Pan is the only Pan in children's literature to be portrayed in Pan's hunting role, as he leads the lost boys in bloodthirsty pursuit of the animals in Neverland.

In conclusion, aspects of the goat-god in each of these Edwardian texts can be summarised by way of contrast with *The Secret Garden*, the text which has been the main focus of this chapter. Peter Pan, who awakens Wendy's maternal instinct, it may be argued in contrast to Carpenter's view stated above, is the antithesis of the Christ child who represents only good, yet he is also cast as a heroic version of Pan in overcoming Hook and rescuing females. His resemblance to Pan is enhanced by his solipsistic state where he exists moment by moment, forgetful of others and of what has gone before, a quality that was projected onto Mole and Rattie following their epiphany of the Piper. But unlike Mole, who evolves because of the lingering effect of the vision, Peter Pan remains an egoist who represents the self-absorbed child; like Pan in *Daphnis and Chloe*, his role as outsider supports the conventional world of social relationships. Peter Pan represents what must be excluded.

The Pan of Mole's epiphanic experience is a muscular figure suggestive of his heroic statuary. The love and awe inspired in the Piper's human-animal supplicants by his gentler attributes of helping and healing, attributes stemming from Apuleius' Pan in 'Cupid and Psyche', are tinged with fear of the unknown, implicit in their subjection to his hypnotic music.

Grahame's Pan, symbolic of the masculine fellowship of the river bank, provides a positive role model for the humble Mole while leaving the ungrounded poetic Rat less able to recover from his mystical experience. It is also of relevance that Toad's solipsistic desires and mock-heroic behaviour are reminiscent of Peter Pan.

Kenneth Grahame, drawing on the genre of spiritual allegory to reverse the theme of Bunyan's humble Mole,¹⁶⁰ also evokes Browning's *Pied Piper of Hamelin* as well as elements of the heroic Garibaldi in his Pan figure; while James Stephens provides a more consummate goat-god, summoning Pan to Ireland directly from Greece. The Pan encountered by Caitilin in *The Crock of Gold* is also a transitory figure and an outsider both to Irish culture and to the Christian ethos that informs the philosopher's moral debate and inhibitions. Nevertheless Pan is the necessary agent of the young girl's awakening so that she can discern authentic love and joy when she eventually meets Angus Óg. Stephens' fable also contains similarities with Longus' theme and the role that Pan plays as an intermediary for a love-god; it is in this way that metamorphosis is achieved in these two novels, rather than restricting Pan to his traditional role as sexual predator.

Finally, Dickon in *The Secret Garden* expresses the fertility of Pan in both vegetation and in human sexuality. Being more animal than human, he is both a good shepherd and an animal-tamer for all animals, including children. Yet his role is necessarily transitory. Like Pan in *Daphnis and Chloe*, he remains an outsider to the very social order which his potent presence has helped to reinvigorate by physical and moral example. The loving mother-son relationship of which he is part, the fantasy of Peter Pan's longings, unites both pagan and Christian symbolism and is expressive of the healing power of the New Thought movement which sought to reconnect human society with the healing power of the natural world.

¹⁶⁰ *Of the Mole in the Ground*, Bunyan (1686).

Chapter 6

Arachne's Web: the Reception of an Ovidian Myth in Works for Children

Sheila Murnaghan & Deborah H. Roberts

The story of Arachne's transformation from a young woman overly proud of her weaving into a spider, known to us first from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and a recurrent motif in western literature and art,¹⁶¹ is one of the Greek myths most frequently retold for children. Although the Arachne myth is not included among the 'nursery tales' in Nathaniel Hawthorne's groundbreaking *A Wonder Book* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), it appears in an 1897 volume of 'Greek folk stories' published as a supplement to the Riverside edition of Hawthorne, in several other collections of about the same date, and in many more anthologies and single-myth volumes for young readers up to the present day, most of them illustrated, many of them picture-books.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ The only earlier textual evidence for the story is a brief reference in Vergil, *Georgics* 4.246-7, to the spider as *invisa Minervae* ('hateful to Minerva'); on what may be a much earlier visual depiction, see Weinberg (1956). On aspects of the reception of this story, see Martindale (1988) 16; Dimmick (2002) 277; Brown (2005) ch. 4; Brown (1999) 38-49.

¹⁶² Hawthorne (1923), Peabody (1897). The story is absent from Neale (1847), Kingsley (1855), and Cox (1862), Hawthorne's near-contemporaries and fellow-pioneers in presenting myth as story for English-speaking children, but is told briefly in most of the handbooks that precede Hawthorne, and at length in Bulfinch's collection for family reading, the 1855 *Age of Fable* (Bulfinch (1869) 150-54), whose influence is perceptible in several later versions.

The popularity of the Arachne myth in retellings for children reflects both its ability to convey a moral lesson and its aetiological character.¹⁶³ Aetiological myths are thought to be especially appealing to children because they anchor a story from the remote past in a familiar feature of the child reader's own world; they explain the origins of natural phenomena in pre-scientific terms, reflecting a presumed affinity between young children and the ancient times in which the myths first took shape; and they explain the myths themselves as arising from a universal quest for origins rather than a particular set of pagan beliefs.¹⁶⁴ The aetiological point of the story often seems to outweigh or displace the ostensible moral, and most versions of the Arachne myth end by drawing attention to the 'Arachne's webs' that the reader can see 'any day among the rafters' (Peabody (1897) 51), 'along your garden wall' (Kupfer (1897) 51), or 'sparkling with dew' (Amery (1999) 20).

In Ovid's narrative Arachne is the daughter of a poor Lydian dyer, and is famous for her skill at spinning and weaving, her process itself a pleasure to watch. She claims that her work is not inferior to Minerva's, denies that she was taught by Minerva, and challenges the goddess to a competition. Minerva visits, disguised as an old woman, and warns Arachne to ask the goddess's pardon; Arachne reacts angrily and refuses. When Minerva reveals herself, Arachne remains defiant, and the two embark on a competition. Minerva's tapestry shows Jupiter enthroned with the other gods and goddesses; Minerva's contest with Neptune for Athens is in the center; and at the four corners (to serve as a warning) are tales in which mortal women have

¹⁶³ On the kinds of significance attributed by adults to the myths they retell, see Roberts (2009), Stephens and McCallum (1998) ch. 3. On the inevitability of adult agendas and the implied adult reader in children's literature, see Rose (1992), Nodelman (2008), and Rudd (2013).

¹⁶⁴ The idea that children have a particular affinity for myth as originating in a kind of cultural childhood is to be found in somewhat different forms in Hawthorne, Kingsley, and a number of their successors: see Roberts (2009) 59-60; Murnaghan and Roberts (forthcoming) chs. 1, 3. Many anthologies begin with assertions that Greek myth is quasi-scientific in its search for explanations of natural phenomena; see for example Forbush (1928) x; Osborne (1989) ix; Napoli (2011) 6.

been transformed as punishment for challenging the gods. Arachne's web features a long series of episodes (beginning with the story of Jupiter and Europa) in which disguised gods deceive mortal women. Minerva can find nothing to criticize, and in her anger she tears Arachne's weaving with its portrayal of divine misdeeds and repeatedly hits the weaver's head with the shuttle. The unfortunate Arachne cannot bear it, and hangs herself; in what is described as an act of pity, Minerva brings her back to life, but declares that she and her descendants will all be subject to hanging, and turns her into a spider.¹⁶⁵

Those who seek to retell this story for young readers face several challenges. Ovid's account of divine jealousy, judgement, and vindictiveness, with its complicated and somewhat ambiguous conclusion, does not immediately yield a comprehensible and instructive message for modern children (so that some writers condense the rather equivocal stages of Arachne's punishment and some avoid the grim detail of her attempted suicide). The subject matter of Arachne's web is pointedly erotic, representing the gods as sexual predators who disguise themselves to deceive mortal women, a prominent plot-type in Greek mythology and in the *Metamorphoses*, but one that is usually either omitted or bowdlerized in versions for children. Finally, the spider that is the outcome of the story represents a further challenge both to storyteller and to illustrator: she is an ambiguous figure, potentially positive as a weaver of beautiful gossamer, but also scary and repulsive and producer of unwanted cobwebs. (This ambiguity is nicely expressed by Geraldine McCaughrean in *Greek Myths* (1993) 35: '...though cobwebs are as lovely a piece of weaving as you'll ever want, just look how people hurry to sweep them away'). She is also at once an arachnid and a transformed human, and the representation of this duality may add a frightening element of the uncanny to the story's aetiological and moral closure. Ovid's story of metamorphosis demands multiple forms of

¹⁶⁵ Ovid 6.1-145. Some of our authors, especially the earlier ones, refer to the goddess as Minerva, while others call her Athena. We follow the practice of the author under discussion, but otherwise use 'Minerva.'

transformation as it is converted into versions suitable for children and further transposed from words into images in the illustrations that are a typical feature of children's books, extending, complementing, and sometimes contesting the verbal narrative. In many reworkings, Arachne's web offers an especially telling emblem of this transformative process: a key site of revisionary myth-making and a paradigm for the reception of classical myth for child audiences.

Ovid's narrative invites and has historically received diverse readings of the contest and its outcome. Is Arachne an arrogant young woman, justly punished for her pride, a foolish mortal unaware of the dangers of challenging a god, or a great artist cruelly treated by a jealous divinity?¹⁶⁶ In children's versions, though elements of all these readings may be present, the ancient crime of insufficient reverence for the Olympians is reinterpreted with remarkable consistency, from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first, in terms that suggest qualities a modern child should be steered away from.¹⁶⁷ In Emma Firth's *Stories of Old Greece*, Arachne is a 'vain little maiden,' (Firth (2009 [1894]) 49) and in Elizabeth Spires' *I am Arachne*, she is still confessing herself 'a little vain' (Spire (2001) 3). In version after version, and with very few exceptions, she is conceited, boastful, proud, and generally full of herself.¹⁶⁸ Arachne is not always entirely to blame for this; in Lilian S. Hyde's *Favorite Greek Myths* (1904), 'She heard admiring words on every side, and I am sorry to say that her head was a little turned by them' (Hyde (1904) 80), and Michael Townsend, whose 2010

¹⁶⁶ On the prevalence of different readings in different periods see Brown (1999) 45-6 and Brown (2005) 106-7.

¹⁶⁷ We may find an analogous inscription of morals thought suitable for children into folktales like *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Bluebeard*; on the latter see Tatar (1987) ch. 7.

¹⁶⁸ For examples see -- among many others -- Kupfer (1897), Blyton (2000 [1930]), Sissons (1960), Williams (1992), Amery (1999), Townsend (2010).

Amazing Greek Myths of Wonder and Blunder offers cartoon versions of ‘nine bizarre and wacky tales that take place in a Greek-tastic myth-o-rific world’, explains Arachne’s turn from humility to excessive pride by the unfortunate influence of a fan club eager to turn her into ‘a local celebrity’ (Townsend (2010) 4, 87). She also exhibits in some versions what seems to be a secondary fault, associated especially with the subject matter of her web (on which more below); this is occasionally identified as ‘irreverence’ (D’Aulaires (1958) 46; McCaughrean (1992) 33), but more often described in language used specifically of naughty children: she is insolent, impudent, impertinent, or rude.¹⁶⁹ Her artistry is, however, never in doubt, and although she sometimes loses the contest (especially in early retellings) she more often achieves a victory, a draw, or a near-draw.¹⁷⁰

We do, however, find significant shifts over time in the depiction of the two main characters, and in the weight given to Arachne’s wrong-doing and Minerva’s judgement. In versions published between 1890 and 1910, Arachne is sometimes portrayed as or assimilated to a child; she is described as ‘a young girl’ (Kupfer (1897) 46), ‘a little maid’ (Firth (2009 [1894]) 47), or ‘the little weaver’ (Beckwith (1896) 73) and one writer asserts what Ovid’s Arachne denies: that she is actually Minerva’s pupil (Hyde (1904) 80-1).¹⁷¹ The depiction of mythical characters – especially girls – as children or as child-like is common in early retellings from Hawthorne on; here that alteration recasts the myth’s divine/mortal power differential as one between adult and child, something already suggested in Ovid’s version by Minerva’s evocation of her greater

¹⁶⁹ For examples see Untermeyer (1968) 40, Lewis (1987) 27, Vinge (1999) 27, Kimmel (2008) 34, Hovey (2001).

¹⁷⁰ Minerva is the clear winner in Guerber (1893), Firth (2009 [1894]), Beckwith (1896), and Blyton (2000 [1930]).

¹⁷¹ The illustrations in Beckwith and Firth and the photographed sculpture (Mathurin Moreau’s *La Fileuse*) in Kupfer reflect a tradition in which Arachne is a young woman, but the texts treat her as a child. On Arachne as Minerva’s pupil see also D’Aulaires (1958) 36.

age and experience (*seris venit usus ab annis*, ‘competence comes with advancing years’, *Met.* 6.29).

These early versions are also more likely to elaborate on Arachne’s fault as a lack of concern for others and to emphasize just how badly Arachne is behaving by illustrating that lack of concern. Helen Beckwith’s *In Mythland* (1896), designed as a kindergarten reader, seeks to engage its child audience in a deeper understanding of what is wrong with Arachne’s behavior:

‘Wicked girl,’ [Minerva] said, ‘will you praise no work but your own?
We are to help people in this world.
We are not to boast of our own work.
Do you love no one but yourself?
Then you shall work for no one but yourself.
(Beckwith 1896, 85)

For the Athene of Emma Firth’s *Stories of Old Greece* (1894), working for others is not enough:

Ah, Arachne, there is no pleasure in working for others unless truth and beauty enter all which we do. That which is done for self-praise is wrong. You shall live to warn people who boast of their skill rather than make it a means of doing good.
(Firth (2009 [1894]) 51)

Hyde indicates the depths of Arachne’s self-interest by describing her behavior towards her parents: her Arachne is so busy spinning uselessly fine thread that she fails to help her mother around the house, and she takes all the credit for the Tyrian purple dye her fisherman father actually discovered (Hyde (1904) 79-80).¹⁷² And Firth tells her readers that ‘foolish little Arachne was so much given to boasting’ that her friends ‘grew weary and left her alone’ (Firth (2009 [1894]) 49).

In these early retellings, which (in a narrative mode typical of their period)¹⁷³ offer children a parent’s-eye view of what is wrong with Arachne’s pride and conceit, Minerva tends to appear

¹⁷² Hyde (1904) 79-80. Cf. Pyle (1928) 120: ‘She even scorned her parents, who were humble folk.’

¹⁷³ On the development of the narrative voice in children’s literature see especially Wall (1991).

as a stern but fair enforcer of good behavior, punishing Arachne not out of jealous anger but because ‘...there was no fault that displeased the gods more than conceit’ (Kupfer (1897) 49). In Elizabeth Peabody’s *Greek Folk Stories* she is ‘still merciful’ (Peabody (1897) 50) in offering Arachne a warning through the pictures on her web, and in Hyde’s retelling those picture are ‘meant for a kindly warning’ (Hyde (1904) 82). Her rhetoric in Firth’s version, quoted above, suggests a saddened parent about to inflict just punishment (‘Ah, Arachne...’), and her exchange with Arachne in Beckwith’s retelling for kindergarteners makes her into a parent or teacher addressing a recalcitrant child:

Arachne looked at the cloth.
‘Who has won, Arachne?’ said Minerva.
Arachne would not say one word.
She tried to run away.
Minerva stopped her.
(Beckwith (1896) 85)

A century later, Arachne is less likely to be depicted as a little girl reproved by an adult. Many retellers of classical myths now seek to appeal to children through a tongue-in-cheek approach, in which adult authorities are mocked and classical mythology, viewed as a stuffy academic subject, is reclaimed for modern children through playful anachronism or parody.¹⁷⁴ In this context, Arachne’s vanity is often played for comedy and her rudeness takes a form that children are assumed to find funny in other children. In Geraldine McCaughrean’s *Greek Myths* (1992), Arachne replies to her friends, when they worry about her boasting, ‘Don’t care who hears it. I’m the best’ (McCaughrean (1993) 32); Marcia Williams’ (1992) cartoon version declares, in what sounds like a playground taunt, that ‘Athena couldn’t even weave a diaper,’ and Townsend’s Arachne is a parody of celebrity self-regard, egged on by her fans: ‘Hey

¹⁷⁴ On this phenomenon, see Murnaghan (2011), Murnaghan and Roberts (2017), and Morey and Nelson (2015). On the general issue of register in retellings of traditional material see Stephens and McCallum (1998) 10-15.

everyone, I got a question! Who's the master of the loom?' 'You are! You are! You are!' (Townsend (2010) 90).

The gods of mythology are not exempt from such lampooning, and the Minerva of recent decades is a problematic figure of authority, often vengeful and out of control, her rage depicted as loss of temper rather than righteous indignation; she flies into a rage, screams, 'explodes' (Williams (1992)), and laughs meanly ('Problem solved! Hee hee hee') as Arachne is transformed (Townsend (2010) 97). These texts (again, typical of their period) seek to offer a child's-eye view and appeal to a contemporary child's sense of humor; both they and the illustrations that accompany them suggest that Arachne's vanity is at once annoying and comical, while Minerva combines superhuman power with jealous temper tantrums that are themselves childish.

The versions discussed so far, whatever their tone, are nonetheless consistent in their identification of Arachne as vain and arrogant. Even in Eric Kimmel's 2008 version, in which Arachne is never actually described as conceited (though others are shocked by her reasoned self-appraisal and her skepticism about Minerva's untested skill), the illustrations provide the judgment the narrator eschews: Arachne is consistently depicted with a smug smile or with her nose in the air. There is, however, one twenty-first century picture-book version in verse, Kate Hovey's *Arachne Speaks* (2000) that rejects the received judgment of Arachne altogether and reads Ovid's story (with many recent critics) as a sympathetic account of an artist who resists authority and suffers for it. This is consistent with another recent trend in myth retellings for young readers (as well as for adults), which often foreground the perspectives of figures who

are socially marginalized, otherwise disadvantaged, or even demonized in our classical sources.¹⁷⁵

Hovey's Arachne, telling in the first person 'a tale of punishment and crime,/ of a goddess's black deed', contrasts her life of poverty with Athena's 'wealth and fame', her well-earned reputation with Athena's desire to take credit. She describes the gods as 'these parasites to whom we pray' and recalls the 'wretched hands' of her dyer father (Hovey 2000). Athena, outraged, insists that Arachne yield and atone for her wrong-doing, but also wonders if in Arachne's defiant gaze she sees a mirror of herself; at the end of the story, Athena is alone in her meaningless immortality, still envious, no longer worshipped, while Arachne's descendants live on forever. Here the remoteness of the classical world is reinforced rather than overcome through the story's aetiological outcome: the end of Greek religion is welcomed while Arachne's enduring humanity is stressed and celebrated.

The contents of Arachne's web undergo some form of revision in nearly every version of the myth for children; the sequence of divine seductions described by Ovid is subject to a familiar range of types of bowdlerization.¹⁷⁶ Some writers include elements of Ovid's ekphrasis but suppress the sexual significance and offer a different reading (or no reading) of the events shown. In Peabody's *Old Greek Folk Stories* Arachne is 'making light of Zeus himself and

¹⁷⁵ Examples include portrayals of mythical monsters as gentle creatures misunderstood on account of their difference: Tobias Druitt, *Corydon and the Island of Monsters* (2005); James Christensen, *The Voyage of the Bassett* (1996); Kate McMullan, *Stop That Bull, Theseus* (2003), *Say Cheese: Medusa* (2002) and rewritings of the Odyssey from various perspectives: one of Penelope's slave women in Adèle Geras, *Ithaka*, (2005); a Trojan boy enslaved by Odysseus in Patrick Bowman, *Torn from Troy: Odyssey of a Slave* (2011); one of the sirens in Donna Jo Napoli, *Sirena*, 1998; and one of Odysseus' men who has been turned into a pig by Circe in Paul Shipton, *The Pig Scrolls* (2004) and *The Pig Who Saved the World* (2007).

¹⁷⁶ For a rare instance in which Arachne's web goes relatively unchanged see Untermeyer (1968) 40, who has Arachne depict 'the lawless love affairs of Athene's father' and lists the well-known examples of Leda, Europa, Danae, and Semele. Coolidge (1949) 26, who like Untermeyer is probably writing for somewhat older children, includes on the web the gods' deception of 'fair maidens'.

Apollo, and portraying them as birds and beasts' (Peabody (1897) 51); in D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* she is 'making fun of Zeus and his wives!' (D'Aulaires (1958) 36). In such cases the knowledgeable reader can perceive what is being suppressed; this is so, somewhat surprisingly, in Beckwith's kindergarten version:

Arachne made a picture of a girl in her cloth.
She was petting a pretty white swan.
Then she made a tower.
It seemed to be of brass.
A shower of golden light was shining on it.
She made the sea, too.
It was so blue it made one wish to ride on it.
They were all very pretty.
(Beckwith (1896) 81, 83)

Beckwith gives us no story, only description, supplemented by a picture of a girl feeding a swan, but any reader who knows the myths will recognize the stories, and there are several verbal hints: the girl's caress; the 'shower of gold...' and the 'wish to ride', absent only the bull whose masculinity makes him taboo. Where Beckwith's telling is striking in its innocence, Pamela Espeland's *The Story of Arachne* (1980) offers a faux-naïf account strewn with clues:

It was full of pictures showing how the gods and goddesses cheated people. There was Leda being chased by a swan. The swan was really Jupiter playing a mean trick on Leda. There were other pictures of Jupiter pretending to be animals. He did this a lot so he could sneak up on young women. There was Apollo, the God of the Sun, fooling someone else. And there was Saturn, another god who was not very nice sometimes. (Espeland (1980))

This ekphrasis, at once enigmatic (why exactly does Jupiter sneak up on young women?) and vacuous ('fooling someone else,' 'not very nice sometimes') positively demands that we read between the lines; indeed, an adult reader need hardly know the myths in order to guess at the gods' shenanigans.

In some instances, the illustration may provide details that hint at what the text leaves out, again pointing to knowledge possessed by the author and artist, and by adult readers, but not

by the child: in D'Aulaires' [fig. 1], the truth behind Arachne's 'irreverent scene' is suggested by images of Zeus as a swan with legs and



[fig. 1]

as a man-faced bull (D'Aulaires (1958) 37).¹⁷⁷ And (not surprisingly) in Hovey's version the salacious expressions on the faces of the gods, Europa's semi-revealing garments, and Apollo's ostentatious fig-leaf suggest that these 'glorious but cruel scenes, unmasking more immortal fiends' entail specifically sexual cruelty (Hovey (2000)).

More writers, however, adopt a different strategy, and go directly to the supposed message of the web, offering brief generalizations with little or no content. Arachne's web shows 'that even the gods could sometimes make mistakes' (Kupfer (1897) 50) or depicts 'the gods doing wrong and foolish things' (Blyton (2000 [1930]) 96); it displays 'the weaknesses and errors of the gods' (Sissons (1960) 117) or reveals them as 'angry, jealous and deceitful' (Blood (2001)). The emphasis is primarily on the folly of the gods (in contrast with their grandeur on Minerva's web), less often on their outright wickedness.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. the half-changed Zeus as eagle in Deborah Winograd's illustration for Simons (1991).

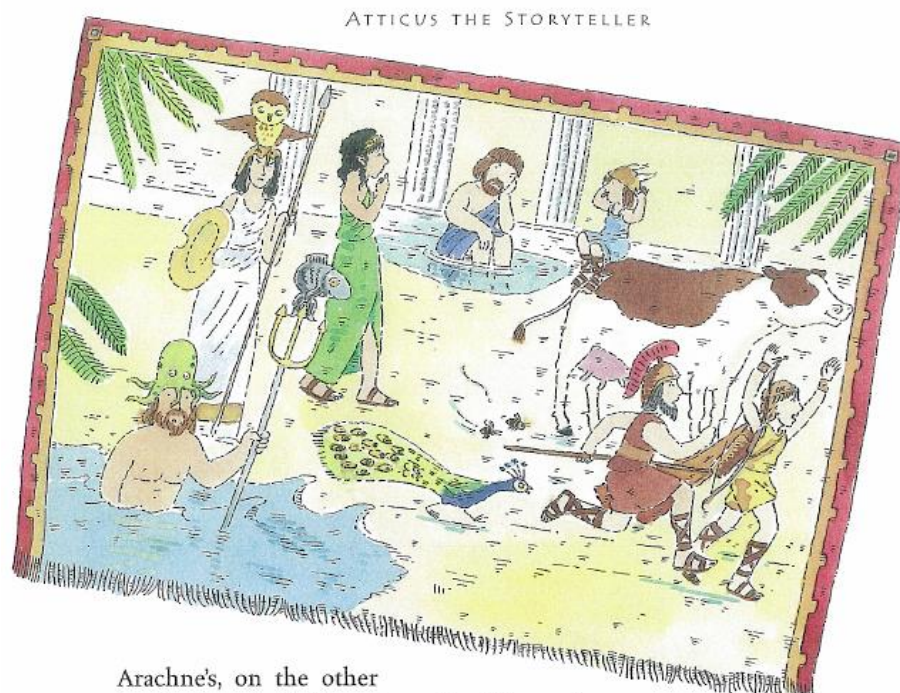
Finally, some writers simply substitute different content, with varying relationships to the story. In Katharine Pyle's 1928 version Arachne's web includes 'all the evil deeds the gods had done':

There was shown the earth torn and destroyed while Titans and the gods battled together. There was shown Prometheus bound in misery, while vultures tore at him; Atlas wearily bearing up the weight of the heavens; Europa carried off by Zeus in the form of a bull; Niobe weeping over her children slain; there were shown wretched mortals being turned by jealous goddesses to beasts or serpents.... Then last she wove about it all a border of such flowers as Persephone had dropped when Hades stole her from the bright upper world and carried her down to the dark realm of spirits.

(Pyle (1928) 122-3)¹⁷⁸

Here Pyle has recontextualized Ovidian elements of Arachne's web (the abduction of Europa) and Minerva's (the tales of jealous goddesses transforming mortals) as stories of divine wickedness; even Arachne's flowery border (also Ovidian) here recalls a god's misdeed. More recent myth books, in keeping with a general turn towards the comic, are likely to depict the gods not just as foolish and mistaken but as silly. Lucy Coats, for example, provides us with a series of entirely invented details, shown as well in Anthony Lewis' illustration [fig. 2]: the gods are all in ridiculous positions, Zeus sitting in a puddle, Athena with honey on her face, Hermes backwards on a cow and sticking out his tongue at Hera (Coats (2002) 62).

¹⁷⁸Cf. Kimmel (2008) 33-4, who offers a few examples of 'all the foolish and cruel deeds the gods had done', including the torment of Prometheus.



[fig. 2]

We also find two versions that depict not the wickedness of the gods but Arachne's own pride: she is at the center of her own web in the versions both of Spires (who has Arachne add herself to an otherwise unexceptionable scene of spring flowers) and of Townsend (Spires (2001) 4, Townsend (2010) 96).¹⁷⁹

Arachne's web epitomizes the process of retelling myth for children, not only because of its subject matter, which requires such transformations in order to be made suitable for a child audience, but also because of its self-reflexive status as a work of art that responds to another work. This is already a feature of the Ovidian original; even though Minerva and Arachne are portrayed as producing their webs simultaneously, Ovid describes Arachne's web

¹⁷⁹ For an outlier among these representations, see Evslin (1966), who has Arachne show happy scenes from the life of a couple from childhood through marriage, with an internal ekphrasis: the quilt square on their bed retells their story (12).

second and in terms that make it seem like an answer to Minerva's, from which it diverges in both form and content. Minerva's image is more schematic, with the episodes depicted arranged in a symmetrical pattern (contest of Minerva and Neptune in the center, mortal women punished for competing with the gods in the corners) and the Olympian gods, who watch the central contest, arrayed in a dignified tableau (*augusta gravitate*, 'in lofty solemnity', *Met.* 6.73), with each presenting a stable, definitive aspect (*sua quemque deorum/ inscribit facies*, 'each one's own appearance designates each of the gods', *Met.* 6.73-74). Even the narrative elements of this scene are relatively static and canonical: as Athena and Neptune stand to assert their claims on Athens, they are armed with their identifying attributes (the trident, the aegis) and strike poses as they point to their distinctive contributions (the salt spring, the olive).

Arachne's web deploys the theme of metamorphosis to counter Athena's image of the gods both thematically and formally. The shapes assumed by the gods to further their erotic conquests contradict Athena's depiction of them as both august and unchanging; the tales of their seductions unfold more dynamically over time (so that the disjunction between a verbal ekphrasis and a material image is more pronounced) and are presented as sequential narratives without any indication of their spatial arrangement on the web.

As many critics have noted, Arachne's web can be seen as figuring Ovid's own project in the *Metamorphoses*, and in other works, of retelling traditional myths with an emphasis on mutability, erotic passion, divine cruelty, and mortal vulnerability.¹⁸⁰ Her work can have a similarly programmatic function in modern versions for children, where Arachne's web often rewrites Minerva's in a way that thematizes the conversion of inherited and adult-oriented mythic traditions into stories that will appeal to children, and so comes to stand for the whole

¹⁸⁰ For recent critics who read the two webs as (in diverse ways) reflections on art and reflections of the poem in which they appear, see Harries (1990), Vincent (1994), Oliensis (2004), Salzman-Mitchell (2005) 125-39, Rosati (2006), Feldherr (2010) 42-3, 60-61, and further bibliography cited in these.

of the work in which it appears. At times the distinction is primarily one between static accounts of the gods and their attributes, such as might appear in a handbook, and more engaging narratives:

Minerva wove a tapestry showing the twelve greatest gods and goddesses of Olympus. But Arachne wove a tapestry showing not only the gods and goddesses, but their adventures also (Osborne (1988) 20).

With the ‘but’ that introduces the second sentence, even this minimal account indicates that Arachne’s version should be read in opposition to Athena’s; the phrase that begins ‘not only’ suggests that Arachne’s image builds on Athena’s, while the term ‘adventures’ hints at what Ovid’s Arachne spells out in detail: that once the gods are shown in action, they become less dignified and pure.

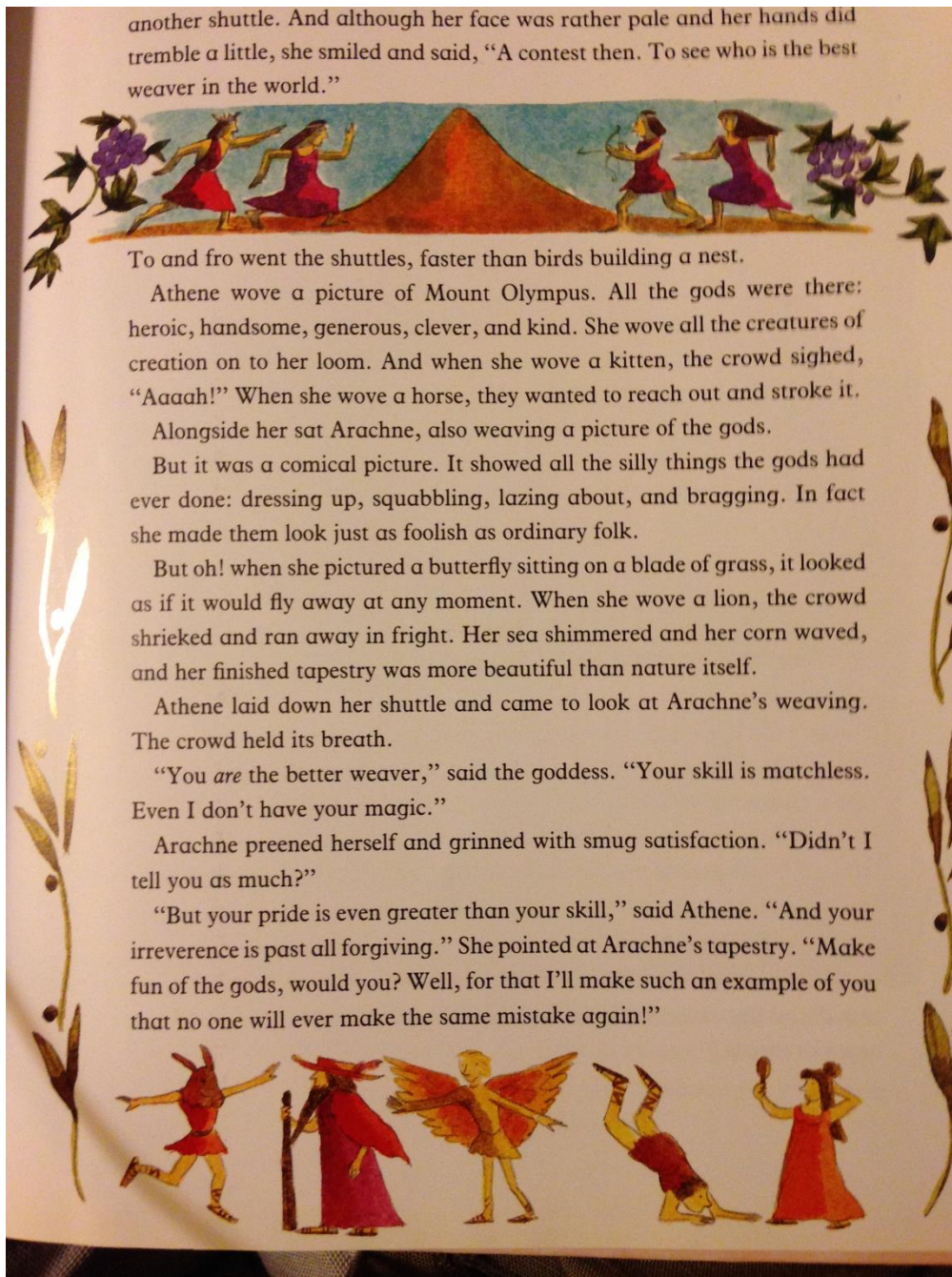
The revisionary character of Arachne’s web is especially pronounced in those recent versions in which myths are made child-friendly through jokey irreverence. One set of books that reflects that trend (although it does not include the Arachne story) is Kate McMullan’s ‘Myth-o-mania’ series, published 2002-2003, in which humorously down-to-earth reworkings of well-known myths are presented as corrections to canonical versions found in *The Great Big Fat Book of Greek Myths*.¹⁸¹ The two webs of the Arachne story provide a similar contrast between a projected canonical version and the parodic modern work in which they appear.

In some cases, the jocular style of the text is further accentuated in the illustrations, as in Anthony Lewis’s illustration for Coats’s version [fig 2 above], or in Geraldine McCaughrean’s *Greek Myths*. McCaughrean describes Athena as weaving a picture of Mt. Olympus with idealized gods, ‘All the gods were there: heroic, handsome, generous, clever and kind.’ Arachne also portrays the gods,

¹⁸¹ See for example McMullan (2002, 2003).

But it was a comical picture; it showed all the silly things the gods had ever done: dressing up, squabbling, lazing about, and bragging. In fact, she made them look just as foolish as ordinary folk. (McCaughrean (1993) 33)

This description suggests McCaughrean's own breezy narrative (Arachne, for example, replies to suggestions that her talent comes from the gods, 'Gods? bodkins! There's nothing the gods could teach me about weaving,' McCaughrean (1993) 32) but even more the accompanying illustrations by Emma Chichester Clark, which have a notably cartoonish style. This is evident in Chichester Clark's depiction of Athene's web, which is already a 'comical picture,' with the gods as somewhat ridiculous figures striding self-importantly towards Mt. Olympus, as well as in Arachne's similarly strip-shaped version further down the page [fig. 3]. In Arachne's version, the gods are not only doing silly things, but they look younger, in a visual translation of McCaughrean's list of notably childish behaviors, starting with 'dressing up,' which reinterprets the gods' predatory metamorphosis as a form of play (represented by a figure with a donkey's head, who suggests Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* more than any classical god). At the center, the imposing presence of Mt. Olympus has been replaced by Icarus, who is not even a god, and whose story of childish disobedience is told elsewhere in the collection.

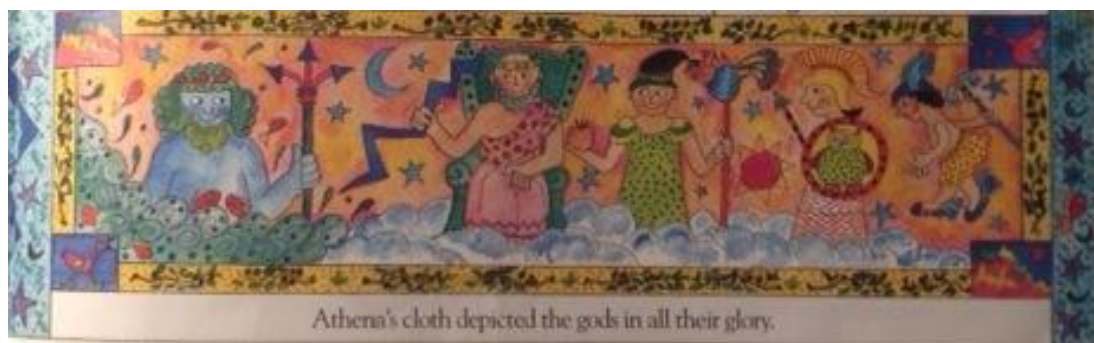


[fig. 3]

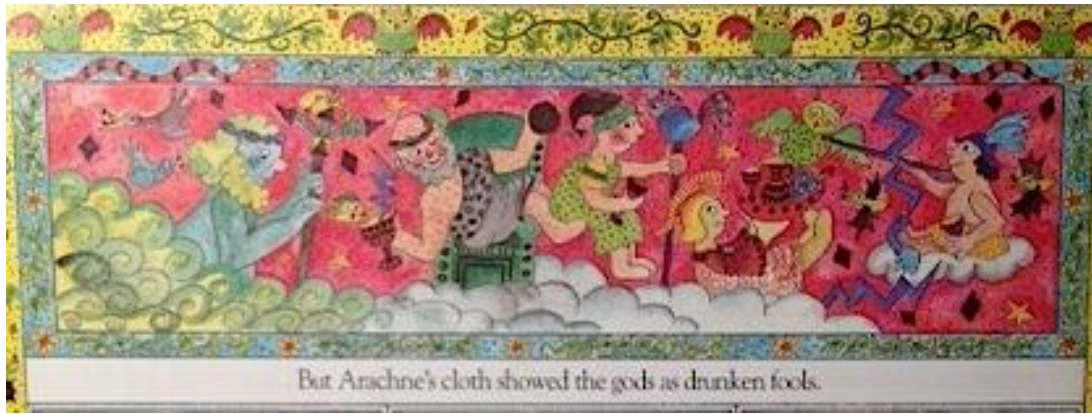
The reworking of traditional myth as a 'comical picture' is most obviously programmatic in the case of the several versions for children that actually take the form of a cartoon or comic strip.¹⁸² In a medium marked both by irreverence and by the frequent

¹⁸² On the cartoon as a favoured medium for contemporary myth retellings for children, see Roberts (2009) 68-70.

repetition of similar images, Arachne's web readily becomes a visual parody of Minerva's. In Marcia Williams' *Greek Myths for Young Children*, Athena's web is as goofy as the rest of the images, but it does present a canonical tableau of the Olympian gods lined up in a row [fig. 4]; its association with official mythology is signalled by the fact that it also appears on the book's title page. Arachne's web, which is described by the text as showing 'the gods as drunken fools,' is a variant on the same image, with the gods lined up in the same configuration on the same bed of clouds, but now transformed by drink and displaced into foolish postures. Jupiter is reclining rather than sitting on his throne; Juno perches on his feet with a cup in one hand, rather than facing forward and displaying her attributes; Hermes playfully pokes Athena's owl with his caduceus [fig. 5]. These are the relaxed and ludicrous variants on the Olympian gods that Williams portrays in order to appeal to a child audience.



[fig. 4]



[fig. 5]

In Michael Townsend's *Amazing Greek Myths of Wonder and Blunders* (whose publisher promises 'the mythic monsters and Hellenic heroes that have captured Western culture for centuries – but a whole lot more fun'),¹⁸³ Arachne's web is similarly a close variant on Athena's; Townsend's unapologetic manhandling of the mythic tradition is reenacted as Athena's decorous assemblage of Olympians is pushed to the bottom of the image and a grinning, arm-spreading, sunglass-wearing Arachne inserts herself into the scene [fig 6].

¹⁸³ See <http://www.amazon.com/Amazing-Greek-Myths-Wonder-Blunders/dp/0147510694>



[fig. 6]

In Kate Hovey's much more serious retelling, the tenor of Hovey's anti-elitist revision is figured in the difference between the materials of the two webs. Athena is not portrayed as actually weaving a web, but only as pointing to her 'fine thread . . . /Royal purples from Tyre,/ spun gold burnished with red,' while Arachne works with humbler threads colored by dyes mixed by her hard-working father (Hovey (2001)).

Arachne's transformation into a spider may be a terrible punishment, but it does preserve her identity as an artist, a point that is made with poignant clarity in the version by Katharine Pyle (one of a family of noted artists and illustrators, including her more famous brother Howard Pyle). As Athena vengefully strikes her and declares 'Never again shall you weave,' Arachne cries out 'take not away my power of weaving, rather take my life; better to die than live helpless and scorned by all' (Pyle (1928) 123-4). Versions vary in the degree of emphasis they give to Arachne's transformation, as opposed to the contest with Minerva, but most include some sense of the horror and loss involved in the experience of becoming a spider, and so complicate the story's neat aetiological conclusion. Many follow Ovid in presenting

Arachne's dehumanization as a series of stages, beginning with the loss of her hair. In Beckwith's version, Arachne feels herself growing small, then recognizes her own metamorphosis through the words of some sympathetic, but ultimately detached, nymphs:

She heard a nymph say
'O, how little Arachne is growing.
What a tiny head she has!
What a big body!
Now her pretty hair is gone.
Only her bright eyes are left.'
They felt so sad.
They went away and left her. (Beckwith (1896) 86-7)

Williams' cartoon includes a series of frames, in each of which Arachne has suffered another change, beginning with one in which she is holding clumps of hair and exclaiming 'not my beautiful coiffure!'

Illustrators seeking to capture the transformation in a single image often produce uncanny hybrids like those found on the D'Aulaires' version of Arachne's web [fig. 1]. Deborah Winograd's version for the retelling by Jamie and Scott Simons [fig. 7] shows Arachne as a girl in front and a spider in back, with one human arm and one tentacle emerging from the sleeves of her dress; the Kafkaesque horror of this is at once confirmed and mitigated by the exaggeratedly wide eyes and open mouth that hint at caricature even as they express shock.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Cf. the hybrids illustrated in Coolidge (1949) 27, Hovey (2001), and Spires (2001), frontispiece and 2.



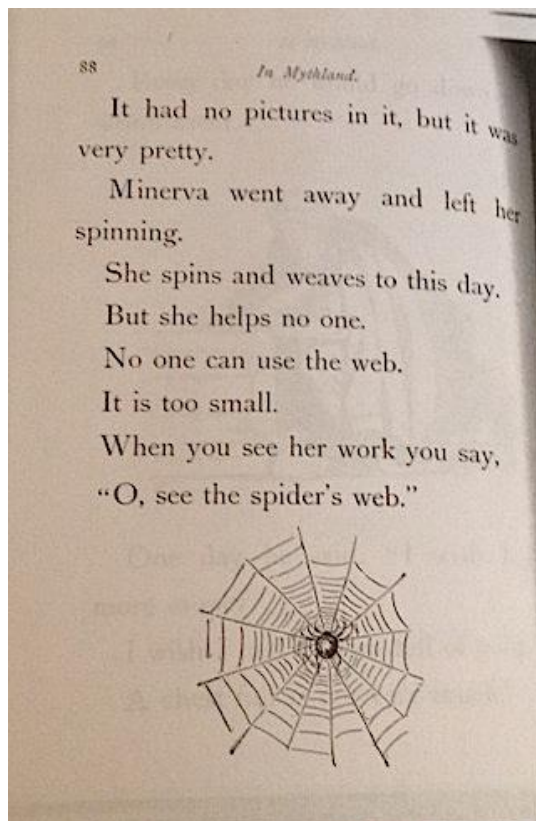
[fig. 7]

The D'Aulaires themselves show a nearly complete spider scuttling across Arachne's web, but still with a human face, which is marked by an expression of dismay as she looks back at her divine nemesis. Some versions present the spider negatively from the perspective of arachnophobic humans, rather than Arachne herself, or even, in one case, of the poor flies whom she entraps (in Townsend's cartoon version, where the final frame is mostly covered by a banner reading 'the very censored END').

However disorienting and double-edged the emergence of the spider may be as the final chapter to Arachne's story, it does provide the clear telos expected in an aetiological myth. Many versions conclude by stepping back from the narrative and noting this timeless outcome: 'From that day on, people have admired the spider's weaving' (Simons (1991)); 'And ever since then she has been weaving and weaving and weaving' (Coats (2002) 62); 'All spiders descend from Arachne . . .' (Coolidge (1949) 26); 'And Arachne's daughters, the world's spiders, are all great weavers. Just like her' (Kimmel (2008) 35); 'And Arachnida is what the class of spiders is known as, from that day to this!' (Lewis (1987) 27).

This closural move has a frequent visual analogue, as many illustrated versions end with a small, realistic image of a spider on its web. This image is presented differently from those that

illustrate the story, appearing as a kind of decorative vignette or filler at the bottom of the page [fig. 8], or in one case in the corner of the page (Coats (2003) 62), sometimes in black-and-white in contrast to colored illustrations (Coats (2003), Osborne (1988)). In two books dedicated wholly to this myth, such a depiction appears in one case on the title page (Simons (1991)), in another on both the title page and the end papers (Hovey (2001)). This ornamental and generic image brings the story to a close by stepping away from the incidents and transformations of narrative; it returns us to the unchanging status quo that is sometimes figured by Minerva's web, now in the form of a natural occurrence in the child reader's familiar world: an ordinary sight that an ancient myth – if suitably rewoven – can animate and explain.



[fig. 8]

Chapter 7

Narcissus in Children's Contexts: Didacticism and Scopophilia?

Aileen Hawkins and Alison Poe

Popular modern compendia of classical myths for children often implicitly or even explicitly present their versions of these myths as faithful reflections of ancient values and behaviour.¹⁸⁵ From the mid-nineteenth to early twenty-first century, the story of Narcissus, when included in these books, consistently represents a cautionary tale against vanity and cold-heartedness toward others. While the texts depend either directly or indirectly on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, though, the modern retellings in fact diverge from their main ancient source in ways that alter the myth's message. Furthermore, when presented to children in antiquity, this story may have at least sometimes possessed very different functions and meanings. Although few renderings of the Narcissus myth created expressly for a juvenile audience have been identified in the ancient literary and visual corpus, a first-century fresco decorating a probable children's bedroom in Pompeii (fig. 1) provides one likely example. The Pompeian painting is so emphatically sensual, this paper contends, that its purpose may well have been to introduce a male child viewer to eroticism and scopophilia. The disparities between this ancient treatment of Narcissus and the stories of Narcissus in modern children's books serve as a reminder that

¹⁸⁵ Our thanks go to the editors of the volume for including this essay, and to the audience members at the 'Classical Receptions in Children's Literature' conference who furnished useful feedback on our paper, which we have incorporated into this revised version. All errors remain our own.

the latter are instances of classical reception: they are *constructions* of antiquity, possibly rooted in Freudian theories of narcissism.

The versions of the Narcissus myth that are most widely read by children in the U.S. today model themselves on the account in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁸⁶ The earliest example still taught in many schools, Thomas Bulfinch's 1855 *Age of Fable*, relates Ovid's version because of its function as a frequent source of literary allusions. Edith Hamilton's 1942 *Mythology*, another standard text in many an elementary and secondary classroom, derides Ovid for treating myth, in her words, as 'nonsense' (Hamilton 1942, 15), but she nonetheless preserves the basic plot of Ovid's story, because, as she puts it, 'he tells the story well' (Hamilton 1942, 16). And more recent books of myths that are written expressly for children, including Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire's 1962 illustrated *Book of Greek Myths*, William Russell's 1992 *Classic Myths to Read Aloud*, and Heather Amery's 2000 *Greek Myths for Young Children*, offer simplified retellings of Ovid's version to appeal to young readers. These popular books have provided the foundations upon which countless Anglophone children have built their understanding of ancient mythology.

All of these modern authors present the Narcissus myth as a didactic story, as Narcissus is punished by the gods for treating others coldly and heartlessly. In two crucial ways, however, their versions depart from the plot of the *Metamorphoses*, and these departures, we propose, significantly influence our current perception of the Narcissus myth and its meaning. First, in

¹⁸⁶ A November 2014 survey of sales of these popular compendia of classical myths read by children confirms their enduring popularity. Bulfinch's *Age of Fable* is available for purchase on amazon.com in 229 print editions and 19 e-book editions. Hamilton's *Mythology* is the second most popular book about Ancient Greece on the same site. Most notably, the D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* has been published in 27 different editions and formats since its initial publication in 1962. As of November 10, 2014, the D'Aulaires' volume was ranked #634 in sales of all books on amazon.com, where it is included among *100 Children's Books to Read in a Lifetime*. The New York Public Library also recently named this compendium in its *100 Great Children's Books* list.

Ovid's telling, Narcissus' divine retribution for spurning Echo and his other admirers is never to win the love of another: Nemesis grants the prayer of a rejected suitor, *Sic amet ipse licet sic non potiatur amato*, 'So may he love -- and never win his love!' (*Met.* 3.403, tr. Melville). Narcissus' crime, then, is cruelty, and his punishment is to fall in love tragically and ironically with one being who definitely cannot return his affections, his own reflection. While Bulfinch retains Ovid's punishment in his retelling, Hamilton, Amery, and Russell change the story by *explicitly stating* that Narcissus' punishment is to fall in love with himself, *not* just to suffer the pain of unrequited love. Even farther afield are the D'Aulaires, who eschew any discussion of retribution and instead characterize Narcissus from the beginning as someone who "liked nobody but himself" (D'Aulaires 1962, repr. 2003, 92). The D'Aulaires' Narcissus is so vain, he simply cannot help falling in love with his own reflection. By changing Narcissus' punishment from unrequited love to fatal self-love, the modern children's authors alter the moral of the story, and the lesson becomes even more clear for young readers. Narcissus' tragic fate is a warning against self-centeredness; those who will not love others (or, in the D'Aulaires' telling, those who only love themselves) will perish from their vanity.

The second key difference between Ovid's Narcissus and modern versions for children appears as the modern authors wrestle with whether Narcissus truly understands the nature of his punishment. In the *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus falls in love with the beautiful face he sees in the water, and only later does he come to realize, to his great dismay, that he is the object of his unrequited love, exclaiming: *iste ego sum: sensi, nec me mea fallit imago*, 'Oh, I am he! Oh, now I know for sure/ The image is my own' (3.461, tr. Melville). He then wastes away, grieving his inability to love himself and be loved back. With the exception of Hamilton, the modern authors, particularly the authors writing explicitly for children, opt *not* to allow Narcissus to reach this epiphany. Instead, the authors employ dramatic irony to elucidate the moral and intensify the warning against selfishness. The pure and principled reader—a young

child, in fact—comprehends Narcissus’ folly and the cause for his punishment, but Narcissus dies without any such understanding. He is too shallow and too self-absorbed to realize that he is in love with himself.

On a broader level, the moralizing aims of the modern children’s writers also put their books at odds with the *Metamorphoses*. Alessandro Schiesaro argues that Ovid’s poetry is not didactic in worldview or intent: unlike Lucretius and other Greek and Roman didactic poets, Ovid does not uphold eternal truths in a positivist manner, moral or otherwise, but rather ‘problematizes ... the very notion of knowing, and drowns his predecessors’ fundamentalist certainties in a whirlwind of competing accounts and elusive contradictions’ (Schiesaro 2002, 63). On its own, Ovid’s story of Narcissus can perhaps be read as a warning against cruelty: those who show no kindness or love towards others will never be loved in return. Within the fragmented, inconsistent moral universe of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, however, the myth loses any clear moral message. The didacticism of the modern mythological compendia therefore represents a significant departure in intent from their principal ancient source.

Despite these major differences between Ovid and the modern retellings of Narcissus for children, these nineteenth- through twenty-first-century authors frame the Narcissus myth as universal, or as part of what Carl Jung calls our ‘collective unconscious.’ They either explicitly or implicitly use the story to link the values of the ancient Greeks and Romans -- or sometimes only of the ancient Greeks -- to modern sensibilities. Bulfinch demonstrates Narcissus’ enduring legacy as a literary archetype by asserting that ‘no one of the fables of antiquity has been oftener alluded to by the poets than that of Narcissus’ (Bulfinch 1967, 105) and by including examples of the Narcissus myth in English literature. As critics have argued, however, Bulfinch’s version more closely reflects conservative nineteenth-century values than the function of the myth in antiquity. Hamilton even more explicitly suggests the universality of the story, despite her clear departure from Ovid: ‘Nothing we learn about [the ancient

Greeks] is alien to ourselves' (Hamilton 1942, ix). As for the simplified versions written specifically for young children, Amery includes the Narcissus myth in her collection to suggest that vanity and cold-heartedness were just as morally wrong in ancient Greece and Rome as they are today. The D'Aulaires offer no preface or introduction to their compendium, but by including their version as 'the' myth of Narcissus into their *Book of Greek Myths*, they imply a fixed meaning across time. Russell contends, moreover, 'We are...connected to these ancient civilizations...by these myths, for it is in these tales that we see ourselves' (Russell 1992, 5). The consistent underlying premise, then, is that the story of Narcissus, and classical mythology generally, constitutes a stable entity with fixed meanings and values, both within antiquity -- for all authors and all readers in both Greece and Rome -- and through the present day.

For Hamilton and her successors, the construction of the Narcissus myth as a story with a clear moral message may depend in part on the theories of narcissism that emerged within the field of psychology in the early twentieth century. Already by the turn of the century, Havelock Ellis had already identified a 'Narcissus-like tendency...for the sexual emotion to be absorbed and often entirely lost in self-admiration' (Ellis 1898; Ellis 1927; cf Engels 2013, 77-78). Sigmund Freud's 1914 paper 'On Narcissism: an Introduction' paved the way for an adoption of the Narcissus myth by the psychological community as a means of explaining sexual perversions or an unhealthy self-love. In his seminal essay, Freud postulates an initial 'primary narcissism,' or 'ego-libido,' as a necessary stage in a child's sexual development, when a child cannot clearly distinguish love of him or herself from the love of an external object or person. An inability to advance from this primary narcissism, however, can be damaging, Freud contends: 'A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love' (Freud 1914, repr. 1985; cf Engels 2013, 85-89). Freud's characterization of the potential dangers inherent in excessive self-love helped to frame

narcissism as a disorder to be proactively avoided. Given its great impact on Western thought over the last century (Renger 2002), Freud's theory may well have shaped twentieth- and twenty-first century children's versions of this story, at least indirectly. The use of the Narcissus myth by Hamilton, the D'Aulaires, Russell, and Amery as a cautionary tale against self-absorption, and specifically for an audience in the midst of its psychological development, certainly resonates with Freud's formulation of narcissism.

The authors under consideration thus present their versions of the Narcissus story as fables with a clear and timeless moral, and they treat this presentation as a point of commonality between the ancient Greeks and modern children, and even among all mankind. The myth of Narcissus varied even in antiquity, however. Disparate literary versions survive possibly in Theocritus' *Idyll* 1 (early 3rd c BCE) and certainly in Conon's *Narratives* (Jacoby 1923 no. F26, 36 BCE - 17 CE), Pausanias' *Description of Greece* 9.31.7-8 (mid-second century CE), the ekphrases of Philostratus the Elder (*Images* 1.23, probably early to mid-third century CE) and of Callistratus (*Descriptions* 5, third or fourth century CE), and elsewhere (Zimmermann 1994; Vigne 1967, 41). Pausanias, for instance, gives a rationalization of the Narcissus myth in which Narcissus falls in love with his twin sister, who dies, and subsequently finds solace in his own image. The many renderings from the twelfth through the early nineteenth century differ again (Vigne 1967, 55-330). As we have seen, finally, modern children's books in fact rework the story once more, using the *Metamorphoses* as a starting point but adapting it to teach modern moral lessons about vanity, probably partly under the influence of Freud.

Could the disparities between these compendia and other treatments of the Narcissus myth derive simply from the difference in intended audience? In other words, if the ancient (or medieval or early modern) versions had been composed for children, would they have resembled modern children's books much more closely? To answer this question with a case study, this paper will turn to a slightly later presentation of the Narcissus myth that *was*

probably meant for a young audience, to establish whether its intended purpose and underlying messages align with those of the popular modern children's volumes.

The fresco of Narcissus in Pompeii V.4.a, a house that probably belonged to Marcus Lucretius Fronto, a local politician, is one of the very few surviving Roman wall paintings that can be plausibly identified as having been made for children (fig. 1).¹⁸⁷ It belongs to a repainting of parts of the *domus* sometime between the earthquake in Pompeii in 62 and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79.¹⁸⁸ Framed as a fictive panel painting, the image forms part of the Fourth-Style scheme of decoration in room 6 (sometimes known as room *i*), a small rectangular chamber adjoining the atrium. Given the location, scale, and layout of room 6, the space was almost certainly a *cubiculum* (bedroom).¹⁸⁹

John Clarke has argued that *cubiculum* 6 belonged to children (Clarke 1991, 159), and the archaeological and pictorial evidence indeed supports this attribution. First, a graffito of the name Marcus appears on the west (front) wall (Sogliano 1901, 161). Given Roman naming conventions, Marcus Lucretius Fronto the Elder could well have named a son after himself, and that boy might have been more apt than his father to refer to himself by the intimate *praenomen* rather than by the more public *cognomen* or by the more formal *tria nomina*. Second, the frescoes on the west wall of the room present wreath-framed roundels containing the busts of two children: a boy of roughly seven to ten years on the north side of the entrance doorway, nearest the Narcissus painting, and a girl of perhaps three to six years on the south

¹⁸⁷ On the house, Wynia (1982) 329-40; Clarke (1991) 158-63; Peters (1993). On Marcus Lucretius Fronto, see Castrén (1975) 66; Franklin Jr. (1980) 99-100.

¹⁸⁸ Wynia (1982) 333-34; Clarke (1991) 159; Peters et al. (1993) 139-40.

¹⁸⁹ Peters et al. (1993) 77, 405. Allison (2009) notes that five ceramic jugs and a plate were discovered in the room and proposes that “during its final occupancy, [the space] had a rather more utilitarian use than that implied by the painted decoration.” On the other hand, the use of the space for storing vessels, perhaps only temporarily, does not preclude its continued use as a bedroom.

side (figs. 2, 3). Roman artists often employed this circular format for portraits (Winkes 1969). The distinctive features of the two children, such as the boy's long, heart-shaped face and the girl's full cheeks, suggest that the figures represent specific individuals. The lightly traced parallel lines on the boy's shoulders may represent a strap for the *bullā*, the gold amulet worn by upper-class Roman boys in this period (Stout 2001, 77-78). This child wears the winged hat and caduceus of Mercury, probably following the widespread Roman practice of depicting real individuals in the guise of divinities (Wrede 1981).¹⁹⁰ The girl's hairstyle is the *melonenfrisur*, a common coiffure in Roman portraits of girls (Olson 2008). The two roundels in cubiculum 6 thus almost certainly portray an actual, contemporary boy and girl, very plausibly the intended occupants of the room. If the boy was responsible for writing the graffito *Marcus* on the same wall, then he was probably the son and namesake of the house's owner, Marcus Lucretius Fronto, and the girl was likely his younger sister.¹⁹¹ The frescoes in chamber 6, then, probably constitute one of the very few Roman domestic painting schemes directed from the outset specifically toward juvenile viewers.¹⁹²

The Narcissus panel decorates the center of the north (left) wall of the cubiculum, its square frame set against a yellow ground. The adolescent youth sits languidly on an outcrop in a rocky landscape, leaning back on his straight left arm (fig. 1). His body is nude save a purple and blue rectangle of drapery covering his lower thighs and calves; his head is wreathed, and he cradles a spear, his attribute as a hunter, on his right side. He turns his head to his left (the

¹⁹⁰ The attributes of Mercury perhaps served to encourage the child's interest in the financial realm (Clarke (1991) 159), or they may have simply cast him in the role of his favorite god or patron god.

¹⁹¹ At the time of the eruption, at least, children were certainly in this house, as three children's skeletons were found in another room: Allison (2009).

¹⁹² Clearly defined children's spaces are usually lacking in the Roman *domus*; see Wallace-Hadrill (1998) 52. This absence that manifests itself in the textual record (Riggsby (1997) 42); in the domestic assemblages of finds at Pompeii as Allison (2004) shows; and in the distribution of children's graffiti, which are found in various parts of the house, albeit often in cubacula (Huntley (2011) 79-83).

viewer's right) and directs his gaze downward as a reflection of his head shimmers in a small pool in the right foreground.

The painting emphasizes the sensuality of Narcissus to an extraordinary degree. The youth's nude body dominates the composition, occupying almost the entire diagonal of the picture plane from the lower left to the upper right corner. Its soft, pubescent contours are clearly defined, and his smooth skin is brightly lit, especially in comparison with the hazy, washed-out silhouettes of the surrounding rock formations. Narcissus' exposed genitalia are given great prominence: situated centrally in the panel, they are framed by the V shape of his falling drapery and mirrored by the nearly parallel line of his spear, a weapon that in antiquity could symbolize erotic pursuit (Elsner 2007, 153). Intimate details suggest the tactility of his body, from the position of his left big toe, which appears to stroke his right foot, to the gentle grasp of his right hand on the spear, to the cascading of a few tendrils of wavy hair and the ties of his wreath onto his rounded shoulders.

Many versions of this scene survive from ancient Rome, and their broad similarity to one another suggests that they derive from a single famous prototype, now lost (Rafn 1992; Prehn 1997; Kondoleon 1995, 30-40; Elsner 2007, 152-76). Subtle differences exist among the versions, however, and the child's painting in the House of Fronto is one of the most erotic. Compared to a roughly contemporary fresco in the House of Marcus Loreius Tibertinus at Pompeii (II.2.2-5) (fig. 5), for example, the child's panel in the House of Fronto depicts Narcissus closer to the viewer, in a more recumbent pose, and with much more conspicuous genitals (on this fresco: Platt 2002, 87-112; Elsner 2007, 160-62). Pavement mosaics at Antioch show Narcissus wearing a brimmed hat, a sword on a strap across his chest, and drapery that covers his genitals (fig. 6, House of Narcissus); a floor panel in the House of Dionysus at Paphos on Cyprus adds a cloak over his shoulders and hunter's boots (Kondoleon 1995, 30-40, figs. 11-15). In a number of other images, including a fresco from Pompeii now in the Naples

Museum (fig. 7) and a mosaic in the House of the Buffet Supper at Antioch, Narcissus is accompanied by Cupid, Echo, or both, placing the figure within a more explicit narrative context (Elsner 2007, figs. 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.13-6.17; Kondoleon 1995, fig. 15). The exclusion of these figures from Fronto's painting minimizes the literary character of the image and instead focuses the viewer's attention squarely on the body of Narcissus.

Directly across room 6 from the Narcissus panel in the House of Fronto is a second framed scene at the center of the south (right) wall (fig. 4). Now damaged, it depicts Pero nursing her father Micon in prison to prevent him from starving to death, a myth attested in Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 5.4.1 (fig. 4). A painted inscription in elegiac couplets in the upper left corner, clearly original to the fresco, describes the action and concludes with the line *tristis inest cum pietate pudor* ("In sadness, modesty meets with filial piety") (*CIL* IV 6635; Courtney 1995, 76-7, no. 56; 227-28). This epigram lends the panel a strongly didactic quality (Clarke 1991, 159) by explicitly celebrating the qualities of its heroine that were considered model traits for a Roman woman (Williams 1996; Dixon 2001; Riess 2012). Perhaps not coincidentally, the roundel of the young girl is situated closest to this scene (fig. 3).

The moralizing tone of the Pero and Micon fresco throws into high relief the absence of any overt moral message from the Narcissus panel opposite it. Even if a child viewed the image with the full arc of Narcissus' story in mind -- a possibility, since upper-class boys and some upper-class girls began formal education around the age of seven, and since even younger children absorbed myth through informal storytelling and other means (Bonner 1977; Rawson 2009, 156-209) -- the fresco *itself* contains no visual cues that the youth will die by the pond, or that this fate constitutes a punishment. By contrast, the painting in the House of Tibertinus turns Narcissus' reflection into a Gorgoneion, cleverly signifying its deadly power (fig. 5). The mosaic pavements in the House of Narcissus at Antioch (fig. 6) and in the House of Dionysos

in Paphos portray Narcissus with a doleful expression, raising his hand to deliver his pathetic final soliloquy. The images that include Echo usually depict her languishing at the edge of the composition, her gaze unreturned by the object of her affections; she thus embodies the pain that Narcissus has caused others (fig. 7). In the painting in the House of Fronto, however, Narcissus assumes a relaxed pose, his expression is dreamy, his reflection is human, and his spurned suitors do not appear. The panel simply presents a beautiful adolescent boy admiring himself in a pool.

If the purpose of this fresco was not to impart a lesson about hardheartedness or self-centeredness, then what was it? Jaś Elsner argues that the Narcissus myth serves in Roman art generally as a metaphor for the viewing of naturalistic art: Narcissus' desire for what he wrongly believes is a real person, separate from himself, parallels the desire of a viewer for the image of the beautiful nude Narcissus, and it implies that the viewer's admiration of naturalistic figures in art is a form of narcissism, of *self*-admiration (Elsner 2007, 132-76, esp. 168). For a young audience, though, this interpretation may have been too sophisticated to grasp, and even if not, other layers of meaning may have been primary for the painting in the House of Fronto.

The patron(s) of the decorative program -- presumably the children's father, Marcus Lucretius Fronto *senior*, or less likely their mother, or perhaps both -- may instead have commissioned the fresco in room 6 to acclimatise Marcus *iunior* with his own male sexuality. Narcissus may have offered an especially apposite choice from the repertory of myth: he was not yet a full-grown man himself; his beauty and desirability were proverbial; and his self-absorption created the opportunity for voyeurism. The experience that Elsner postulates of a Roman viewer seeing himself reflected in Narcissus would have been a particularly vivid encounter for a male *child*, even one too young to appreciate the parallelism with the myth itself. Reclining in bed in his cubiculum and gazing at this fresco, the boy Marcus would have found it easy to identify with the young figure of Narcissus leaning back and gazing at his

reflection. As Marcus aged to sexual maturity, he may even have viewed Narcissus as an ideal version of himself. In other words, the painting may have invited, and even *encouraged*, narcissism.

Roman literary sources sometimes bemoan the exposure of children to sexually charged talk, activities, and imagery in the home. Quintilian laments that children “see our mistresses, our boy lovers; every dinner echoes with obscene songs; things are to be seen which it is shameful to name” (*The Orator’s Education* 1.2.8, late 1st c CE, tr. Russell). Tacitus complains about loose talk and other poor adult behavior around children (*A Discourse on Oratory* 29.1, c. 102 CE, tr. Sarah Bryant). Propertius denounces the painter of “indecent pictures in a virtuous house, who corrupted the innocent eyes of girls, refusing to leave them ignorant of his own depravity” (*Elegy* 2.6.27-30, c. 25 BCE, tr. Goold). Plutarch cautions teachers of young men that a painting, like a poem, can convey “foul actions and unseemly passions,” but he does advise them to praise the technical achievements of the artists (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*, 3, c. 100 CE, tr. Babbitt). While these authors express dismay that children see and hear the world of adult sexuality, their criticisms indicate that such sights and sounds were not uncommon, even at home. As Beryl Rawson has noted, Roman children participated in family marriage celebrations and dinner parties, both of which could be highly sexually charged (Rawson 2003, 213-15). The rarity of room 6 in Fronto’s house as (probably) a designated children’s cubiculum reflects the fluid nature of living and sleeping arrangements in the Roman *domus*: young members of the *familia* typically circulated throughout most or all of the house and slept in rooms with parents, slaves, or other adults.¹⁹³ Christian Laes points out that this arrangement must have led to boys and girls at least occasionally witnessing sexual acts in the home (Laes 2011, 261). Wall paintings and statues of an even more overtly erotic

¹⁹³ See above, note xxx.

nature than the Narcissus panel, including not only scenes of mythological liaisons but also outright pornography, decorated a variety of spaces in many Roman houses, as attested both by a range of literary references and by ample archaeological remains (Grant and Mulas 1975; Myerowitz 1992; Clarke 2001, 145-94). The innumerable smaller-scale Roman domestic objects with sexual imagery, such as oil lamps, Arretine-ware bowls, mirrors, and gems, must have been impossible to keep from children's eyes (Johns 1982; Clarke 1998, 59-78, 108-18, 243-65). In actuality, Roman children must have gleaned much of their early understanding of desire and sex from within their own house.

Given this context, the alluring figure of Narcissus in the likely bedroom of the young Marcus Lucretius Fronto and his sister may represent a deliberate and controlled use of domestic art to acquaint children -- or at least a male child -- with eroticism. It may have offered Marcus *iunior* the scopophilic enjoyment of a sensual body under circumstances that were perhaps considered relatively respectable: within a classicizing fresco of high artistic quality that depended on a renowned earlier work of art. The beautiful Narcissus could have elevated to an aesthetic ideal the sexual culture that the boy might be expected to encounter in more sordid ways elsewhere in the house. To ensure, however, that the presence of this body did not "corrupt" the young female viewer in the room, the patron/parent(s) counterbalanced Narcissus with a female embodiment of *pietas* and *pudor*, Pero. The components of Roman decorative ensembles could interact thematically (Bergmann 1994), and the paintings in this room may have served to present normative Roman gender roles in regard to sexuality.¹⁹⁴

This presentation of Narcissus as a potential object of lust for a juvenile viewer finds no parallel in any of the major modern children's books that treat this myth. Of course, other

¹⁹⁴ An example of multiple mythological scenes together reinforcing gendered societal norms occurs in room E of the House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5.18), where Medea, Phaedra, and Helen represent different types of errant wives; Bergmann (1996). The intended audience for the frescoes in this room is unclear, however.

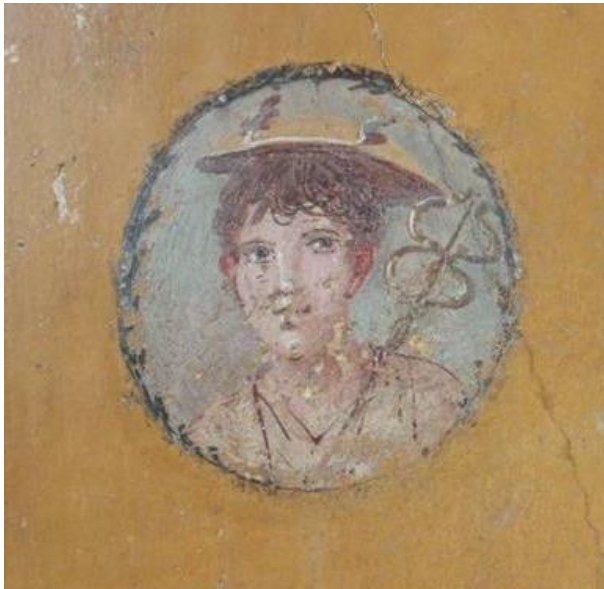
versions of the Narcissus story for Roman children, if they existed, may have differed considerably from the fresco in the house of M. Lucretius Fronto. The single example of this painting demonstrates, however, that the modern didactic retellings of the myth do *not* represent a point of complete connection and cultural kinship with antiquity, despite the assertions of their authors. The titillating function of the Roman children's fresco deviates strongly -- perhaps even shockingly, to our modern sensibilities -- from the use of the myth by children's writers from Bulfinch to Amery to teach boys and girls about the dangers of vanity. As the differences among the many versions of this story through the ages also show, the notion of a monolithic understanding of the youth who fell in love with his reflection is, itself, very much a myth.

The question arises, then: what role should modern storytellers play in acquainting children with a Greek myth that has been relayed by ancient and postclassical sources as varied as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Freud's "On Narcissism"? If the goal of a modern retelling is to teach a moral lesson, then perhaps it should be made clear that these stories are inspired by, but are not necessarily reflective of, the values of the ancients. Similarly, if the goal is to teach children the ethos of a particular time and place, then perhaps a more historical approach should be taken when narrating the myth. Perhaps, however, the establishment of a strong link between ancient Greek or Roman values and today's sensibilities should not be the goal, if it is even possible at all. Modern readers and viewers see in the ancient myth of Narcissus a story in perpetual evolution, reflecting the cultural and moral attitudes of each generation's storyteller.

[Fig. 1] Narcissus, fresco, north wall of room *i*, House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, between 62 and 79 CE.



[Fig. 2] Roundel of boy as Mercury, fresco, north side of front (west) wall of room *i*, House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, between 62 and 79 CE.



[Fig. 3] Roundel of girl, fresco, south side of front (west) wall of room *i*, House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, between 62 and 79 CE.



[Fig. 4] Pero and Micon, fresco, south wall of room *i*, House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii, between 62 and 79 CE right (south) wall.



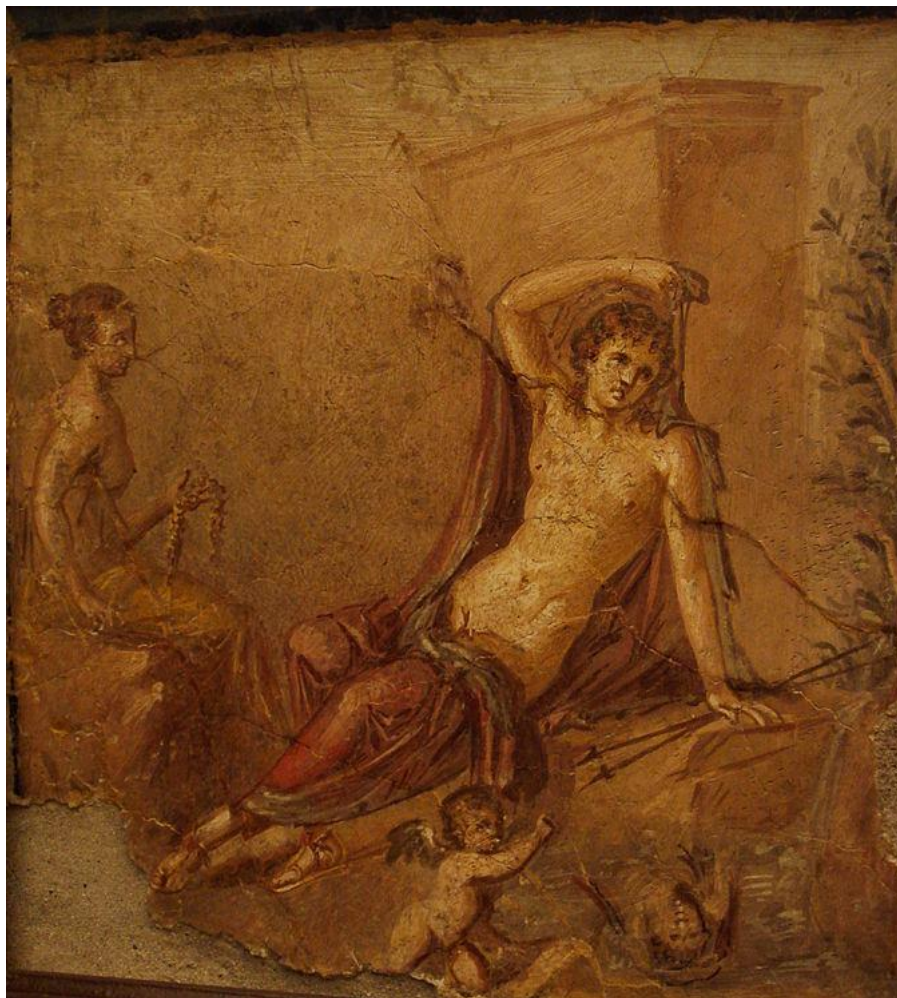
[Fig. 5] Narcissus, fresco, wall of outdoor dining terrace, House of M. Loreius Tiburtinus, Pompeii, 3rd quarter 1st c CE.



[Fig. 6] Narcissus, floor mosaic panel, triclinium (bedroom), House of Narcissus, Antioch, 2nd quarter 2nd c CE. Now in Baltimore Museum of Art.



[Fig. 7] Narcissus, Echo, and Cupid, from Pompeii (exact provenance uncertain), c. 3rd quarter 1st c CE. Now in Museo Nazionale, Naples (no. 9380).



Didactic classics

Chapter 8

“I'd break the slate and scream for joy if I did Latin like a boy!": Studying and Teaching Classics in Girls' and Boys' Fiction

Lisa Maurice

Latin is a language,
Dead as Dead Can Be,
First it Killed the Romans,
Now It's Killing Me.

All are dead who spoke it.
All are dead who wrote it.
All are dead who learned it,
Lucky dead, they've earned it.

So went the perennial cry of the prep or public schoolboy, a verse penciled in textbooks and quoted in fiction, throughout the history of boys' school stories.¹⁹⁵ Yet from the Victorian period to the twentieth century, enormous changes in educational ideas and systems occurred. One of those transformations concerned the place and status of classical studies in British education; another was the attitude towards, and practices of, girls' education. Both of these shifts were reflected in the juvenile fiction produced over the same period, a fact that is highlighted by a consideration of the depiction of classics, and in particular teachers of classics, in girls and boys fiction.

In boys' books, Greek, and even more, Latin, which remained a core subject for far longer, were symbols of boyhood suffering. Latin and Greek, and those who teach these subjects, were

¹⁹⁵ See Gruber-Miller (2006) 9; Seigel (1999) 3; Anthony Buckeridge, *Jennings Follows a Clue*, chapter fourteen. Due to the large number of editions of the works of children's fiction cited in this chapter, in the interests of clarity I cite chapter numbers rather than page numbers.

depicted as a instruments of torture for the poor boys forced to struggle with the incomprehensible and irrelevant torment of declensions, conjugations, gerundives and subjunctives. Meanwhile in these tales, teachers of Classics are portrayed as stuffy, old-fashioned and unchanging, the antithesis of metamorphosis.

In girls' fiction, however, a very different picture emerges. While learning about the ancient world was a grim duty in boys' fiction, , in girls' fiction it was a rich pleasure.¹⁹⁶ This very different picture of Classical Studies is itself a result of the enormous evolutions that took place in female education at the time these books were written and sold. As the twentieth century progressed, the continuing changes in education, and in particular the move to gender equality, impacted on the depiction of the teaching of Classics, and these differences disappeared, as the following survey will demonstrate.

The World of Boys: Boys' Education and Classical Studies

As Judith Humphrey points out, education in Britain has traditionally been less about imparting information than about forming people, and has traditionally been specifically connected with morality.¹⁹⁷ This is reflected in Thomas Arnold's intentions at Rugby, to develop 'sound religious and moral principles', and 'gentlemanly conduct' with 'intellectual ability' coming in only a poor runner-up to these aims.¹⁹⁸ The best way to achieve these lofty goals was believed to be through the teaching of classics.

¹⁹⁶ It may of course be asked to what extent this is a depiction of classics as opposed to schoolwork in general, and whether such work is positively depicted in girls' fiction but negatively in that for boys. Yet classics was so central as a subject in education, where it possessed an almost symbolic status, as will be shown below, that few other subjects even feature at any length in juvenile fiction.

¹⁹⁷ Humphrey (2009) 55.

¹⁹⁸ Gross (1965) 384.

Classics was, therefore, the staple of the public school during the time in which the school story first appeared. In Arnold's *Rugby*, boys studied little except Greek and Latin.¹⁹⁹ Although the second half of the nineteenth century saw these subjects challenged by new areas of knowledge such as science (at first regarded as 'practical' and inferior to the 'liberal' education of the intellect,²⁰⁰ but later displacing these less useful skills),²⁰¹ classics was still preeminent at the end of the century. A timetable from the Lower Sixth of Winchester college in 1898 shows that thirteen out of the twenty four lessons a week were still devoted to classical studies, as opposed to two each of Divinity, German, Science, one of English and four of mathematics.²⁰² At this period, Latin in particular was seen as the perfect tool for producing men who would run and rule the British empire.²⁰³ The rote learning which it emphasised was regarded as an ideal means of teaching boys obedience and discipline; the complexity of the language taught the ability to think; and the corporal punishment by which the learning was enforced turned them into brave men, able to endure suffering with a stiff upper lip.²⁰⁴

The position of Greek and Latin as an entrance requirement for Oxford and Cambridge also ensured the continuing centrality of classics, despite a changing world. This new reality was reflected in the fact that the Greek requirement was removed by the universities after the first world war. Nevertheless, Latin remained compulsory until as late as 1960.²⁰⁵ Since 70% of Oxford places still went to candidates from public schools in 1962,²⁰⁶ Latin remained an

¹⁹⁹ See Hughes (1904), with Sylvester (2006) 204-6.

²⁰⁰ See White (2003) 75.

²⁰¹ See in particular Mclure (2006) 89-111 on the Taunton Report of 1868 and the Elementary Education act of 1870; and also Barnard (1947) 128-134 and Gathorne-Hardy (1977) 136-143.

²⁰² Stray (1998a) 37.

²⁰³ See McDermott (2008) 369-392.

²⁰⁴ Stray (1998a) 29; McDermott (2008).

²⁰⁵ See Turner (1984) 5; Stray (1985) 19-52.

²⁰⁶ These figures were published in the Robbins Committee report on higher education in 1962. See Harrison (1994) 226.

essential component of the curriculum in these schools until the middle of the twentieth century.²⁰⁷ It is no coincidence then that the books which flourished during this period, which were set almost exclusively in such private schools, feature Latin so prominently.²⁰⁸ Nor is it a coincidence that Latin is portrayed almost without exception in a negative way.

Classics and Boys' School Stories

The widespread dislike of Latin is reflected in that most stereotypical of British prep-school boys, William Brown, the creation of Richmal Crompton, a classics mistress herself by profession.²⁰⁹ William's reaction to the subject is typical:

"P'raps it's Latin," said William, after a moment's thought. Mrs. Brown considered this explanation in silence.

"How do you mean, Latin?" she said at last.

"Well," explained William, "you see all this Latin I've got to learn mus' make my brain jolly heavy, an'-well, you carry your brain on your feet, don't you, same as the rest of your body, an', if I stopped learnin' Latin, my brain wouldn't be as heavy as what it is now, an'-well, I shouldn't go through my stockings so much. Can I stop learnin' Latin?"

"No, dear," said Mrs. Brown, "and don't talk such nonsense."

William sighed. He hadn't really hoped for anything else. Between himself and the Latin master lay a long and bitter enmity. He had tried various ruses to induce his father and mother to let him stop learning Latin but none of them had worked.²¹⁰

Nor does the situation change over time. Almost thirty years later, Latin fares no better in Anthony Buckeridge's Jennings series. In the first book of the series, *Jennings Goes to School* (1950), Darbishire's "Famous-Mammoth-How-Many-More-To-the-End-of-Term-Calendar" records how many more occurrences of certain events must be endured until the end of term.

²⁰⁷ Walford (2012) 186.

²⁰⁸ Perhaps ironically, the kind of school which many young readers would have attended, the secondary modern, did not teach classics in any shape or form at this period. See Forrest (1996) 1.

²⁰⁹ Cadogan (2003) 47-65.s

²¹⁰ Richmal Crompton, *Just William's Luck*, chapter ten.

Along with suet pudding and clean socks, Latin is the only lesson marked out in this way, reflecting its unpopularity.²¹¹

Over and over, the sheer difficulty of Latin is stressed. Billy Bunter for example finds Latin almost impossible. In particular, line 305 of Book 1 of the *Aeneid* crops up several times as one that Bunter construes badly:

If *at pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens, ut primum lux alma data est, exire locosque explorare novos* didn't mean "But the good Aeneas, turning over often in the night, when he is given a light goes out and explores nine places," Bunter just didn't know what it did mean or might mean.²¹²

A comment in the second book in the William series perhaps sums up how boys felt about the difficulty of Latin:

"Do you know any Latin, William?"
"Jus' a bit," said William, guardedly. "I've *learnt* a lot, but I don't *know* much."²¹³

As was the case in the public schools that the books aped, teachers were more than ready to enforce knowledge through corporal punishment. Since Latin and Greek were the main subjects taught in these schools, they also became associated with the stereotypical cane-wielding master. The earlier passage from Billy Bunter continues:

"If you had prepared this lesson, Bunter, you could not possibly make such absurd mistakes. You have done no preparation. You are making wild guesses at the meaning of that passage! Your translation, Bunter, would disgrace a small boy in the Second Form. I will not permit such idleness, such slackness - in my form! I have warned you, Bunter, of the consequences of idleness and slackness. I shall now cane you."
"Oh, lor!"²¹⁴

²¹¹ Anthony Buckeridge, *Jennings Goes to School*, chapter 13.

²¹² Charles Hamilton, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School*, chapter 12.

²¹³ Richmal Crompton, *More William*, chapter 13.

²¹⁴ Charles Hamilton, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School*, chapter 12.

Yet not all fictional classics masters were harsh disciplinarians. Perhaps the classic example of the teacher of Latin and Greek is James Hilton's Mr. Chipping, more familiarly known as Mr. Chips.²¹⁵ While not written specifically for children, Hilton's book does fit into the tradition of boys' school stories. His Mr. Chips, despite being portrayed positively, nevertheless displays the stereotypical elements of the classics master. He is strongly reactionary, showing a determination to cling to old and supposedly better values. When berated by Ralston, the new and 'modern' headmaster on his refusal to take up the 'new' Latin pronunciation,²¹⁶ his response is:

"Oh, *that!*" he answered, scornfully. "Well, I--umph--I admit that I don't agree with the new pronunciation. I never did. Umph--a lot of nonsense, in my opinion. Making boys say 'Kickero' at school when--umph--for the rest of their lives they'll say 'Cicero'--if they ever--umph--say it at all. And instead of 'vicissim'--God bless my soul--you'd make them say, 'We kiss 'im'! Umph--umph!'"²¹⁷

Nor is he any more flexible about the idea of innovation with regard to his lessons, although in this case this is not depicted negatively. When the headmaster tackles him on this issue, saying, "I understand, Mr. Chipping, that your Latin and Greek lessons are exactly the same as they were when I began here ten years ago?", he provokes the following response:

Chips answered, slowly and with pride: "For that matter--umph--they are the same as when your predecessor--Mr. Meldrum--came here, and that--umph--was thirty-eight years ago. We began here, Mr. Meldrum and I--in--umph--in 1870. And it was--um--Mr. Meldrum's predecessor, Mr. Wetherby--who first approved my syllabus. 'You'll take the Cicero for the fourth,' he said to me. Cicero, too--not Kickero!"²¹⁸

Yet the tide could not be stemmed as Ralston's reply to Chips reflects:

"You live too much in the past, and not enough in the present and future. Times are changing, whether you realize it or not. Modern parents are beginning to demand something more for their three years' school fees than a few scraps of languages that nobody speaks."²¹⁹

²¹⁵ See Berman (2004) 36-40.

²¹⁶ See Waquet (2002) 169.

²¹⁷ James Hilton, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, chapter 11.

²¹⁸ *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, chapter 11.

²¹⁹ *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, chapter 11.

While Ralston is eventually defeated in this book, and Mr. Chips painted as the hero, his backward-looking attitude, opposed to any change, is typical of the fictional classics master.

The figure of the classicist is made more ridiculous in boys' fiction because, despite the arcane nature of his subject, he is genuinely and disturbingly enthusiastic about it. Out of touch with reality, he cannot grasp his pupils' lack of interest or comprehension, and is unaware that the world has changed round him. The description of Geoffrey Willans' Molesworth is notable in this regard:

“Meanwhile Lat. master drones on. He is always frightfully keen on lat. which he call Classicks amo amas amat gender rhymes bonus and hic haec hoc which he quote with glee. Fancy a grown man saying hujus hujus hujus as if he were proud of it it is not English and do not make SENSE.

Lat. masters are always convinced that lat. is easy quite pappy. They encourage you. It is so *simple* Molesworth they cry if only you will try.”²²⁰

Ronald Searle's caricature of the classics master in the same volume shows a smug-faced man, captioned with his incredulous words, “And when I asked him the supine stem of confiteor the fool didn't know!”²²¹

The dislike of Latin was surely increased by the old-fashioned way in which it was still being taught in the post-war period in which Jennings, Molesworth and Billy Bunter all flourished.²²² Kennedy's *Revised Shorter Latin Primer* was the standard Latin text for schoolboys,²²³ a book mainly composed of grammatical tables, which has come to represent all that is deadening about learning ancient languages. In fiction, as in real life, the book has become the object of ridicule: both Jennings and Molesworth doctor the cover so that the title

²²⁰ Willans and Searle, *How to be Topp*, chapter 3.

²²¹ Willans and Searle, *Down with Skool!*, chapter 3.

²²² See Stray (1994) 201-222.

²²³ See Mary Beard, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/book-of-a-lifetime-kennedys-latin-primer-by-benjamin-hall-kennedy-942649.html> (accessed 22.1.14).

reads in the former case, *A Shorter Way of Eating Prime Beef*, and in the latter, the *Shortbread Eating Primer*.²²⁴ Faced with these abstract grammatical rules, it is easy enough to understand Molesworth's comment, echoed throughout boys' fiction, that Latin is simply "just BOSH".

As the purveyor of this 'bosh', the classics master in boys' fiction is portrayed as out of touch, and with a skewed sense of proportion, caring only about the arcane subject he teaches.²²⁵ Kipling depicts King, his fictional classics master, as having a real love and feeling for the texts, and it is his frustration with the boys who do not share this that causes his explosiveness.²²⁶ The short story, *Regulus*, which takes the reader through a whole Latin translation lesson demonstrates this:

"Ye-es; but then how do you render *obstantes*?"

"If it's a free translation mightn't *obstantes* and *morantem* come to about the same thing, sir?"

"Nothing comes to 'about the same thing' with Horace, Winton. As I have said, Horace was not a journalist. No, I take it that his kinsmen bodily withstood his departure, whereas the crowd--populumque--the democracy stood about futilely pitying him and getting in the way. Now for that noblest of endings--*quam si clientum*,' ...All right, Winton. Beetle, when you've quite finished dodging the fresh air yonder, give me the meaning of *tendens*--and turn down your collar."

"Me, sir? *Tendens*, sir? Oh! Stretching away in the direction of, sir."

"Idiot! *Regulus* was not a feature of the landscape. He was a man, self-doomed to death by torture. *Atqui, sciebat*--knowing it--having achieved it for his country's sake--can't you hear that *atqui* cut like a knife?--he moved off with some dignity. That is why Horace out of the whole golden Latin tongue chose the one word '*tendens*'--which is utterly untranslatable."

The gross injustice of being asked to translate it, converted Beetle into a young Christian martyr, till King buried his nose in his handkerchief again.²²⁷

Terence Rattigan's Crocker-Harris, perhaps the most negative classics teacher in fiction, nicknamed the "Himmler of the lower fifth", is humourless, emotionally stunted and a harsh

²²⁴ Buckeridge, *Jennings Goes to School*, introduction; Willans and Searle, *How to be Topp*, chapter three. See also Stray (1994) 216.

²²⁵ For this stereotype and its deviance from reality, see Beard (2013) 268.

²²⁶ On *Regulus*, see Plotz, (1993) 152-167; Gaisser, (1994) 449-452; Montefiore (2000) 112-136; Mackenzie (2002) 609-620; Leary (2008) 247-262; McDermott (2008) 369-392.

²²⁷ Kipling (1908).

disciplinarian; yet he also has a real love for his subject.²²⁸ Yet paradoxically, this genuine intellectual curiosity and love of the dead languages in which the Classicist specialises, makes him as incomprehensible to his pupils as Latin itself, for it is an area of research of no importance in the real world. This stereotype of Latin as a cliché for the boring, despised and irrelevant, unwilling and unable to change, is consistent throughout boys' schools fiction.

The World of Girls: Educating Girls, Expectations and Requirements

The situation of classics for girls was very different from that of boys; indeed the whole education system for females developed to a certain extent in reaction to that of their male counterparts, and started considerably later. A starting point for this metamorphosis can be seen with the Taunton Commission of 1864-68, which was set up to examine the state of secondary education, and which was persuaded only with difficulty even to consider girls' as well as boys' education; its findings demonstrated that girls received only the most basic education, and advised that this situation be rectified.²²⁹ In response to this demand for change, the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 established funding for grammar schools for both boys and girls.²³⁰

Nor did change stop there; the impetus for high level education for girls was provided by Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale, with the establishment and development in the 1850's of The North London Collegiate School and the Cheltenham Ladies' College. The setting up of the National Union for Improving the Education of Women by Maria Grey in 1871 and the Girls' Public Day School Company by Emily Shirreff in 1872 inspired further improvement. This latter organisation established schools for girls, including the High Schools at Oxford,

²²⁸ For more on *The Browning Version* see Beard, "Do the Classics Have a Future?", *The New York Review*, January 12 2012, reprinted in Beard (2013) 1-14.

²²⁹ See Ball (2013) 68-9.

²³⁰ Humphrey (2009) 54-5; Dent (1949) 8-9.

Winchester, Durham and St. Paul's Girls' School. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a large number of girls' boarding schools also appeared.

Educational reform for the lower classes appeared in the form of the Forster Act of 1870, which established a national system of elementary state education for all children between the ages of five and thirteen. Attendance was not made compulsory for another ten years, and it was a further decade before free schooling was introduced.²³¹ The Education Acts of 1902, 1918 and 1936 made further changes and improvements, but it was not until the 1944 Butler Act that free, compulsory secondary education for both sexes came into being.²³²

If the aim of boys' education was to produce a 'good person', a 'fine citizen' who knew his place in the world of the British empire, girls' education was even more weighed down by social needs, and had to be in line with women's perceived roles. As Humphrey explains:

"This, in England, developed into the domestic ideal, the belief that woman's place was in the home and her function, according to class, was to service or embellish it as God and nature intended...For working-class girls, the emphasis lay in being useful, and they were prepared for a life of service....Women whose social standing made housework or even care of their own children taboo were thus left without any practical function at all but, in accordance with Rousseau's maxims, if they could not be useful, they could be pleasing. Their whole education, such as it was, was therefore directed at charming men."²³³

This agenda meant that the subjects intended for girls' education were clearly defined, and strikingly different from those envisioned for boys. In schools for the lower classes, sewing and the teaching of domestic skills dominated girls' teaching, but in the high schools and the boarding schools that were the female equivalent of the boys' public and even grammar schools, a transformation took place in the girls' curriculum that is interesting to observe. These schools were determined to implement an education very similar to that of the boys, stressing

²³¹ Hopkins (1994) 231-240.

²³² Woodin, McCulloch, Cowan (2013) 33-76.

²³³ Humphrey (2009) 57-9.

both academic achievement and sport. Many pioneers of female education saw absolute academic equality as essential, and insisted upon a syllabus that was identical to that of boys, and on girls competing in the same examinations as their male counterparts. Thus Dorothea Beale, headmistress of the Cheltenham Ladies College, wrote, “If what I have said is true, the subject cannot be treated in reference to girls only;because the teaching of both should aim at developing to the highest excellence the intellectual promise common to both”.²³⁴ Similarly Emily Davies, founder of Girton College, in 1868 approved of “every effort to improve the education of women, which assumes that they may, without reprehensible ambition, study the same subjects as their brothers and be measured by the same standards.”²³⁵

Despite this attitude held by women reformers, such ideas faced great and long standing opposition, and change was painfully slow. It was widely believed that women were incapable of studying subjects that were too academic, and so doing would not only damage their health, but also annihilate their femininity, and indeed destroy society as a whole by leading women to forget their divinely ordained roles as home-makers for the males.²³⁶ Studying what were traditionally held to be ‘boys’ subjects’ was regarded as particularly dangerous, and distinctly unattractive in a woman, in an age where the term ‘blue-stocking’ was one of great contempt.²³⁷

Interestingly, the idea of what constituted a boys’ subject altered over time, as ideas and subjects changed, gaining or losing in importance. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, classics had been the only subject of importance, while science was regarded as frivolous and without real value. Science therefore – which included mathematics, accountancy, astronomy, meteorology, physics, chemistry and geography - came to be regarded at that time as a woman’s

²³⁴ Beale, Soulsby and Dove (1898) 7.

²³⁵ Auchmuty (1992) 56.

²³⁶ Humphrey (2009) 61-3.

²³⁷ See Cardwill (1889) 34.

subject, while classical studies was exclusively for men.²³⁸ This attitude continued into the eighteenth hundreds, as we have seen. Judith Humphrey declares that Thomas Arnold's brilliance as a classicist, and belief in the value of classics above all else, "made the serious teaching of science almost impossible".²³⁹ The situation gradually changed and as science and mathematics rose in importance, these disciplines metamorphosed into 'boys' subjects' as opposed to 'girls' subjects', and the final proof of girls' intellectual equality was demonstrated by their ability to study these now firmly masculine fields. Mastery of these subjects, as epitomised by Latin and mathematics in particular, was the hallmark of the intellectual female, while the less academically able were condemned to less challenging fields such as domestic science.²⁴⁰

Latin, as a 'boys' subject', therefore, enabled girls to feel superior and to reach new intellectual heights, and was studied in schools that aimed for as high an academic standard as possible, in a bid for equality with boys. For girls, it was a symbol of their newly-won freedom, and classics possessed a kind of magic in its attraction. Thus Eleanor Dorly, a pupil at Leamington High School from 1892 to 1898, said of the school classics mistress:

Ethel Elise Freeman introduced us to the new idea that Greek and Latin were both spoken tongues, and I shall never forget floods of scolding in the most poetic and beautiful Latin pouring in on me from the far distant top of the bannisters; it didn't matter what one was doing; I can give little idea of the sheer joy it used to be to rouse "Fuit" as we used to call her to pour forth those constant and lovely quotations.²⁴¹

The excitement of girls at such exposure can be felt from these lines, and would have been all the more powerful for the fact that few enough girls were fortunate enough to experience

²³⁸ See Hunter (2005) 123–40.

²³⁹ Humphrey (2009) 69.

²⁴⁰ Thus many grammar schools replaced Latin for the brighter pupils with cookery for the weaker streams. See Humphrey (2009) 73.

²⁴¹ <http://www.follymagazine.co.uk/Info/Evelyn%20Smith.pdf>

such things. As late as 1938, Ethel Strudwick, High Mistress of St.Paul's Girls' School, declared that girls felt that Latin gave them 'a sense of power'.²⁴²

Classics in Girls' School Stories

It is against this background that the portrayal of classics in girls' school stories must be understood. The genre of the girls' school story developed in the early years of the twentieth century, and particularly flourished from 1920 until 1960, as writers such as Angela Brazil, Elsie Jeanette Oxenham, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elinor Brent-Dyer turned out hundreds of books between them.²⁴³ These books, like the boys' school stories, are set in private schools, depicting middle or upper middle class pupils, although they were popular with a much wider readership.²⁴⁴ Latin in particular features in these books since classics was a part of the private school curriculum, even if it was not studied by the girls themselves who read the books.

In Angela Brazil's books, for instance, Latin is a part of the school syllabus. Latin is continually mentioned in *The Luckiest Girl in the School*, along with Maths and French, as a core subject in the curriculum. Dorita Fairlie Bruce's books paint a similar picture. Dimsie and her friends learn Latin, which is mentioned in passing in several places. In *Dimsie Goes to School* (originally titled *The Senior Prefect*), Miss Edgar's Latin class in the senior schoolroom is mentioned, and girls mention Latin homework and lessons as a matter of course. More examples are provided by the girls in Evelyn Smith's school stories. *Val Forrest in the Fifth* (1925), has the heroine teaching Latin to a seven year old boy named Sam, who is delighted to learn that the first declension goes mensa mensa menSAM! Another of her books, *Milly in the Fifth* (1928), makes reference to reading *Aeneid* 11, for Milly, whose name is short for Camilla,

²⁴² Stray (1998b) 258.

²⁴³ See Hunt and Bannister (1996) 348-350.

²⁴⁴ See Smith (2003) 73.

is embarrassed at her form reading the section about Camilla. Similarly, Elinor Brent-Dyer's vast Chalet School series, published between 1925 and 1970, shows changes in the curriculum over the years, but Latin remains constant.

It is clear, however, that, reflecting real life, classics was regarded by girls as a boys' subject even in fiction. In one of Angela Brazil's books, a new pupil has been teased before her arrival by her brothers who said that:

"Chessington was exactly on the model of a boys' college, and that if girls learnt Latin and mathematics and played cricket and hockey and had a gymnasium and a debating society, it put such a masculine element into them that they couldn't refrain from using brute force, instead of any other means of persuasion. They declared it was a natural sequence and I must make up my mind to it".²⁴⁵

While it is clear that this is said only in jest, and that the reality of the situation is very different, it does highlight the prevalent view of Latin as a boys' subject. Similarly, *The Nicest Girl in the School* (1909) by the same author has the girls bemoaning the difficulty of Latin, because, as a male subject, it is too hard for girls:

"I don't think Latin was ever meant for girls. My brother did Caesar two years ago, and he's in Virgil now, though he's a year younger than I am. It seems quite easy to him, but I never know which verb goes with which substantive, or whether a thing is nominative or genitive. I look out all the words in the dictionary, and learn their meanings, but I can't make the least sense of them until Miss Harper shows me how they fit into sentences."

Yet Patty, the heroine of the story, does not agree:

"I grumble over mathematics at any rate," said Patty.
"But not over Latin?"
"No, I rather like it."
"How can you like it?"
"I don't know why, but I do."
"There's nothing to like."
"Yes, there is; it's rather fun to try and turn the words into sentences."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Angela Brazil, *The New Girl at St. Chad's*, chapter seven.

²⁴⁶ Angela Brazil, *The Nicest Girl in the School*, chapter ten.

Since Patty is the epitome of all that an ideal schoolgirl should aspire to be, the message is that girls can do Latin and even enjoy it, despite, or maybe even because of its difficulty and its being a subject for boys.

This picture remains constant even as late as the 1940's, as one of Elinor Brent-Dyer's stories from that period demonstrates. A new and tomboyish character at the Chalet School, 'Tom' Gay (actually christened Lucinda Muriel, but always known by her nickname) has been brought up by her father, who, disappointed that his only child was a girl, educated her as if she was a boy. The state of her education is described thus:

Tom's classics were excellent for her age, and so were her mathematics, but she knew little French; her history and political and commercial geography were beneath contempt....and while she was fairly well read from a literary point of view, she knew absolutely nothing about the sort of stories most girls of her age enjoy. Art was a sealed book to her and she was so unmusical that she was unable to sing "God save the Queen" without branching off into "Rule Britannia". Of needlework she knew less than nothing.²⁴⁷

Arriving at the Chalet School, she "sniffed at having to learn French thoroughly", and was very unimpressed with the other girls' efforts in Latin:

After having been accustomed to about sixty lines of construe to prepare, she complained to Mlle de Lachenais, who took all classics in the school, that they never got on with their Caesar. Whereat the entire Upper Fourth looked at her as if she were some fabulous animal, and for ever after were prepared to regard her with deep dislike. They found twenty lines enough at a time!²⁴⁸

Despite this attitude, Latin is actually rarely singled out negatively in comparison to the boys' school stories; girls often mention Latin homework, lessons or translations in passing with no difference between Latin and French, German or any other subject that they study. As with the boys, it is true that on occasion the difficulty of Latin as a school subject is highlighted.

²⁴⁷ Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, *Tom Tackles the Chalet School*, chapter three.

²⁴⁸ *Tom Tackles the Chalet School*, chapter three.

In Dorita Fairlie Bruce's *The Senior Prefect*, there is an account of Daphne working in her study:

Daphne was searching diligently through Caesar's account of his adventures in Gaul for those elusive verbs which he seems to have taken such pains to hide.

"A jolly good thing for me," she groaned, "that they don't make Latin compulsory in the Locals, or I should certainly fail. Oh, why wasn't Caesar trained in his youth to write briefly and concise?"²⁴⁹

Robin, the heroine of Evelyn Smith's *The Small Sixth Form* (1927) likes reading Latin but finds Latin prose difficult. The eponymous heroine of Angela Brazil's *Monitress Merle* (1922) can exclaim "Bother the old 'Merchant of Venice' and beastly Latin verbs!"²⁵⁰ In the same author's *A Popular Schoolgirl* (1920), a character sighs dismally, "And I haven't touched my Latin or French!", adding "I wish ... that somebody would invent a typewriter that would just spell the words ready-made when you press a button"²⁵¹, a wish that, in that pre-Bill Gates era, a friend agrees would earn its inventor a fortune. These comments, while hardly glowing, are a long way from the opprobrium found in boys' fiction. Latin is relatively difficult, but it is not depicted as notably worse, or indeed different, from other school subjects.

In some cases, in fact, classics is portrayed very positively. Clare Mallory, for example, writing in the 1940's and 1950's, in New Zealand, but very firmly in the British school story tradition,²⁵² assumes that the girls of whom she "approves" are classicists. There is a scene, for example, in *The New House at Winwood* (1949), in which a new girl named Deb helps Nick, the new House captain, unpack her books.

She glanced at the titles with interest - lots of plays: Barrie, Galsworthy, Oscar Wilde, Sheridan, and one-acters; the latest novels; Cicero, Zenophon, Euripides, Sallust - goodness Nick must be a classic, too.....

"Found anything you like?...".

²⁴⁹ Dorita Fairlie Bruce, *The Senior Prefect*, chapter 28.

²⁵⁰ Angela Brazil, *Monitress Merle*, chapter five

²⁵¹ Angela Brazil, *A Popular Schoolgirl*, chapter six.

²⁵² Hunt and Bannister (1996) 848.

“The Euripides –“ stammered Deb, caught peeking.

“Know him at all? Lots of people read the Gilbert Murray translations, I suppose..”²⁵³

The implication is that Deb, who turns out to be older/higher up the school than Nick expected, would not have used translations but would actually have read the originals. Similarly in *Leith and Friends* (1950), a love of classics draws Leith and the wonderful prefect, Persis, together. In Mallory, appreciation of classics is what marks a girl out as superior in every way.

Winifred Darch²⁵⁴ treats classics with equal approval, and unusually in girls’ fiction, portrays girls studying Greek as well as Latin. In *Chris and Some Others*, the heroine, Chris, is passionate to do Classics and struggles to prevent her aunt from removing her from high school and selling her Greek dictionary. Similarly, in *The School on the Cliff*, the central character, Dawn, is passionate about Greek. The plot of this book also includes a feud between two forms involving a doll called Helen of Troy.

Classics is also portrayed positively by Antonia Forest, who undercut so many of the conventions of the traditional school story. Karen Marlow, the eldest of the Marlow sisters in her books, is portrayed as a true and natural scholar; naturally she is a classicist, depicted with a Greek thesaurus and an academic intellectuality. Nicola Marlow herself, the heroine of the series, chooses as an end of term prize a leather-bound edition of Homer in the original Greek.²⁵⁵

Nor do teachers of Latin generally fall into the negative mould of Quelch, King or Crocker-Harris. Nevertheless, one of the Chalet School books features the unpopular and misguided Miss Bubb, a substitute headmistress who is described as a Latin scholar with an MA in the

²⁵³ Claire Mallory, *The New House at Winwood*, chapter three.

²⁵⁴ On Darch, see Julien (2007) 84-10; (2008) 1-21.

²⁵⁵ Antonia Forest, *The Cricket Term*, chapter nine.

subject.²⁵⁶ Miss Bubb's sole concern is a high level of scholastic achievement, which she tried to achieve through strict discipline and a rigid hierarchy. She overworks the staff, is dismissive of art, music, sports and Guides, and bans all exam students from playing on school teams, thus coming into conflict with the Chalet School philosophy of a well-rounded education and good health before all.

Such a depiction might lead one to conclude that Brent-Dyer was perpetuating the stereotypes found in fictional boys' schools. Yet nowhere else in the long saga of Chalet School books is Latin, or any teacher of Latin, described in such a way. On the contrary, Latin is generally taught by Mlle de Lachenais, described as 'small', 'dainty', 'pretty' and 'vivacious', a 'dark little woman with sparkling black eyes', and an expert skier and a keen member of the French Alpine Club. In the later books, depicted as 'the doyenne' of the staff, she is usually portrayed as the maker and distributor of fine coffee in the staffroom. Another teacher of Latin is Mlle Berne, also, by a strange coincidence, a dark, vivacious looking black-eyed woman with a small and dainty build, and a member of the French Alpine Club. While there obviously may be some typical Brent-Dyer confusion of characters here, it is clear that there is no negative stereotype of a Latin teacher in this case. Indeed, Joey Maynard, the heroine of the entire series, acted as a substitute junior Latin teacher for one term,²⁵⁷ and there is no higher model in the Chalet universe than that of Joey Maynard. There may be elements of stereotype in Miss Bubb, in that she is a traditionalist with high standards, but it is her individual personality and lack of understanding that make her the unsympathetic character she is, rather than the subject in which she specialises.

Antonia Forest's Latin teacher, Miss Latimer, is described even more untypically, as follows:

²⁵⁶ Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, *Gay From China at the Chalet School*, chapters four and five.

²⁵⁷ *Gay From China at the Chalet School*, chapters four and five.

Someone had once described Miss Latimer, approvingly, as the most gorgeous Jersey cow. It wasn't merely a matter of looks, though her eyes were particularly large and brown, it had to do with a marked placidity of manner, as of one knee-deep in clover, chewing the cud, tail gently whisking at flies.²⁵⁸

It would be hard to find more of a contrast than this to the irascible teachers of boys' fiction.

Clearly then, the girls' stories have a much more positive attitude towards Latin and Greek than the boys' stories, and it seems likely that this reflects the historical difference between the place of classics in male and female education. The study of the ancient classical languages had a cachet in girls' schools that was quite different to its role in boys' education, and this is mirrored in fiction.

A Half-Century of Metamorphosis: Girls, Boys, Greek and Latin

At the very beginning of the period in which the girls' school story was born, the division between the sexes educationally was most stark. Although not a school story, the book from which the title of this paper is taken, E. Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, published in 1906, demonstrates this. Nesbit says:

Whatever the children were doing, they always wanted to be doing something else. When Peter was doing his Latin, he thought it would be nice to be learning History like Bobbie. Bobbie would have preferred Arithmetic, which was what Phyllis happened to be doing, and Phyllis of course thought Latin much the most interesting kind of lesson.²⁵⁹

There is no question however of Phyllis learning Latin. When the children's mother writes a verse for her son, Peter, that runs:

I once thought Caesar easy pap—
How very soft I must have been!
When they start Caesar with a chap
He little know what that will mean.
Oh, verbs are silly stupid things.
I'd rather learn the dates of kings!

²⁵⁸ Antonia Forest, *The Attic Term*, chapter ten.

²⁵⁹ Edith Nesbit, *The Railway Children*, chapter fourteen.

Phyllis' verse runs:

Such pounds and pounds of apples fill
My slate—what is the price you'd spend?
You scratch the figures out until
You cry upon the dividend.
I'd break the slate and scream for joy
If I did Latin like a boy!

Here is the contrast in its essence, both in reality, and in the fiction that reflected that reality: for a girl to learn Latin would be a privilege and a joy; for a boy it is, as so often, a 'silly, stupid thing', or, as Molesworth so eloquently put it, 'bosh'!

With the marginalisation of classics in British education, accompanied by the demise of the school story genre in its traditional form, Latin and Greek feature far less than they used to in juvenile literature. Yet they have appeared from time to time, and while the numbers are perhaps too small now to draw significant conclusions, it seems that in some cases the earlier stereotypes still linger. Changes can be seen as well, however, most notably that the distinction between girls' and boys' perception of classics (most commonly, Latin) has disappeared.

In Noel Streatfield's *Gemma and Sisters*, the lead character Gemma, a child film star who is now living with her cousins and attending a comprehensive school, needs to learn lines in Latin and Greek for a play in which she is performing.²⁶⁰ She shows no interest in learning the languages themselves, but prefers to learn them parrot fashion, concentrating on intonation and pronunciation. The headmaster of the comprehensive, who coaches her, is a classicist and is rather taken aback by this cavalier attitude to his subjects, but agrees nevertheless and is impressed by the end results. In this case, the stereotype of the passionate classicist remains, and the lack of interest in the subject by the pupil, albeit in rather diluted form, but there is no

²⁶⁰ Noel Streatfield, *Gemma and Sisters*, chapter ten.

feeling that Gemma's attitude is in any way related to the fact that she is a girl, and this is anyway a school for both boys and girls.²⁶¹

Another later series features Latin as a subject taught in the curriculum. Tyne O'Connell's *Calypso Chronicles*. This series, described as romantic comedies, and as much in the style of American popular prep school fiction as that of the English boarding school story, consists of four books and focuses on a group of wealthy upper-class teens who study at St Augustine's, a single-sex boarding school in Berkshire. In keeping with the traditional nature of the school in which the books are set, Latin and Greek are taught as a matter of course, and depicted as subjects for the wealthy elite.²⁶² The portrayal of the languages however is interesting, for they are far closer to the traditional depiction in boys' stories than girls' books. Like the traditional classics master for boys, the Latin mistress in this book, Ms. Mills, is a strict character:

We were always telling Ms. Mills, our Latin teacher that Latin is a dead language, to which she replied, 'You'll be dead if you don't finish your declensions'.²⁶³

Nor is the other Latin teacher, Mrs. Obar, any better, throwing chalk at her pupils and being incapable of teaching them anything. Indeed, it is not clear that she even has knowledge at all, for we are told that her only qualification for being a Latin teacher was that she has been a teacher for thirty-seven years.²⁶⁴

As a subject, Latin itself is depicted as boring and irrelevant; the heroine, Calypso, declares in the first book, "I totally hate Latin. What am I supposed to do with *amo, amas, amat*?"²⁶⁵ Similarly, the girls are horrified at the idea of being taken to see *Oedipus Rex* in the original

²⁶¹ For more on the *Gemma* books, see Huse (1994) 124-6.

²⁶² The two languages are taught both at St. Augustine's and at the boys' equivalent in the books, Eades, a school that seems to be modelled on Eton. See Tyne O'Connell, *Stealing Princes*, chapter one.

²⁶³ Tyne O'Connell, *Pulling Princes*, chapter two.

²⁶⁴ O'Connell, *Stealing Princes*, chapter eleven.

²⁶⁵ O'Connell, *Pulling Princes*, chapter two.

Greek, and can think of nothing worse than, “listening to a whole play’s worth of incoherent piffle”. Yet despite this portrayal, in a rather surprising twist, however, Calypso continues with Latin, as well as Greek, when she is able to drop these subjects, for the startling reason that they are easy, and she will be able to get A grades in them without too much effort. This impression is toned down somewhat later, in that Calypso states that “some loopy lower Sixth girls had told me that dead languages were easy A grades”,²⁶⁶ the implication being that her own experience does not concur with this judgement, but the perception is that the mistake was in believing that she could achieve these grades without working, rather than that the subjects were particularly difficult.²⁶⁷ Yet again, however, there is no contrast between the attitude of the girls of St. Augustine’s and the boys of Eades, with regard to their study of the classical languages.

²⁶⁶ O’Connell, *Dumping Princes*, chapter ten.

²⁶⁷ Although a different genre and setting of book, a picture of Latin as a subject that is masterable is Ann I. Goldfarb’s *The Last Tag* (Arizona: Two Cats Press, 2012), a time slip book in which the hero goes back to Pompeii prior to the eruption of Vesuvius, and has little trouble understanding and even speaking Latin, thanks to his three years of studying the subject in middle school.

Classics for a New Millenium: Latin as a Magical Language

Perhaps the most interesting development in recent years is, however, the association of Latin with magic. The most obvious case is that of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which draws heavily on Latin roots.²⁶⁸ Names are often Latin words that reflect their owner's nature (Albus Dumbledore, the white wizard, Sirius Black, whose animal shape is a dog), or hint at classical tradition (Sybil Trelawney, the teacher of divination, the wise Minerva McGonagall). Spells and curses are usually either Latin verbs in the first person (*accio*, *reparo*, *confringo*) or nouns (*nox*, *impedimenta*), but others are English words with Latinised endings (*muffliato*, *riddikulus*). While Latin is not taught as such at Hogwarts, it does feature in the context of being a language associated with magic.²⁶⁹

This association did not begin (or end) with J.K Rowling however. Anthony Horowitz' Groosham Grange books feature Latin as a classroom subject, but one quite like any other portrayal in school stories.²⁷⁰ Here, David, the protagonist explains:

double Latin wasn't as bad as it sounded. At Beton College it was taught as a "dead language". And the teacher wasn't much healthier! But Mr. Kilgraw spoke it fluently! So did everyone else! By the end of the lesson they were chatting like old friends, and no one even mentioned Caesar or the invasion of Gaul!²⁷¹

The reason for this different teaching approach and ability, is, naturally, that the school is an academy for training wizards and witches, and Latin is therefore both a natural choice of subject and also one for which the students have a facility. Latin, therefore, in this metamorphosis has become a language of magic, and one which is equal in the eyes of both boys and girls.

²⁶⁸ See Janson (2004) 163-4; Frankel (2013) 71-75.

²⁶⁹ See further, Lovatt, introduction, this vol.

²⁷⁰ Anthony Horowitz, *Groosham Grange; The Unholy Grail*.

²⁷¹ Anthony Horowitz, *Groosham Grange*, chapter six.

Conclusion: the Metamorphosis of Classics in Children's Fiction

Throughout the history of children's literature then, as reflected particularly in the genre of school books, Latin and Greek first progressed from the archetype of misery-inducing toil for boys to a symbol of privilege and academic challenge for girls. As equality, in theory at least, was achieved in the education systems for both sexes, these differences faded, to leave classics as a somewhat irrelevant but far from threatening subject in school. With Latin becoming a language studied only by a few, however, it gained an elitist cachet, and finally, it became a subject that was exotic enough to be the language of magic. It remains to be seen what further metamorphoses the presentation of classics will undergo in juvenile literature as the twenty first century passes.

Chapter 9

Latin, Greek, and other classical ‘nonsense’ in the work of Edward Lear

Marian W. Makins

Making nonsense, making sense

On 1 March 1886, an ailing Edward Lear put the finishing touches on ‘Some Incidents in the Life of My Uncle Arly’, the last nonsense poem he would ever complete. The title of the poem announces its autobiographical nature, with the name of the poet concealed ‘unclearly’, as it were, inside Uncle Arly’s.²⁷² Lear immediately sent presentation copies to at least thirteen friends.²⁷³ Although the members of this first audience were all adults, ‘Uncle Arly’ nonetheless provides a useful point of entry for a discussion of classical receptions in Lear’s work for children: it illustrates both the way Lear tended to transform Latin, Greek, and other classical material into nonsense, and his sceptical approach to the didactic project of transforming children into adults.

The first two stanzas tell how, in his youth, Uncle Arly squandered his fortune and wandered off to the faraway Timskoop-hills. Then,

Like the ancient Medes and Persians,—15
(Always by his own exertions,) —
He subsisted on those hills;—
—Whiles,—by teaching children spelling,—
Or at times by merely yelling,—

²⁷² Byrom (1977) 219.

²⁷³ Lear (2002) 546n.

The simile in lines 15–16 seems to refer to a well-established tradition in which the ancient Medes and Persians were exceptionally self-sufficient.²⁷⁵ Except that there *is* no such tradition. Instead of being rooted in history or myth, the relationship between these ancient peoples and the virtue of self-reliance derives from the rhyme between *Persians* and *exertions*. Ann Colley has identified numerous places in Lear's limericks where an approximate rhyme 'momentarily holds and brackets' two ideas that 'normally would have little to say to each other'.²⁷⁶ The conjunction simultaneously invites and refuses to reward interpretation, a characteristic of literary nonsense.²⁷⁷

This stanza might frustrate a classically educated reader as it sent their mind scurrying to locate a context that does not exist. Lear's work contains many more such baffling references, be they to Latin and Greek words or phrases, figures from classical myth and history, or classically significant place-names. In these cases, searching for deeper meaning may distract from the content of the verse, creating a situation in which *not* getting—or, rather, not *suspecting*—a joke is preferable, because there is none to get. Take, for instance, the two poems Lear wrote about a couple named Mr. and Mrs. Discobolos. A copy of Myron's *Discobolus* was assigned as a subject for sketching at the Royal Academy during the brief time Lear studied there in 1850.²⁷⁸ Knowing that δισκόβολος is the Greek word for 'discus-thrower', however,

²⁷⁴ Lear (2002) 456.

²⁷⁵ Vivien Noakes includes in her edition of Lear's *Complete Verse* a delightful appendix containing some of the 'nonsense similes' scattered throughout his correspondence. For example: 'Now my dear boy I must close this as the Cyclopes used to say of their one eye', Lear (2002) 462.

²⁷⁶ Colley (1988) 293–95.

²⁷⁷ Tigges (1986) 166: 'In order to succeed, it must at the same time invite the reader to interpretation and avoid the suggestion that there is a deeper meaning which can be obtained by considering connotations or associations, because these lead to nothing'. Cp. Ponterotto (1993) 156–57.

²⁷⁸ Lear (2002) 517n; and cf. Lear to Chichester Fortescue, 20 January 1850, in Lear (1988) 108–09.

as well as the name given to a famous bronze, will no more help a reader make sense of these poems than knowledge of the story of the three hundred Spartans will shed light on the limerick ‘There was an Old Man of Thermopylae’.²⁷⁹ Lear chose the words for their sound, not their sense. Indeed, they signify no more nor less, in context, than nonsense words coined by Lear himself.²⁸⁰

At other times, Lear employs classical references in a less arbitrary fashion. That is to say, he does sometimes engage the referents of the words or names he uses. Every time X in one of Lear’s picture-alphabets stands for Xerxes, for instance—and that is every time but twice²⁸¹—he means *the* Xerxes, who was a king and a warrior and lived long ago. Similarly, ‘Gozo my child is the isle of Calypso’ *is* about Calypso from the *Odyssey*,²⁸² and ‘The Tragical Life and Death of Caius Marius Esq^{re}’ *does* parody the vita of the Roman general.²⁸³ But bringing to bear pre-existing knowledge on these occasions may still result in frustration, because Lear did not craft his references according to a desire for accuracy. Instead, he blends fact and fiction for the sake of amusement. He might clothe historical figures in anachronistic garb, for

²⁷⁹ ‘There was an Old Man of Thermopylae, | Who never did anything properly; | But they said, ‘If you choose | to boil eggs in your shoes, | You shall never remain in Thermopylae’, Lear (2002) 330.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Colley (1988) 290. It may interest classicists to learn that, in her notes on the limerick beginning ‘There was an Old Man of Vesuvius | Who studied the works of Vitruvius’, Noakes provides the following gloss on Vitruvius: ‘appears to be a fictional author’, Lear (2002) 483n.

²⁸¹ Pace Noakes (2004) 141. In ‘A was a lovely Apple’ (c. 1880), X stands for ‘XX of very strong porter’ (E.876-1951, Victoria and Albert Museum); and in the undated alphabet ‘A tumbled down, and hurt his Arm, against a bit of wood’, for ‘double XX ale’, Lear (2002) 421 with 532n.

²⁸² Lear (2002) 210.

²⁸³ Lear (1983). Lear drew this picture-story, along with one about Romulus and Remus (GEN MSS 601, Koch Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University Library), for the family of Edward Penrhyn in 1841; Levi (1995) 62. While the precise inspiration for ‘Caius Marius’ is unknown—Peter Levi wonders, ‘Was it written for a schoolboy? Or was it the memorial, the written version, of some old light-hearted joke?’ (62)—I suspect at least the partial influence of Oliver Goldsmith’s *Roman History*, abridged by the author for school use; compare esp. Lear’s plates 15–18 with Goldsmith (1781) 117–18.

example—in one alphabet, Xerxes sports a gigantic, multi-coloured turban and brandishes a scimitar²⁸⁴—or alter familiar plot lines, as when he has Calypso feed diseased poultry to Odysseus and his men.

Thus the metamorphosed classical content of Lear's nonsense would likely amuse or infuriate the classically educated, depending on their temperament. But what of the young children who made up Lear's primary audience—his 'privileged readers', to borrow a phrase from Jean-Jacques Lecercle?²⁸⁵ All the alphabets and most of the limericks and longer poems were written for specific children, and most were eventually published in editions packaged for the under-ten set.²⁸⁶ A child of that age would likely not realise that Thermopylae was a real place, unlike the Timskoop-hills; or that Xerxes was a real king, but reigned long before the turban became fashionable in Persia. For this audience, the line between the real and the invented might be not merely hazy but invisible. So how should we understand Lear's impulse to present classical language, history, and culture to children in a nonsensical vein? Was he trying to instruct them in the subject? Was he making fun of it, or of them? Did he aim to entertain two audiences, the children and their classically educated parents? What, in any case, might be the effect of this classical 'nonsense' on children?

While it is impossible to speak with absolute certainty about these matters, I believe that given the wealth of documentary evidence that survives—diaries, letters, published and unpublished verse, stories, and illustrations—there is a lot we *can* say. It seems clear, first of all, that Lear was *not* trying to instruct his audience in the classics, since the references are scattered, and he took such liberties with the material. Such didacticism would also be

²⁸⁴ 'A was an ape' (bef. 1871) Lear (1871) n.p. Cf. Levi (1995) 65: '[Xerxes]' image is a fifteenth-century sultan with a huge striped turban'.

²⁸⁵ Lecercle (1994) 218.

²⁸⁶ On the dates and recipients of the various alphabets, for example, see Lear (2002) 488n.

inconsistent with Lear's ambivalence about taking on the role of teacher. This attitude shines through in 'Uncle Arly'. Lear accomplished three things when he wrote, in line 18, that his alter ego had made his living partly by teaching children spelling. First, he alluded to the fact that he himself had occasionally taught drawing or painting to supplement his income, including a stint as drawing-master to the young Queen Victoria.²⁸⁷ Second, he set up the end-rhyme for the next two lines. But above all, this line is a joke at his own expense.²⁸⁸ Even leaving aside coinages and puns, Lear's spelling was so erratic, so whimsical, that he might more logically have credited himself with teaching children how *not* to spell.²⁸⁹ And, indeed, a child's chances of gleaning accurate information about the classical world from Lear's nonsense were really no better than their chances of learning to spell correctly.

It is equally clear that Lear would not make fun of classical learning per se. In fact, he was, in his way, quite serious about the subject. As a painter, he travelled the Mediterranean painting the landscapes of the Greek and Roman worlds, and sent rapturous letters home to relatives and friends describing sites he visited and the effect they had on him.²⁹⁰ Later in life, he devoted considerable money, time, and energy to learning classical Greek, and laboured lovingly over the works of Homer, Sophocles, and Plato, among others. Moreover, select correspondence shows that Lear expected his many adopted nieces and nephews to encounter and enjoy Greek as much as he did. In 1861, for example, he queried his friend Emily Tennyson:

²⁸⁷ Levi (1995) 85–86.

²⁸⁸ Pace Noakes, whose only comment on l. 18 is: 'in the late 1820s and the 1830s Lear earned money by giving drawing lessons, first in London and later in Italy', Lear (2002) 547n.

²⁸⁹ To take just a few examples from his published work: one limerick begins, 'There was an Old Man with a flute, | a sarpint ran into his boot', Lear (2002) 162; in 'Gozo my child is the isle of Calypso', Calypso says, '*This* is | I who have wheedled the wily Ulysses, | with kurls and kobwebs and kustards and kisses' (210); and 'The Cumberbund' concludes with the warning, 'Beware, ye Fair! Ye Fair, beware! | Nor sit out late at night, | Lest horrid Cumberbunds should come, | And swallow you outright' (406).

²⁹⁰ E.g., Lear to the 13th Earl of Derby, 5 June 1842, in Lear (1988) 53–60; and Lear to Ann Lear, 19 July 1848, 78–81.

Does the tutor still live with you? Do the boys get on? Do they begin Greek?—(wh. is the foundation of all knowledge & happiness & good on this world—far beyond cleanliness or Godliness.)²⁹¹

A year later, he addressed a letter to Ruth Decie, the day-old granddaughter of his friend

William Prescott:

Possibly this is one of the first letters you have as yet received. One of the old Greek Tragedians says—and I am sure you will not think me impertinent in translating what he says... because there has not been time hitherto to buy you a Greek dictionary, (& I feel sure you cannot read Sophocles without,—besides, the Dictionaries are so fat & heavy I am certain you could not use them comfortably to yourself & your nurse,)—μὴ φῦναι &c—which means ‘it is better never to have [been] born at all, or if born,—to die as soon as possible’. But this I wholly dissent from: & on the contrary I congratulate you on coming into a world where if we look for it there is far more good & pleasure than we can use up—even in the longest life.²⁹²

The image of nurse and infant struggling to wield a doorstep-sized lexicon is humorous. It is amusing, too, that Lear takes such pains to introduce the quote from Sophocles, only to ‘wholly dissent from’ it in the next breath. Yet the phrasing, ‘there has not been time hitherto’, playfully suggests an intent to buy Ruth a Greek dictionary *soon*, so that she might begin reading Sophocles for herself.

Moreover, it would be difficult to accept the idea of Lear talking down to or past a child. He was, to quote Vivien Noakes, ‘neither patronizing nor sanctimonious’ with children.²⁹³ For whatever reason, he related more easily to children than to most adults, and his closest friends

²⁹¹ Lear to Emily Tennyson, 15 December 1861, in Lear (1988) 173. Compare Lear to Fortescue, 17 December 1861, in Lear (1907) 212: ‘I wish I had more time for Greek: if I had my way & wor an axiom maker & Lawgiver, I would cause it to be understood that Greek is (or a knowledge of it) the first of virtues: cleanliness the 2nd., and Godliness—as held up by parsons generally—the 3rd’.

²⁹² Lear to Ruth Decie, 9 September 1862, in Lear (1988) 177–78. Cf. Soph. *OC* 1225–27: μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἅπαντα νικᾷ λόγον: τὸ δ’, ἐπεὶ φανῇ, | βῆναι κεῖθεν ὅθεν περ ἦκει, | πολὺ δεύτερον, ὥς τάχιστα.

²⁹³ Introduction to Lear (1988) xii.

were those to whom he could write the most playful letters, and expect replies in kind.²⁹⁴ Indeed, to the end of his days, Lear referred to himself in letters as ‘this child’.²⁹⁵ And his habitual efforts to put children at ease—in a jolting carriage, say, or at a formal dinner—reflect the discomfort he himself felt in the same situations. When Lear was hired by the Earl of Derby to make drawings of the birds and animals living at Knowsley Hall, for example, he felt ill at ease around much of the adult population of the estate.²⁹⁶ But the Hall was also full of children—the old Earl’s great-grandchildren, grandnieces, and grandnephews—and these ‘unaffectedly merry’ souls made life tolerable.²⁹⁷ The children delighted in the long, exotic-sounding names of the creatures Lear was sketching in the menagerie. His interactions with these children—even, one might say, his participation in their discourse²⁹⁸—may have informed later works in which Lear plays with the specialised scientific vocabulary that so amused them then.

In sum, I believe we can say that Lear pitched even his classically themed nonsense primarily to children, but that he aimed neither to instruct them in the subject nor to belittle it. Instead, I would argue that, whether consciously or no, Lear sought to promote a kind of engagement with Latin and Greek words and stories that he felt might lead to their forming independent relationships with the material, thus protecting them from the more malign aspects of the dominant educational model. In other words, he transformed classical material in such a way as to save children from being negatively transformed in turn. Before discussing further how this protective mechanism might work, however, it will be helpful to survey what we know

²⁹⁴ I think especially of Chichester Fortescue, Baron Carlingford, a frequent correspondent and real kindred spirit.

²⁹⁵ E.g., Lear to Fortescue, 7 January 1884, in Lear (1911) 295.

²⁹⁶ Noakes (2004) 31–33; Levi (1995) 43–47.

²⁹⁷ Noakes (2004) 33.

²⁹⁸ Ponterotto (1993) 159.

about Lear's own unorthodox classical education, as well as his opinions about the way Latin and Greek were being taught in schools during his lifetime.

A classical (self-)education

The first and perhaps most important thing to know about Lear's route to attaining classical knowledge, is that at no point did it take him through a school. Owing to a combination of the family's finances, their religiously dissenting views, and Edward's poor health—he suffered from asthma and depression in addition to debilitating temporal lobe epilepsy²⁹⁹—the task of educating him fell to two of his older sisters, Ann and Sarah.³⁰⁰ They taught him reading, writing, arithmetic, and the Bible; worked with him on drawing and painting; and introduced him to the Romantic poets. They also read him classical stories. It was perhaps these nursery tales that Lear parodied affectionately in the Roman history picture-stories he drew for the Penrhyn family in 1841.³⁰¹

When Lear began to earn his living as an artist, he opened the door to many more close encounters with things classical. He made his name painting animals, including parrots (his first major venture being a volume illustrating the family of the *Psittacidae*), raptors, and the many exotic inmates of the menagerie at Knowsley Hall. In order to produce conventional—that is to say, commercially viable—illustrations of these creatures, Lear had to cosy up to their scientific names, which meant immersion in the often absurd-sounding language of binomial nomenclature; in other words, in a whole universe of Latin and Greek words and word-roots.

²⁹⁹ Levi (1995) 5.

³⁰⁰ Lodge (2016) 75–76 reviews the evidence suggesting that Lear's homeschooling was informed by the educational philosophy common among Protestant dissenters of the time. Their methods encouraged independent questioning and exploration, which Lodge argues may in turn 'help to explain why Lear's own approach to writing for children is so interactive, and so invested in individual agency rather than moral quietism' (76).

³⁰¹ See n. xxx, above.

Little wonder that Lear, after being somewhat ironically nominated for membership in the Linnaean Society, showed a penchant for parodying taxonomy.³⁰² In 1860, he sent this tongue-in-cheek, almost Catullan dinner invitation to his amateur mycologist friend George Grove:

I hasten to inform you that in a wood very near here, there are Toadstools of the loveliest and most surprising colour and form:—orbicular, cubicular and squambingular, and I even thought I perceived the very rare Pongchámibinnibóphilos Kakokreasópheros among others a few days back. You have therefore nothing better to do than to come... and hunt up and down St. George's Hill for the better carrying out of the useful and beastly branch of science you have felt it your duty to follow. Provided also that you bring your own cooking utensils you may dine off your gatherings though I won't partake of the feast, my stomach being delicate.³⁰³

Here, again, the boundary between sense and nonsense is difficult to discern. *Orbicular* is a real word, meaning what one might expect, 'orb-shaped'. *Cubicular* is a real word too, but instead of 'cube-shaped'—the meaning its proximity to *orbicular* would suggest—this word comes from the Latin *cubiculum* and means 'of or relating to a bedroom'. *Squambingular* is made-up, as is *P. Kakokreasópheros*; but is this faux-scientific name really so much more absurd-sounding than, say, *Asterophora lycoperdiodes*, the Powdery Piggyback mushroom, or the Pale Staghorn, *Calocera pallidospatulata*?

Lear's Nonsense Botany performs the same linguistic operation, but in reverse. Instead of made-up words that could *almost* belong to the rarefied vocabulary of botanical taxonomy, but do not, here we have real words stuck together and costumed in Latin and Greek morphemes commonly associated with that vocabulary. These composites *look* like the sort of long, ludicrous titles that yield no meaning to the uninitiated, but magically decode themselves when pronounced: *Minspysia Deliciosa*, *Bassia Palealensis*, *Knutmigrata Simplicia* (fig. 1).³⁰⁴

³⁰² Compare Lecercle (1994) 202. For Lecercle, the 'discourse of natural history' was also a feature of the genre of nonsense in general, with the themes of exploration and taxonomy being particularly prevalent.

³⁰³ Lear to George Grove, 15 November 1860, in Lear (1988) 164–65.

³⁰⁴ Lear (2002) 251, 384, and 417, respectively.



Figure 1 'Knutmigrata Simplic'. MS Typ 55.14 (11). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Around the time Lear settled on landscape painting as his true calling, health problems conspired to send him away from England. From then on, he lived a peripatetic life, living and travelling throughout the Mediterranean—but especially Greece and Italy. Lear's correspondence shows his awareness of the history inherent in classical landscapes he toured and painted. In 1853, for example, he wrote to Fortescue: 'I am now doing a huge picture of Syracuse Quarries, $\frac{1}{2}$ -starved Athenians judiciously introduced here and there'.³⁰⁵ Writing to Emily Tennyson in 1856, he illustrated his description of a visit to Mt. Athos with a sketch captioned: 'King Xerxes a dividing the isthmus of Acte, for to let his ships through: Mrs.

³⁰⁵ Lear to Fortescue, 23 January 1863, in Lear (1907) 27.

Xerxes observing the same'.³⁰⁶ And Charles Church, an antiquarian and Hellenist who travelled with Lear through Greece in the summer of 1848, later recalled using his pocket volume of Herodotus to 'make a handbook for Lear in his sketches':

Herodotus in hand, I read to Lear his description of the pass [of Thermopylae], and his story of the great King's amazement at the audacity of the Spartan handful of men awaiting his mighty host, playing at athletics and combing their hair, and then starting from his throne at seeing his men, whom he had sent to drive them away, themselves driven back with slaughter. Meanwhile Lear was sketching the Trachinian Cliffs, the gorge of the Asopus, and the ravine and plain of Anthela, and the mountain outlines above. Then we rode, in great heat, along the base of the mountain, through the 'Western Gate' of Thermopylae, and over the white encrusted plain formed by the deposit of the hot sulphur springs, which cover the track in parts, and run down in streams of deep green water into the plain. At last we pitched our tent for the midday halt at the foot of the hillock (Kolonos) where the Spartans made their last stand.³⁰⁷

Many of the sites Lear sketched on these trips surfaced later in his nonsense drawings.³⁰⁸

Lear at last undertook a more intensive study of Greek in his forties. He hired a series of tutors in Rome and Corfu to give him lessons in modern and classical Greek.³⁰⁹ These men would come to Lear's lodgings and work with him for an hour or two, typically in the morning. Letters and diaries from the period show that these lessons became part of his routine. One 1855 letter even makes one wonder whether the Greek master did not at times function as Lear's only stable link to the rest of society: 'Noone has called today, so I have literally—(as usual,)—spoken to nobody—excepting my Greek master'.³¹⁰ Little wonder, then, that he

³⁰⁶ Lear to Emily Tennyson, 9 October 1856, in Lear (1988) 144.

³⁰⁷ Church (c.1907–1915) n.p.

³⁰⁸ Some of the picture-limericks feature backdrops resembling more 'serious' paintings Lear did of the same places; compare, for instance, 'There was an Old Man of Vesuvius', Lear (2002) 83, with *Massa Looking Towards Vesuvius*, Lear (1839).

³⁰⁹ His favourite was called Papadopoulos. Lear once wrote in his diary of another tutor: 'He is impatient, & tho' a learned man,—not so good a teacher as poor Παπαδοπουλος', Lear (1862) n.p.

³¹⁰ Lear to Ann Lear, 13 December 1855, in Lear (1988) 137.

regretted interruptions to the ‘curriculum’, as when a tutor was forced to cancel a lesson,³¹¹ or he himself became overwhelmed with paying work.³¹² Not even flare-ups of Lear’s chronic ailments always kept him from his studies. On one February day in 1859, he received ‘Tebaldos Λασκάρατος—the νέος διδάσκαλος’ for an hour’s Greek, despite feeling ‘very unwell’.³¹³

Lear continued to read Greek on his own after he ceased to need a tutor’s help. Over the years, he reports reading a wide variety of authors in the original, including Homer, Sophocles, Xenophon, Plato, Plutarch, Lucian, and Josephus. Translating brought Lear unexpected benefits. On one occasion it allowed him to escape unwanted company, when he fled to his room in a Surrey guesthouse to read his ‘daily old Plato’ and avoid the other guests’ requests for musical entertainment.³¹⁴ At other times, it mitigated the loneliness that plagued him. During one episode, he wrote to Emily Tennyson: ‘My evenings—if no friend be here—are dimmydullydillyduffy.—Partly I translate Thousididdles—& so by very slow degrees attain to Greek nollidge’.³¹⁵

Then there were those fortunate occasions on which Lear was able to have both Greek ‘nollidge’ *and* camaraderie. He enjoyed the society of the great Benjamin Hall Kennedy of Shrewsbury School in Rome in 1860,³¹⁶ and once dined with the Rev. William Gurney, a former headmaster of Doncaster School, who offered to send Lear a ‘pumphlett’ he had written about Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*, which Lear was then translating.³¹⁷ Best of all,

³¹¹ To give just one example: despite feeling deep sympathy when one of his tutor’s children fell gravely ill in 1858, Lear could not help noting regretfully that he had had ‘but 2 months of Greek lessons out of the last 12’, Lear to Fortescue, 27 February 1858, in Lear (1907) 87.

³¹² E.g., Lear (1864) n.p.

³¹³ Lear (1859) n.p.

³¹⁴ Lear to Fortescue, 30 September 1860, in Lear (1907) 177.

³¹⁵ Lear to Emily Tennyson, 14 January 1861, in Lear (1988) 167. Compare Lear to Fortescue, 14 September 1863, 184.

³¹⁶ Lear to Fortescue, 10 January 1860, in Lear (1907) 163.

³¹⁷ Lear to Fortescue, in Lear (1911) 298.

however, was to read Greek with Fortescue. Early in their long, close friendship, Lear and Fortescue—who had taken a first-class degree in classics at Oxford—sat in the parlour at the home of the latter’s aunt, ‘doing’ the Gospels and Epistles together.³¹⁸ Then, in 1860, Lear records that Fortescue came to visit him at his lodgings in Surrey, and after a ‘dinner & evening——most delightful’, explicated three Greek verbs that had been puzzling him.³¹⁹ Lear bemoaned his separations from Fortescue, expressing affection partly through references to their shared love of the language: ‘I shall poke on alone in Plato & Ξένοφων’, he writes in one letter, ‘& wish you were here to help me’;³²⁰ in another, ‘I could not go to church to-day. I felt I should make faces at everybody, so I read some Greek of St. John, wishing for you to read it with’.³²¹ At such moments, rather than alleviating Lear’s feelings of isolation, reading Greek seemed only to heighten them.

All things considered, then, *autodidact* is both the perfect word to describe Lear, and also a misleading one. He did *not* teach himself, as a rule, but learned instead one-on-one or in small-group settings from people he liked and typically knew well—his sisters, friends like Church and Fortescue, tutors he hired, and scholars with whom he became acquainted socially. Indeed, while the study of Greek was often a solitary endeavour for Lear—and one that could bring him great satisfaction or even comfort at times—it did not start out that way, nor does it seem he was ever happier as a Greek student than when he had Fortescue with him as comrade and preceptor. If Lear’s classical learning was not essentially solitary, however, it *was* self-propelled. Once he left the nursery, Lear approached classical studies on his own terms, whether through his chosen profession or simple enthusiasm. His experience was thus very

³¹⁸ Lear to Fortescue, 26 September 1875, in Lear (1911) 186.

³¹⁹ Lear (1860) n.p. The entry reads, in part: ‘Greek words—set at rest by C.F. | Ἐνεποίουν—ἐμποιέω—to introduce | Ἐπέζοντο—πίεζω—to press hard on | ἐπήροντο—Ἐπέρομαι—to consult, ask’.

³²⁰ Lear to Fortescue, 18 January 1858, in Lear (1907) 82.

³²¹ Lear to Fortescue, 6 December 1857, in Lear (1907) 67.

different than it might have been in an institutional setting. Lear occasionally sounds like a typical enough student, complaining about assigned readings (he particularly disliked Plutarch)³²² or admitting putting off his homework assignment until the last minute.³²³ But he was an adult, and when he submitted to a master's rule, he did so of his own volition. He never experienced the beatings, humiliations, or atmosphere of fierce competition that sometimes characterised the grammar schools attended by many of his friends and acquaintances.³²⁴

Moreover, the flexible, collegial, and self-directed nature of Lear's engagement with classics left him fearless in his use of the material. Perhaps in part because he was never shamed or punished for giving a wrong answer or cracking a joke,³²⁵ he was not much troubled by the need to be correct or proper. Once he 'had' Latin and Greek, he made free with them, observing no rules of decorum as far as how he spent his intellectual capital. With painting, Lear had to know and, at least to some extent, abide by generic conventions in order to earn both the respect of his peers and the income he needed to live. But language was his playground. Not only did he sprinkle his letters and diaries with words, phrases, even paragraphs in translated or transliterated Greek, but he also made *terrible* Latin and Greek puns. A tiresome man he calls 'potius aper',³²⁶ for example, while his succinct account of what happens after eating some bad

³²² Lear to Fortescue, 3 January 1858, in Lear (1907) 75.

³²³ Lear (1858a) n.p.

³²⁴ On the experience of classical education at nineteenth-century British schools, see esp. Clarke (1959) 74–97; and Stray (1998b) 46–49, 58–59, 183–87. Cf. Maurice, this volume, for representations of this kind of education in children's fiction.

³²⁵ In his first lesson at Harrow in 1888, upon being asked to memorise the declension of *mensa*, a young Winston Churchill inquired about the purpose of the vocative case. The master explained that he would use it in speaking to a table. When the astonished boy blurted out that he never *did* speak to tables, the master snapped back, 'If you are impertinent, you will be punished', in Lecercle (1994) 216.

³²⁶ Lit. 'rather a boar', Lear (1858b) n.p.

cheese is ‘sick transit’.³²⁷ On another occasion, he tells Fortescue how he delighted in riling Sir Richard Bethell with a Latin pun:³²⁸

The Chancellor—(I was there Saturday and Sunday) was delightful: such an abundance of excellent conversation—with a circle or with me only—one seldom has the luck of getting.
He—Speaking of ‘undique sequaces’—‘sequax’,—and saying ‘let us remember the line and go and look for the translation,’ quoth the Landscape painter in a fit of absurdity,
‘My Lord I can remember it easily by thinking of wild ducks’.
‘How of wild ducks Lear?’ said the Lord C.—‘Because they are *sea-quacks*’ said I.
‘Lear’, said his Lordship, ‘I abominate the forcible introduction of ridiculous images calculated to distract the mind from what it is contemplating’.
The painter chuckled inwardly—having from beforehand calculated on the exact result of his speech.

‘On the threshold of knowledge’

Lear’s critique of stuffiness and lack of imagination extended to the educational system itself. He criticised the dominant model for slighting the *ideas* in classical texts by focusing too narrowly on philology. ‘How is it’, he wrote to Fortescue after a sleepless night spent translating Plato’s *Phaedo*,

...that the thoughts of this wonderful man are kept darkly away from the youths of the age? (except they go to universities, & then only as matters of language or scarcely more) because Socrates was a ‘pagan’?³²⁹

For Lear, suspicion of the shadowy authorities who controlled young people’s access to and engagement with the classics formed a part of a larger and more sinister (if well-intentioned) project of ‘forming’ children. He developed this theme in a poem called ‘In medio Tutorissimus

³²⁷ Lear (1863) n.p. See also Lear to Charles Empson, 1 October 1831, in Lear (1988) 16 (*pro tempore* becomes ‘pro trumpery’); and Lear to Fortescue, 9 December 1882, in Lear (1911) 277: ‘I will answer your last at once, as the affectionate Roman Goose said concerning her growing gosling daughter—oportet anser’.

³²⁸ According to Levi, ‘an ambitious, abrasively dogmatic man’, Levi (1995) 139.

³²⁹ Lear to Fortescue, 3 January 1858, in Lear (1907) 75.

ibis’, which he glossed as ‘Thou shalt walk in the midst of thy tutors’.³³⁰ In the poem, a series of zealous, self-important tutors—including one for Latin—state their intentions regarding the ‘edjukation’ of a young boy. Lear based this ‘youthful cove’ on Arnold, son of his neighbour and close friend Walter Congreve.³³¹ For the title, he appropriated a Latin tag such as might have been taught at a school like Rugby, where Congreve had, ironically, once been Under-Master.³³² The tag comes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, wherein Phoebus, having tried and failed to dissuade Phaethon from asking to drive the chariot of the sun, advises his son, ‘You will go most safely by the middle way’ (2.137; *medio tutissimus ibis*). Lear’s groan-worthy (and ungrammatical) pun raises the question of whether the boy he is addressing—who was ‘not so bad’ to begin with³³³—really *will* be safe in the midst of his tutors. At the same time, seeing as he himself had once given drawing lessons to Arnold and his brother, Lear seems to cast doubt on the wisdom of ever having taken on such a role.³³⁴ This sceptical attitude accords with a general pattern Sara Lodge has identified in Lear’s writing: ‘Educators tend to fail, whether they are trying to teach fishes to walk or little owls to drink tea. Their attempts are akin to those of missionaries determined to convert natives of other lands’.³³⁵

A final quotation from one of Lear’s letters will spell out his genuine concerns regarding formal classical education. The addressee is, once again, Fortescue:

Would you believe it, ὃ πολυμόχθε, Undersecretary for the Colonies, I am nearly half through Οἰδίπους ἐπὶ Κολόνοι—yes, and understand it well too. I am almost thanking God that I was never educated, for it seems to me that 999 of those who are so, expensively and laboriously, have lost

³³⁰ Lear (2002) 425–27. Cp. ‘He lived at Dingle Bank – he did’, Lear (2002) 452–53, perceptively analysed by Lodge (2016) 78–79.

³³¹ Lear (2002) 534n. In the poem, it is the youthful cove’s own ‘parient’ who teaches him Latin (‘and Grammarithmetic, | And lots of things beside’).

³³² Cf. Lear to Fortescue, 13 September 1871, in Lear (1911) 138–39.

³³³ Lear (2002) 425.

³³⁴ Hubert Congreve, preface to Lear (1911) 22. Compare Rieder (1998) 54–56.

³³⁵ Lodge (2016) 78.

all before they arrive at my age—and remain... cut and dry for life, making no use of their earlier-gained treasures: whereas, I seem to be on the threshold of knowledge, and at least have a long way to the chilling certainty which most men methinks should have, that all labour for light is vain and time thrown away.³³⁶

Lear shows his self-awareness here. He recognised that although his enthusiasm for the study of Greek was not unheard of among the conventionally educated—Fortescue shared it, after all—it was uncommon. He had no doubt observed that plenty of former schoolboys recalled the study of classics as a tedious, distasteful, or even traumatic process.³³⁷ Several years of the ‘gerund-grind’³³⁸ might indeed leave a pupil ‘cut and dry for life’, lacking the desire to continue studying Latin or Greek literature once he left school. This awareness led Lear to connect his openness to classical ‘treasures’ with his lack of formal schooling. And, in making the point, he implicates nonsense as well. For, as serious as Lear sounds with his talk of ‘labour[ing] for light’, has he not also just made another awful pun, this time in Greek, changing the title of Sophocles’ play to accord with Fortescue’s official government title as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies?³³⁹

It should now be possible to see how all this classical nonsense—the puns, parodies of botanical Latin (and Greek), inaccurately depicted characters and decontextualised names—is connected to Lear’s avowed conviction that young children should *and could* look forward to deriving as much satisfaction from studying classics as he had. For him, somehow, the instinct to create and appreciate nonsense occupied the same mental space as his passionate desire to deliver, as it were, ‘the youths of the age’ unto serious contemplation of Socratic philosophy.

³³⁶ Lear to Fortescue, 2 September 1859, in Lear (1907) 148.

³³⁷ Stray (1998b) 46–47, 59, 187; cf. Maurice, this volume.

³³⁸ Stray (1998b) 48–49.

³³⁹ The Greek title is Ὀιδίπους ἐπὶ Κολωνῶν. Lear may simply have made a mistake, but I favour Lady Strachey’s suggestion that he was punning instead (preface to Lear (1907) xlv; and cf. 60n).

Ironically, grammar school education in this period actually led to the production of a fair amount of nonsense in itself. Lear was hardly the only critic of the system to object strenuously to the myopic fixation on grammar and parsing. An article in the *Westminster Review* in 1825 lamented the fact that grammar school pupils spent their days

in attempting, not to read and understand the matter of a classical author, to know the history, the poetry, the philosophy, the policy, the manners and the opinions of Greece and Rome, but the grammar, the syntax, the parsing, the quantities and the accents; not in learning to write and speak the language, but in getting by rote a few scraps of poetry, to be again forgotten, and in fabricating nonsense, or sense verses, it is indifferent which.³⁴⁰

Thus, following Lecercle, not only does the social apparatus of ‘the School’ contain and generate nonsense, but nonsense texts also inscribe the School within themselves.³⁴¹ This reciprocity may seem paradoxical, since writers of nonsense were at best marginal members of the School; their privileged readers were either too young or of the wrong gender to enter it; and the ‘pedagogic positions’ struck by nonsense texts hardly reflect the educational practices of the day.³⁴² It may also seem to cast an odd light on my suggestion that, by inviting children to join him in making nonsense of the classics, Lear may have hoped to protect some of them from the ‘desiccating’ effects of a classical education—which would consist at least partially of nonsense.

Yet there is a crucial difference between the nonsense Lear shares with his audience, and the nonsense they may be compelled to consume and produce in a classroom. The spirit and circumstances of each interaction are key. A pedantic schoolmaster might force students to swallow seemingly nonsensical information and expect them to treat it like sense, standing

³⁴⁰ In Lecercle (1994) 215. Cf. Clarke (1959) 55–56, on the Etonian system wherein students of Latin versification progressed through forms called Scan and Prove, Nonsense, and Sense before attempting original composition.

³⁴¹ Lecercle (1994) 214.

³⁴² Lecercle (1994) 218–19.

ready to regurgitate it flawlessly on cue. There would be little room for play or laughter in such a scenario, little chance for students to ‘receive’ material in their own way—at least, not without risking censure. Lear, on the other hand, invites children—girls *and* boys—to join him in laughing at ‘unauthorised’ classical receptions, thereby freeing them to cultivate their own idiosyncratic relationships with the subject. A child who begins by, say, delighting in the sound of Latin words encountered in Lear’s nonsense, might set out to study the language on their own and, in time, discover the deeper charms of the ideas that lie behind the words. Or, if sent to school and subjected to the ‘gerund-grind’, a child’s earlier enchantment with the language might allow them to remain open to those charms despite a less-than-inspiring schoolroom experience. Lear’s nonsense thus subverts the dominant educational model even while echoing it.

Metamorphoses of a Persian king

It seems somehow fitting to end by circling back to where I began, with Medes and Persians. Or, at least, with one Persian—Xerxes, whom Donald Lateiner has termed a ‘remarkably useful, nearly essential resource for the tail end of your nonsense alphabet’.³⁴³ The representation of Xerxes in Lear’s alphabets will further illuminate the process I have been describing, offering a case study that emanates from works we *know* were created for children and which (unlike, say, the Nonsense Botanies) we can compare and contrast with other examples of the genre. So, let us take a brief look at Xerxes according to Lear.

The letter X has long bedevilled creators of alphabet books. A surprising number duck the challenge entirely, claiming English has no words beginning with X.³⁴⁴ Hilaire Belloc both

³⁴³ Lateiner (2008) n.p.

³⁴⁴ E.g., *Picture Alphabet* (1850) 14: ‘There is no word in the English language beginning with this letter’; and *Dr. Jollyboy’s ABC* (1898) n.p.: ‘X stands for nothing’.

satirised these authors and acknowledged their quandary when he wrote in his *Moral Alphabet*, ‘No reasonable little Child expects | A Grown-up Man to make a rhyme on X’.³⁴⁵ More courageous abecedarians have had to ‘think outside the box’. Many early ABC books pair X with the Roman numeral for ten³⁴⁶ or with the cross, either the shape or the wooden structure. Several use *Xantippe*, perhaps not referring specifically to Socrates’ wife, but to the related English word for ‘ill-tempered woman’.³⁴⁷ More zoologically inclined authors have had recourse to *Xiphias*, the swordfish;³⁴⁸ *Xanthornus*, the ‘Baltimore Bird’;³⁴⁹ or Xanthus, Achilles’ horse.³⁵⁰ One writer even took the opportunity to put in a rather sententious plug for Xenophon: ‘X was Xenophon, a wise Grecian sage, | Who tells us the deeds of a far distant age. | Make haste, then, to read, that you quickly may look | To the pleasure you’ll find in his beautiful book’.³⁵¹

Then we come to Xerxes. Some books use the name without hinting that he was a real person. In the *Little Folks Picture Alphabet Book*, for example, the narrator addresses a little boy named Xerxes to draw attention to a group of songbirds.³⁵² *Our Friends* adds a moral, depicting ‘young Xerxes’ who went sliding on thin ice and fell into a pond.³⁵³ Others allow

³⁴⁵ Belloc (1899) 60.

³⁴⁶ As in *Mother’s Picture Alphabet* (c.1877) 52–53; *Child’s Picture Alphabet* (c.1880) n.p.; Johnson (1884) n.p.; and *Golden Playbook* (1886) n.p.: ‘X stood for Ten, with the Romans of old; | But no pretty story about it is told’.

³⁴⁷ As in *Alphabet of Goody Two-Shoes* (1808) 32: ‘X, was Xantippe, | As you’ve heard before; | But not to forget her, | I name her once more’; and Sunbeam (1856) 91: ‘X is for Xantippe, who often would rail, | And scold at her husband, they say’.

³⁴⁸ As in *Little Folks Picture Alphabet Book* (1832) 52: ‘X is for the Xiphias, | Or sword-fish as ’tis named, | It can pierce the planks of vessels | With his beak for which it’s famed’; and Crane (c.1890) n.p.

³⁴⁹ *Illustrated Alphabet of Birds* (1851) n.p.

³⁵⁰ Presumably; in Webster (1858) n.p., the label *Xanthus* appears next to a small drawing of a horse in an alphabet made up entirely of animals.

³⁵¹ Hofland (1839) n.p. Note the absence of any truly enticing detail about Xenophon or his book, beyond his alleged wisdom and its alleged beauty!

³⁵² *Little Folks Picture Alphabet Book* (1832) 52.

³⁵³ *Our Friends* (1895) n.p.: ‘Young Xerxes out a sliding went, | The ice, alas, was thin; | Now if he’d stayed upon dry land | He wouldn’t have tumbled in’.

that there was a person named Xerxes about whom tales could be told, but scarcely admit that they might be worth hearing. *Mrs. Lovechild's Golden Present* is one such: 'X was King Xerxes, a warrior of Old'.³⁵⁴ Two more adopt an oddly dismissive tone, raising the question of why their creators used Xerxes at all. The *Picture ABC Book* is especially disdainful: 'The X is a very *cross* sort of letter, | Though it stands for King Xerxes, if nobody better'.³⁵⁵ And *The Silver Penny* seems almost to gloat over his irrelevance: 'What Xerxes was, 'tis hard to say, | And yet to say what's true;— | Be what he might, 'tis past a doubt | That he is nothing now'.³⁵⁶

Lear's Xerxes is unlike any of these. His kingly status is never in doubt. In many alphabets, he wears exotic clothing, including a cap, crown, or turban that miraculously stays put as he brandishes weapons at the reader or at someone cowering just off the page.³⁵⁷ Lear's text for this fierce king commonly emphasises his anger and passion.³⁵⁸ Then there is a less martial version in which Xerxes gulps porter from a mug bigger than his head, denying with his lustiness the sober implications of the caption: 'The Excellent Double-extra XX | imbibing King Xerxes, who lived a | long while ago'.³⁵⁹ Yet another Xerxes, the most minimally illustrated, bears a message that seems almost designed to counter *The Silver Penny*: 'X was King Xerxes, whom | Papa much wished to know; | But this he could not do, because | Xerxes died long ago'.³⁶⁰ Lear has transformed both the historical Xerxes and the Xerxes found in

³⁵⁴ *Mrs. Lovechild's Golden Present* (c.1807–1850) 15.

³⁵⁵ Woodworth (1850) 87. Woodworth includes neither an illustration of Xerxes nor a story about him, as he does for the exemplars of other, more favoured letters.

³⁵⁶ *Silver Penny* (c.1820) 25.

³⁵⁷ As in 'A was an ant' (bef. 1871), Lear (1871) n.p.; cp. fig. 2, below.

³⁵⁸ As in 'A was an Ant' (c.1865): 'X was King Xerxes, | Who more than all Turks is | Renowned for his fashion | Of screaming with passion' (MS Typ 55.3, Houghton Library, Harvard University). In 'A was some Ants' (1860), Xerxes is 'renowned for his passion | and furious fashion', Lear (2013) n.p.

³⁵⁹ 'The Absolutely Abstemious Ass' (1870), Lear (2002) 268.

³⁶⁰ 'A was an area arch' (1871), Lear (2002) 317.

contemporary alphabet books. *His* Xerxes is a vital soul worth knowing, or at least worth knowing *about*.

But what does Lear *tell* us about Xerxes, really? There is so little context. The classically educated may deduce that this is the same King Xerxes whom Lear once sketched ‘a dividing the isthmus of Acte’, but the alphabets do not set the king in the context of his story. Lear does not, as it were, tell the child to ‘make haste to read’ Herodotus, or supply other confirmation of Xerxes’ authenticity. In fact, the king’s nearest neighbour in one alphabet³⁶¹ is the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo, a known quantity in Lear’s nonsense but perhaps not in the historical record.³⁶² How is a child to intuit that Xerxes is ‘real’ in a way the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo is not? Similarly, how are they to know that none of the rhyming words given to Xerxes in ‘A was once an apple pie’ (*xerxy*, *perxy*, *turxy*) is real (fig. 2), but that Q has one real one (*quaily*) and J, three (*jammy*, *mammy*, *clammy*)?³⁶³ They could not know these things; and this contributes to the beneficial effect. The Xerxes of the alphabets is unbound from context, free to wear a turban and drink porter without being accused of anachronism or impropriety. He is every bit as memorable as the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo—which is to say, more memorable by far than our friend ‘X is for Xenophon’.

³⁶¹ ‘The Absolutely Abstemious Ass’ (1870), Lear (2002) 268–69.

³⁶² Cf. ‘The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo’, Lear (2002), 324–27.

³⁶³ ‘A was once an apple-pie’ (n.d.), Lear (2002) 279–304.

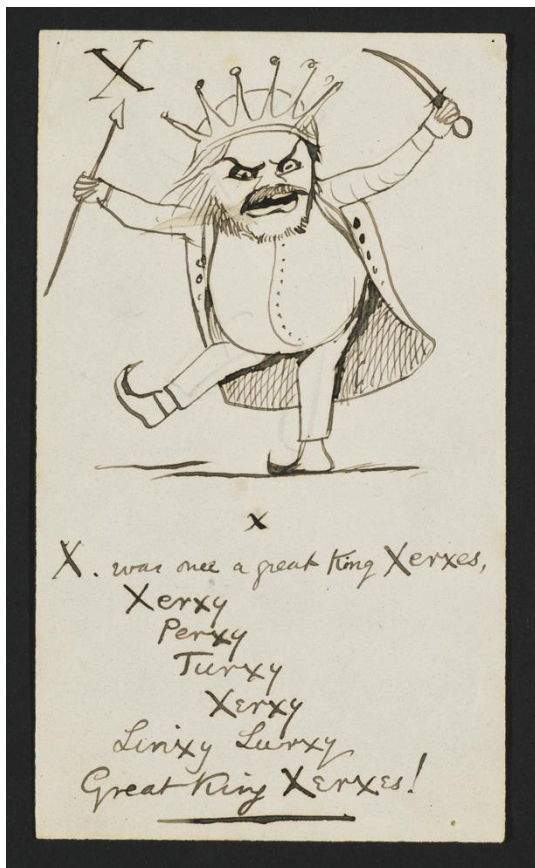


Figure 2 The letter X from the undated alphabet 'A was once an apple-pie'. MS Typ 55.14 (144). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

In sum, Lear sensed, on some level, that children who learned such 'lessons' as 'X stands for Xerxes' and 'Gozo my child is the isle of Calypso' might remain more receptive to the charms of the languages, cultures, and landscapes he himself found so charming. When *these* children eventually encountered Xerxes in a tedious Greek grammar lesson, they would remember a picture-alphabet in which a swashbuckling sultan brandished spear and scimitar while standing on one leg. And that just might be enough to prevent their 'losing all'.

More than that, perhaps, a person who remains open to the imaginative possibilities of what they see or hear, might more easily escape the tyranny of a single perspective. In escaping the complete metamorphosis of child into adult, such individuals retain the imaginative ability to transform objects, words, or ideas they encounter—or, perhaps, to perceive the various forms already implicit in each. Jonathan Rose has written that 'the mastery of any foreign language

marked the point when a scholarship pupil would irreversibly leave his parents behind’, adducing this quotation from Marjory Todd:

Soon after [the scholarship pupil] went to his grammar school he was ‘showing off’ at the table. He said that sugar and bread in French would be masculine things but others might be feminine. His father, who up to this point had been his absolute authority on everything, told him this was nonsense, and he felt for the first time that they would henceforth drift apart. His French teacher he knew was right; his father disagreed with his teacher; *both* could not be right.³⁶⁴

Yet anyone accustomed to looking at the world through the eyes of nonsense, knows that both *can* be right. The idea that sugar and bread might be masculine will make sense to those familiar with the concept of grammatical gender. To most children, though—and to adults who retain a childlike sense of whimsy—the idea is also absurd, as sugar and bread are inanimate objects, and hardly redolent of manliness. The person who sees both possibilities, therefore, understands both views while remaining independent of their authority. The mind that plays freely *is* free.

³⁶⁴ Rose (2010) 227.

Chapter 10

Changing Alexandria: Didactic Plots and Roman Detectives in Caroline Lawrence and Lindsey Davis

Helen Lovatt

Roman detective stories have become a genre since the success of Lindsey Davis' Falco series.³⁶⁵ This chapter asks: what happens when you metamorphose this genre for a child audience? Caroline Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries* have done just this, and the comparison of the two series offers an opportunity to reflect on the differences of approach in recreating a Roman world (and the detective genre) for adults and children. Both series are set in the Flavian period: the Falco series under Vespasian, the Roman mysteries under Titus. Several of the Roman mysteries have strong similarities with episodes in the Falco series: *The Scribes from Alexandria*, for instance, shares a setting with *Alexandria*;³⁶⁶ *Scandal Takes a Holiday* is set in Ostia, as is *The Thieves of Ostia* among others; *The Beggar of Volubilis* features a theatrical troupe, as does *Last Act in Palmyra*; both *The Gladiators from Capua* and *Two for the Lions* are set in the arena; *See Delphi and Die* focuses on a Grand Tour of Greece, as does *The*

³⁶⁵ Not very much has yet been published about Lawrence and the *Roman Mysteries*: Lovatt (forthcoming); brief discussion in Travis (2010). On Roman detectives see O'Gorman (1999), Lovatt (2011). On historical detectives in general: Most (1983), Browne and Kreiser (2000).

³⁶⁶ Lawrence (2009 [2008]) and Davis (2010 [2009]), hereafter abbreviated as *SfA* and *Alexandria*.

Charioteer of Delphi.³⁶⁷ This paper first looks at overall similarities and differences in narrative, genre and style, then focuses on the issue of didacticism. How do the two authors use and present their research? How do they present teachers and teaching? How do they involve readers in the Roman world? How do they change and educate readers? Do they transform and domesticate the Roman world in the same ways and to the same extent? To what extent can the differences between them be ascribed to their target audiences? What can these differences tell us about their reception of Roman history? What can the comparison tell us about children's literature as a category? Overall this paper shows how writing for children metamorphoses the reception of the Roman world in detective fiction.

There are some significant over-arching differences between the *Roman Mysteries* and the Falco series. Perhaps the most important is the difference between the first person narrative of Marcus Didius Falco and the third person narrative of Caroline Lawrence. Falco's voice is distinctively adult, and generically significant in its relationship to Raymond Chandler and hard-boiled detective fiction. Falco is interested in the seamy underbelly of Roman life, and particularly enjoys innuendo. The wry and allusive humour of Falco's voice relies very much on an adult audience who are familiar with the genre as well as Roman history and literature. In contrast, Lawrence uses strong focalisation through her four main child characters, so that they always offer a child's eye view of the Roman world. Lawrence's primary detective fiction model is Nancy Drew, which leads not only to a different tone, but also a different type of story. While Davis' plots often build slowly and focus on social observation and character

³⁶⁷ *Scandal takes a holiday*: Davis (2006); *The Thieves of Ostia*: Lawrence (2001); *The Beggar of Volubilis*: Lawrence (2009 [2007]); *Last Act in Palmyra*: Davis (1994); *The Gladiators from Capua*: Lawrence (2009 [2004]); *Two for the Lions*: Davis (1999 [1998]); *See Delphi and Die*: Davis (2006 [2005]); *The Charioteer of Delphi*: Lawrence (2009 [2006]-a).

interactions, Lawrence's move fast, with frequent cliff-hangers and puzzles for the reader, that are quickly solved.

Alexandria

I shall use as my main case study a pair of related books set in Roman Egypt, and I will be focussing on the representation of Alexandria, especially the library. Lindsey Davis' *Alexandria* (2009) follows Falco and his wife Helena Justina on their quest to see the seven wonders of the world to the Egyptian metropolis, where they become embroiled in the sudden death of the Librarian. The main setting of the book is the city of Alexandria, especially the Mouseion, which gives Davis the opportunity to play with the campus novel. This is the nineteenth Falco novel: he now has three children, one adopted, and Helena Justina is pregnant with a third. The family situation has significantly skewed the generic status of the series: it can no longer be quite so hard-boiled as it used to be. Although the Falco series started long before the *Roman Mysteries* (*The Silver Pigs* was first published in 1989), Caroline Lawrence's *The Scribes from Alexandria* (2008) predates *Alexandria* (2009). I am not interested here in which came first, or who is imitating whom, but rather in the different ways that the two books change and adapt the same (or very similar) material. In *The Scribes from Alexandria*, Lawrence's four young detectives have been sent to North Africa apparently by the emperor Titus, and have been shipwrecked at Alexandria. The first part of the book (scrolls I-XIV) is set in Alexandria, before they travel more widely in Egypt.

Both casts are varied in order to allow perspectives from different parts of Roman society: Falco may be a low-life, but his relationship with Helena Justina allows him to connect with the powerful. Past friendships, with, for instance, Thalia the snake-dancer, give him access to different elements of Roman society. Lawrence's four child detectives are Flavia the Roman ship-owner's daughter, Jonathan the Jewish doctor's son, Lupus the Greek mute and Nubia the

African slave, who has since been freed by Flavia. This provides a range of social statuses and cultural perspectives. In Lawrence particularly, the children show a remarkable propensity to talk to people whose names and works have survived antiquity, like Pliny the Elder. Both series use apparent imperial sponsorship to open doors and provide access to places and situations that should not necessarily have been open to them.

Detective novels are inherently didactic: in order to involve readers in solving the mystery, readers must understand the terms of the mystery and be able to speculate on possible solutions. The reader as detective, driven onwards by their desire to know what happened, is a well-known conceptualisation of readership.³⁶⁸ Lawrence exhorts her readers to be detectives in their everyday lives, in order to grow into writers.³⁶⁹ Further, she explicitly asserts that writing historical fiction is a sort of detective work: 'Writers of historical fiction are like detectives. We have to recreate the scene of the crime, i.e. the past.' (*From Ostia*, xii) Lawrence has experience as a teacher at primary level.³⁷⁰ As with Rick Riordan, author of the Percy Jackson series, she is well aware of pedagogical theory, and seeks to make her readers as active as possible. To reverse the analogy, 'problem-solving' is a form of student-centred learning which requires students to adopt similar attitudes to detectives.

Both Lawrence and Davis are interested in the Mouseion as an educational institution. In *Alexandria*, Falco is working alongside Helena Justina's brother Aulus who has enrolled in the Library as a scholar. The most dramatic educational set-piece occurs in chapter 12 (68-79),

³⁶⁸ In classical literary criticism, for instance, see Winkler (1985).

³⁶⁹ In *From Ostia to Alexandria with Flavia Gemina* Lawrence (2008), the companion travelogue to the series, readers are given tasks to do in each place and detective assignments. In her postscript she says 'I hope this guide has made you eager to travel and use your powers of imagination and observation, maybe even to write a story based on your travels.' (109)

³⁷⁰ See <http://www.romanmysteries.com/author>, accessed 20.10.2015: 'She then taught Latin, French and art at a small London primary school.'

when they attend the autopsy of the dead librarian, Theon, in a lecture theatre. The dissection is conducted by Philadelphion, the zoo keeper. He begins with an extensive lecture on the history of dissection (69-72). Philadelphion starts his lecture very much in the style of a university lecturer: 'For those who may be new to this, I shall first review the history of dissection in Alexandria.' (69) Davis gives the full text of the lecture, and presents the audience reactions: 'Philadelphion paused, to allow note-takers to catch up.' (70) The reader and the internal audience are closely mapped onto each other. Lists of complex Greek names emphasise the learning of both lecturer and author (Herophilus, Erasistratus, Demetrius Phalereus, 70-1). The necropsy itself (74-5) is vividly visualised, spectacular, drawing on the genre of forensic crime fiction (such as Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series), but pulling away at the end from describing the removal of the brain in any detail. The actual dissection causes viewers to faint and vomit. The lecture serves to bring the visual learning of the dissection into sharp relief. Both are, however, entirely passive: Aulus' one question is sharply rebuffed, and the audience wait patiently to hear Philadelphion's conclusion, although the discussion of possible causes of death involves a number of questions and answers, with emphasis on the ways that questioners assert their own roles, status and knowledge (again, much as in academic research papers).

The focus in Davis is very much on the professors, all potential suspects, since they might have wanted to become Librarian in Theon's place. Caroline Lawrence, in contrast, creates two characters (Seth and Chrysis - later revealed to be a girl called Chryse) who are junior scribes at the Library, not much older than the child detectives. When Flavia, Lupus and Jonathan arrive at the Library looking for Nubia, they are introduced to Philologus, the Head Scholar. Philologus is obsessed with riddles and asks each of the children a riddle as a sort of test. In each case, Lawrence allows a few lines before giving the answer, and gives the answer initially in Latin. This allows child readers to think about the riddle before learning the answer, and also

incidentally to learn a little Latin. The bulk of the novel follows the quest of Flavia, Jonathan, Lupus and Seth to find Nubia and Chrysis, who has left riddles for them to follow. Lawrence often creates a gap between announcing the riddle and solving it, sometimes even the end of a chapter, so that the reader is involved in solving the riddle, or at least feels they have the opportunity to beat the character to it. For instance the anagram HERBA ANTE NOS APER MEUS is repeated on pages 68 and 69, and the method of solving it is described while Lupus solves it. The answer is only revealed over the page at the beginning of chapter 11 on page 70. This allows the reader to work it out themselves, before turning over to reveal the answer. Similarly, the quotation at the end of chapter 11 is solved by Lupus, but the answer is not revealed until the first line of chapter 12 (76). This creates a cliff-hanger between chapters that ensures readers keep reading. This riddling, it turns out, is in fact the pedagogical technique of their teacher, the very same Philologus:

'Our teacher at that time was Philologus. He used to send the three of us on Word Quests around Alexandria. ... In this way he taught us to recognise and break codes, and to identify and translate different languages. Also we got to know our way around the city.' (71)

The act of solving puzzles becomes plot device, teaching method, character test and initiation. Learning, in this model, immediately takes them outside the Library, first to Alexandria and then to the Nile and the countryside of Egypt.

Various aspects differentiate these two models of learning: first, Davis' autopsy is grounded in the reality of the body; she does not give so much detail as to alienate the reader and she focuses on experiences of those in the ancient world that would have made such a spectacle bearable (soldiering, sacrifice). Lawrence's child heroes frequently watch funerals and occasionally violence, but bodily details are carefully circumscribed. More importantly, though, is the active, short-term nature of the problem-solving and the plot. The children move from place to place in bite-size chunks; each riddle is easily solvable; readers are frequently

rewarded with bursts of new knowledge and understanding. We might call this the 'gamification' of plot: just as computer games offer frequent short-term rewards for continuing to play, so Lawrence's novels offer frequent cliff-hangers and resolutions, while building towards the long-term questions of both the book as a whole and the series. For *The Scribes from Alexandria* the central questions are 'where is Nubia?' and 'why is Chrysis luring Seth to follow them?' For the series, the reader asks 'why are the children wanted by the authorities?' and 'will they be able to go home?' In contrast, Davis sets up the overall questions of the novel ('Who killed Theon?' and 'How many scrolls are there really in the Great Library?') and builds towards them much more slowly, with periods of digression, red herrings and long-term developments of character and situation. In fact, it only becomes apparent in the later stages of the investigation that the question of the number of scrolls in the Great Library is not just one of trivia, or a self-conscious play on the limits of historical knowledge, but a crucial part of understanding Theon's death. The emphasis is much more on social observation, particularly description of the workings of the Mouseion and Library as a satire of academia, or at least of institutional power games. This is not to say that Lawrence is not putting character at the centre of her writing: the question of why Chrysis is acting in this particular way is precisely about character, but Chrysis' situation is a personal one (she is pretending to be a eunuch, but is actually a woman, and is in love with Seth), not a position in an institutional power struggle.

In fact, Lawrence's *The Scribes from Alexandria*, opening as it does with a ship-wreck and continuing with cross-dressing and romance, has more than a hint of the Greek novel. Lawrence's works often put ancient literature and literary figures at the heart of her plots: Pliny the Elder's death at Vesuvius features in *The Secrets of Vesuvius* (Lawrence (2002 [2001]-b)); Statius' villa poems and the figure of the patron (Pollius Felix) in *The Pirates of Pompeii* (Lawrence (2002 [2001]-a)) and *The Sirens of Surrentum* (Lawrence (2009 [2006]-b)); the *Argonautica* in *The Colossus of Rhodes* (Lawrence (2005)); the detailed portrayal of Valerius

Flaccus, who ultimately marries Flavia; Suetonius in *The Sirens of Surrentum* and *The Man from Pomegranate Street* (Lawrence (2010 [2009])). While Davis might tell you everything you ever wanted to know about Roman water systems (*Three Hands in the Fountain*), Lawrence is much more transparently focused on ancient literary texts.³⁷¹

Didacticism and the female character

Both Lawrence and Davis soften the introduction of research material by putting it in the voices of characters, particularly female characters. While Nubia's status as a recent immigrant in the first books allows Flavia Gemina and the author to explain many Roman customs, concepts and words, Nubia is not with them during the initial chapters of *The Scribes from Alexandria*, and has in any case gone beyond this role. Instead, Flavia joins in with exposition, making a claim for her own knowledge, and even sometimes giving the source. For instance as they approach Alexandria, their local host acts as guide:

Thonis chuckled. 'It's five hundred feet tall. And it's not actually called the Pharos. That's the name--'
'--of the island on which it's built!' interrupted Flavia. 'I know that from Pliny's Natural History,' she added. (Scribes, 16)

All of the children are given a chance to observe, remember and work things out: Lupus calculates the number of miles in fifty stades (*SfA* 15); Jonathan is called upon to confirm Flavia's reading of Hebrew inscriptions on tombs (17-18). Flavia is most often characterised by her book learning, Lupus by his observation skills and knowledge of the streets, while Jonathan has expertise in the spiritual and mystic (dreams, prophecies, religion), and Nubia has intuitions which often turn out to be correct. For instance, Jonathan explains the production of the Septuagint to Flavia (*SfA* 158). The children refer back to sources of knowledge from earlier

³⁷¹ Davis (1997).

in the series, as with Pliny in the quotation above, and Aristo, Flavia's tutor, on Alexander, Ammon and ram's horns at *SfA* 79. Above all, Lawrence's characters believe in the importance of learning and understanding, and the series encourages its readers to indentify as enthusiastic learners.

In Davis, Helen Justina is a keen reader, and has a tendency to pass on her knowledge to others, sometimes at self-consciously bizarre moments. For instance, towards the end of *Alexandria*, she is instrumental in putting out a serious fire in the library, and subsequently offers an impromptu lecture on the invention of the siphon:

Helena Justina, fetchingly besmirched by smuts, sat on a small patch of grass, clutching her knees. Dreamily, she lectured us: 'Ctesibius, the son of a barber, was the first head of the Museion. His inventions included an adjustable shaving mirror ... He discovered the principle of the siphon which we have demonstrated with such good effect today! However it may be said that setting fire to the Great Library was a drastic way to illustrate pumping principles. This empirical approach may have to be rethought in future.' (*Alexandria*, 323)

The ironic nod at the Mouseion as an institution of learning (not very effective) demonstrates the way that Davis engages her reader at several different levels, often encouraging them to keep an ironic distance from the material and particularly from Falco's position as main narrator. The phrase 'fetchingly besmirched by smuts' emphasises Falco's focalisation and portrays both affection and sexism. This distance between Falco and Helena is especially brought out when she lectures him: for instance in chapter 25 the action of the plot is self-consciously broken by a trip outside Alexandria, to relax, discuss and catch up with each other. During this trip, Helena passes on to Marcus the contents of a conversation she had with their host Cassius about the workings of the Mouseion, in which she discusses the scholar Didymus (168-9). Marcus quips:

'Did *Cassius* tell you all this?'
Helena blushed. 'No. I've been reading up myself...'

Davis makes clear that she is laying out the basis for her own historical interpretation of the decline of the library of Alexandria. It is the coolly educated and female perspective of Helena Justina that is valorised. Perhaps this allows readers less patient with detailed material about history to identify rather with Falco, to separate out the history and the mystery and by clearly marking passages such as this to skip over them. In contrast, Lawrence's nuggets of information are carefully packaged in bite-size chunks, and integrated with plot and character-development. Amazon reviews of *Alexandria* show that not all readers appreciate the didacticism of Davis' text: despite entitling the review *Falco still going strong* (14 April 2010, accessed 20.10.15), J. Lumsden felt that 'the Alexandrian setting, even with information about the libraries and zoo, did not add enough so that I found myself skipping sections at a time'; Graham R. Hill (*Groove or rut*, 19 June 2010, accessed 20.10.15) finds the representation of Rome perhaps too 'recognisable, comfortable and unthreatening', and suggests that the action is surrounded by a 'potted precis of a guide book/history of Alexandria'. More negative still is donfoxtad in *Boring Lindsey Davis Alexandria*, 8 April 2010, accessed 20.10.15, who says 'Her desire to parade her knowledge of matters Roman - and here also Roman era Egyptian - gets in the way of a good murder.'³⁷² In contrast, Marshall Lord positively appreciates the historical mode: 'I thought there were a lot of interesting historical details added about the first century empire'. (*Falco 19: the body in the Great Library*, 13 Feb 2009, accessed 6.10.14). The overall rating of 4 out of 5 stars for 62 reviews (as at 20.10.15) suggests that must people enjoy the mix of detail and excitement, but it is clear that the overtly didactic tone can be a problem for some readers.

The chicken-coop of the Muses

When Philologus introduces the children to the great library, he says:

'We do have several eunuchs employed here in the chicken coop of the Muses.' ...

³⁷² Full ref.

'Chicken coop?' said Jonathan with a puzzled frown.

The old man chuckled. 'That is what some call this place,' he said. 'They refer to our scribes as cloistered bookworms scratching endlessly in the chicken coop of the Muses.' He looked up at them with his bright black eyes. 'A bad mixture of metaphors. Bookworms don't scratch; they devour.' (*SfA* 46)

This observation works on a number of levels: it characterises Philologus as literal minded and quirky, an adult who talks to children as adults. The unpicking of the metaphor is not just a nod to adults, who might even be aware of the ancient material, but also to children who are encouraged in literacy at primary level to distinguish between metaphors and similes and use similes in their writing. It passes on an ancient comment on the library of Alexandria: according to Barnes, Timon of Phlius (fr. 12 Diels) 'remarked "In populous Egypt many cloistered bookworms are fed, arguing endlessly in the chicken-coop of the Muses."' This is quoted in an article, published in 2000, which uses the phrase as its own title.³⁷³ Lawrence has subtly adapted the quotation by substituting 'scratching' for 'arguing', which brings out her own interpretation of the metaphor:

'Do you see?' cackled Philologus. 'Do they not look like chickens in their coop, peck-peck-pecking with pen on papyrus?' (49)

The removal of 'arguing' also fits with her focus on scribes rather than scholars. The process of copying takes centre stage, while academic dispute and discussion are occluded. Lawrence has made a decision that readers will be more interested in the mechanics of scroll production than in the niceties of textual criticism. Certainly her young readers will not be familiar with the university as an institution, its libraries or processes of academic disputes, while many of Davis' readers are likely to be university graduates. Conversely, one could see this as an attempt to be faithful to ancient material, and to avoid characterising the ancient library as a version of a modern institution, instead focusing on evidence available.

³⁷³ Barnes (2000).

We can see further how the two authors handle ancient material from their treatment of Alexander's nose. Cassius Dio tells an anecdote which is mentioned in another article of the 2000 book on the Library of Alexandria: 'the body lies there with a broken nose, for when Octavian, the future emperor Augustus of Rome, was in Alexandria, he asked to see the body. He not only saw the body but he also touched it, whereupon a piece of the nose broke off.'³⁷⁴ This anecdote catches the attention of both Lawrence and Davis. Lawrence first includes it in the information given by their local guide as they drive through Alexandria:

'They say when Octavian Augustus went to view it a hundred years ago he couldn't resist touching the nose.'

'What happened?' asked Jonathan.

'What do you think?' said Thonis with a laugh. 'He broke Alexander's nose. Would you like to see it?'

Lupus tugged Flavia's long tunic and nodded enthusiastically.

'Yes,' said Flavia. 'We would love to see the noseless and mummified corpse of Alexander the Great.' (*SfA* 22)

The inclusion of both names for Octavian is elegantly compatible with the guide's foreign status; dialogue draws out the anecdote, and the clear difference of opinion between Lupus and Flavia offers a range of reactions from delight to disgust. At 76-81 their word quest takes them to the Soma itself, where they see the sarcophagus for themselves: Flavia again reacts with distaste ('Ugh! ... His hair is all wispy and his face is shrunken.' 76), while Lupus is overcome with hero worship ('To him the body looked wonderful, both young and old, innocent and wise. ... his fellow Greek.' 76). The broken nose is noted by Jonathan in passing ('You can see where his nose is glued back on,' said Jonathan.' 77). This episode offers a model to readers of engaging with the past, showing possible varied responses to an object in a museum, visceral, personal and that of detached observer.

³⁷⁴ Brazil (2000) 41 citing Cassius Dio 51.16.5: 'After this he viewed the body of Alexander and actually touched it, whereupon, it is said, a piece of the nose was broken off.'

It is tempting to see Davis as elaborating on Lawrence here, picking up similar points and playing with them, subverting and complicating. The Octavian/Augustus problem is dealt with by varying the name (16-7): first 'Augustus' (more memorable and better known), then 'Octavian, Julius Caesar's great nephew' (informative, didactic); next Octavian/Augustus (just in case we had not made the connection) and finally 'Octavian Caesar' (in the voice of Helena, aiming at authenticity). Davis' central characters have a low opinion of Augustus: 'that reprobate ... had taken it upon himself to destroy Alexander's best feature ... obnoxious and self-satisfied, but plenty of Roman patricians have these faults without attacking corpses'. This banter about the most respected Roman emperor suggests an insider's view, what the Romans really thought - although Vespasian is generally treated with grudging respect and a certain amount of wariness by Falco and Helen Justina. There is an emphasis too on the distance of history: the precise material of the sarcophagus is not clear, and it is also not transparent enough to make Alexander visible: 'All we could make out was the hero's blurred outline. ... Generations of gawpers had left smeary fingerprints, while sand dust had blown in everywhere.' (16) Davis is here keen to bring out the difficulty of getting close to the past: although Helena Justina's theory about why Octavian touched Alexander's nose ('One of the lads: "You may be Great, but I can tweak your nose!"') assimilates Octavian to Falco, and to modern day readers. The concluding sentence of the episode ('We were asked to move along.') suggests a modern museum goer under the frowning gaze of a disapproving attendant. Davis' version of history is grubbier, more complex and disputed, more humourous, but also perhaps more explicitly domesticated.

Courting (and counting) controversy

The great Library of Alexandria is most famous for the fact that it was destroyed. But academics and historians are far from agreed on when and how this destruction took place.

Bagnall calls this issue 'a murder mystery with a number of suspects'.³⁷⁵ Primary sources suggest that Julius Caesar was responsible for burning the library in 48 BC during his conflict with Ptolemy XIII.³⁷⁶ Dio Cassius also mentions a fire at this point which destroyed docks, grain warehouses and very many excellent books (*Rom. Hist.* 42.38.2). Seneca sets the number of books destroyed in this incident at 40,000 (*de Tranqu. animi* 9.4-5). There clearly was a fire, but did it destroy the whole library, or part of it? There seems still to have been an important library in Alexandria during the reign of Domitian, when Domitian replaced books lost in the great fire of Rome by sending scribes to copy manuscripts in Alexandria (Suet. *Dom.* 20). Or are we just reluctant to accept that the Romans (and Caesar in particular) were responsible for destroying a great part of Greek culture? Bagnall responds to the contradictions and lack of evidence in the primary sources by outlining the limit of what we know and not attempting to make any further claims. However, writers of detective fiction cannot live with this sort of indeterminacy. Either the library was destroyed in 48 BC, or it was not, and was still there to act as a setting in the Flavian period. Both Lawrence and Davis are compelled to choose a later date for the destruction of the library, and both find convincing the explanation suggested by Barnes: 'Dio might mean that it was only the books that happened to be in the warehouses in 48/7 BC which were destroyed.' (2000, 71)

Lawrence does flag up this controversy, but does so in such a way as to provide greater authority to her own interpretation. As they search Chrysis' room, the detectives question Seth about the library:

'I thought Julius Caesar burned the library down,' said Flavia, ...
 'Common misconception,' said Seth gruffly. ... 'When Caesar first arrived here in Alexandria he was trapped by the Egyptian fleet in the Great Harbour. So he ordered some of his men to sneak out and set fire to the enemy's ships. The fleet was destroyed, but the fire spread to some of the warehouses on the docks, where the duplicate scrolls

³⁷⁵ Bagnall (2002) 356. See also Hatzimichali (2013) for an assessment of the state of the question.

³⁷⁶ Primarily Plutarch *Caesar* 49.

are kept. Luckily, the fire never reached the Library or the Serapeum and only forty thousand scrolls were burned.'

'Only forty thousand!' muttered Jonathan (*SfA*, 59)

Flavia is, as ever, the voice of the ancient sources, but Seth is given the position of authority in suggesting the rationalisation also favoured by Barnes. Jonathan's muttering reflects not just awe at the enormity of the holdings of the library, but could imply scholarly scepticism about the numbers transmitted by ancient sources. Seneca's figure of 40,000 has been emended to 400,000 in order to match figures suggested in Orosius (*Hist. adv. pagan* 6.15.31-2) for the total holdings of the library.³⁷⁷ Bagnall suggests that all figures for the holdings of the library are hideously exaggerated: no library collection reached that size until the nineteenth century; book-based catalogues would not have been capable of organising such numbers, and everything we know about lost works and authors from the ancient world suggests a much smaller corpus of works.³⁷⁸ Numbers in ancient sources are notoriously unreliable. Jonathan's muttering can express scepticism about the number of scrolls in the library as much as the number destroyed by Caesar. On the one hand Lawrence gives a clear explanation of the sources available, which will not confuse young readers. On the other, she hedges it about with markers that imply its contingency without explicitly revealing scholarly debate, and yet still, by 'correcting' a 'misconception', makes the version on display seem authoritative.

Lindsey Davis uses the question about the number of scrolls in the library as the centre of her mystery. The initial death of Theon the Librarian turns out to have been suicide primarily in despair at the nefarious activities of Philetus, head of the Mouseion, who has been selling off scrolls (possibly duplicates) for personal profit. The unmasking of his crimes, and his connections with gang bosses who are selling the scrolls on to Rome (through Falco's relatives),

³⁷⁷ Barnes (2000) 71; Bagnall (2002) 251; emendation suggested by Delia (1992) 1458 n.38.

³⁷⁸ Bagnall (2002) 351-4 muses at some length on the question of the number of scrolls.

forms the denouement of the book, during which Philetus attempts to remove evidence of his crimes by burning down a storehouse, and nearly precipitating the great fire himself. Falco (and Davis) are thus able to have their fire and extinguish it. Helena Justina's questioning of Theon about the number of scrolls may have been the proximate cause of his suicide. Conversation is not going well; her attempt to show off her research about the library has gone down badly: 'The man was hard going. Probably desperate, she jangled an armful of bangles and asked the obvious question: 'So how many scrolls do you have?' The Librarian must have bitten on a peppercorn. He went white and choked.' (26) The phrase 'the obvious question' works on at least two levels: it's the obvious question for the characters, attempting to sustain small talk about the library, the sort of fact you would expect to find in any basic information about a library; it is also the obvious question that historians have been asking for centuries, and largely failing to answer. Theon completely fails even to attempt to answer it at this point, and it becomes a running joke, as they ask various people and do not receive a straight answer. For instance, Pastous the library assistant, who turns out to be one of the few helpful, efficient and worthy characters in the story, equivocates:

Then I asked the question Helena had asked Theon yesterday: 'So how many scrolls are there?'

Pastous reacted calmly: 'Between four hundred and seven hundred thousand. Call it half a million. However, some say considerably less.'

'For a place that is so heavily catalogued,' I sniffed, 'I find your answer oddly vague.'

Pastous bristled. 'The catalogue lists every book in the world. All of them have been here. They are not necessarily here now. For one thing-- ' He was not above a gentle jibe-- 'Julius Caesar, your great Roman general, burned a great number on the quayside, I believe.'

He was hinting that Romans were uncivilised.' (48)

Since the whole series is focalised through Falco, readers are encouraged to identify with Romans, although with a certain amount of sceptical distance. Pastous' comment is marked as gently anti-Roman, and Davis encourages us to think about Greek attitudes to Romans. Here Pastous voices scholarly controversy in an open way, with the additional ironic touch of the 'I

believe', signalling authorial uncertainty about the truth and exact details of the Caesar story. His attitude also gives a fair approximation of historians' understanding of ancient conceptions of numbers. There were, it seems, quite a lot of scrolls.

The discussion at 114-5 between Falco and some of the students at the Library plays even more self-consciously with academic controversy. Falco asks them about the scrolls, and they wonder whether the question can possibly be relevant to Theon's death (as the reader might well too). First the students all chorus the official line (seven hundred thousand, apparently); then Falco asks 'Don't renegade staff every put about conflicting versions?', leaving the students open to signal that 400,000 is a distinct possibility. Finally '[o]ne pedantic soul who collected boring facts to give himself more character' is allowed to explain about the question of Julius Caesar. The speech is saturated with qualifiers: 'It all depends whether you believe the rumour'; 'it is said'; 'some people believe'; 'others say'; 'maybe'. Falco inserts further questions, which result in the students looking uncertain. For good measure, Davis then mentions two further controversial stories: that Mark Antony gave Cleopatra the scrolls - 'some say from the Library at Pergamum', and that 'perhaps' Octavian took them all to Rome - 'or not'. The question of how the library could have been destroyed, and yet still be operational later in the Roman empire is then brought out:

I made a bemused gesture. "*Some say and perhaps...* So what do you think? After all, you do have an operational library now." (115)

Falco then offers his own reasons why it might be hard to determine the number of scrolls: librarians misleading conquerors; too many scrolls for anyone ever to count them. "'Everything is possible," agreed the young philosophers.' (115) The first of these brings us back within the storyworld, positing a plausible reason for the lack of information available to Falco, while the second offers a philosophical solution to the lack of information available to us. We have hit the limits of knowledge. It is interesting that Davis marks this discussion out as one only likely

to interest a boring person who has an obsession with trivia, yet her investigators keep coming back to it, and she makes it central to the plot. Is this an ironic attempt to distract the reader, or an amused aside on the obsessions of historians? The tonal complexity of this dialogue is particularly fascinating.

At the Serapeion, too, they question Timosthenes on the subject, and find he is having a stock check, about which Falco pretends to be bored (162). Further, one of the main subjects of Helena Justina's lecture to Falco at 163-72 is attitudes to scrolls: a deft explanation of textual criticism and the importance of multiple copies for it, followed by exposition of two different approaches to texts, Philetus who views scrolls as a commodity, and a liability;³⁷⁹ and Theon who wanted a fully comprehensive collection for the purposes of 'comparative study of duplicates ... as valid literary criticism.' (170) Falco's impatience with textual criticism ('I dismissed scholars who spent years narrowly comparing works on a line by line basis,' 171) gives the required authorial distance from overidentification with academics. Readers may well feel the same as Falco, but Philetus' commodification of books and knowledge is clearly condemned by Davis, along with his criminality. When Falco finally confronts him after the burning of the store room, he links his disgust at Philetus, administrative incompetent, criminal and arsonist, to his strong emotional attachment to the library and its scholarly and educational mission (326). Davis is aware that not all readers will share her own interest in and emotional commitment to the Library and its workings, but anyone who reads through to the end of the story will surely be persuaded.

The degree of self-consciousness does vary across the novel, along with the tone of engagement. A further example of controversy surrounds the *Septuagint*, mentioned in both Lawrence and Davis. The *Letter to Philocrates* of Ps.Aristeas, probably written in the second

³⁷⁹ Here Davis may evoke modern debates in university libraries about whether or not to keep physical books or dispose of them and rely on electronic versions.

century BC, makes the claim that Demetrius of Phaleron commissioned the translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek and hence the creation of the *Septuagint*. Bagnall calls this text 'a piece of Jewish propaganda' and wonders whether the story of the creation of the *Septuagint* is fictitious.³⁸⁰ When Lawrence brings up this story, she puts it into the mouth of the head scholar, Philologus, who says: 'I believe it was here that the Septuagint came into being.' (*Scribes*, 52), signalling awareness of the potentially problematic status of the story. This strikes an odd note, because what is unsure for us would surely have been known to Philologus, who does not generally express uncertainty. In contrast, Davis gives this to us in a paragraph about 'hard fact'. As they wait to speak to the librarian of the Serapeion about his 'daughter library', Falco and Helena investigate its contents. 'They could already read a first-rate translation of the Hebrew books treasured in the Jewish religion, which was called the Septuagint because seventy-two Hebrew scholars had been closeted in seventy-two huts on Pharos Island and instructed by one of the Ptolemies to produce a Greek version.' (158) This straightforward statement of fact is given added authority by the additional 'Maybe one day browsers would read something by the Christian Mark,' which refers back to the story of Mark's death in Alexandria, and asks readers to join in with ironic reflection on how important Christianity was going to be in the long-term history of the Roman empire. The final mention in the paragraph of the fact readers at the Serapeion could not borrow '*The Spook Who Spoke*, by Phalko of Rome' again involves aficionados of the series in a moment of shared irony: this is a reference to the play written by Falco when employed as scriptwriter in a travelling theatrical troupe in *Last Act in Palmyra* (a proto-version of *Hamlet*).

The greater detail and depth of an adult novel allows for much more complex and multi-layered engagement with historical problems. However, the same patterns of authorial

³⁸⁰ Bagnall (2002) 350, 361. On Ps.-Aristeas as a source, see Gruen (1998) 207-22.

distancing and signals of uncertainty are present in Lawrence, and Davis often mixes fiction, uncertainty and certainty.

Conclusion

This chapter has formed an initial investigation into comparison between the two series, one for adults and one for children, and there is the potential for much further work on the subject. The chapter has treated one pair of novels, both rather late in the series, both set in Alexandria rather than Rome. Other pairs will be more revealing for exploring the difficult aspects of Roman life, such as violence and slavery, which are crucial in assessing the relative levels of domestication in each series. The Alexandrian material has been particularly useful for reflecting on the ways the two authors approach and represent education, and on their handling of academic controversy. It is clear that both authors use research in complex and self-aware ways, and that the tone of engagement with ancient material can vary considerably even across the same novel. In some ways, the fact that Lawrence goes into less detail and relies more on suggestion and less on explicit description allows more room for uncertainty. However, by leaving the reader to fill in the gaps, she is offering them the opportunity to assimilate the ancient world to their own. Davis, in contrast, uses multiple voices and multi-layered interactions to set up a complex representation of uncertainty and divergent interpretations. Both authors signal uncertainty and the importance of belief in making historical judgements, in a way that surely will have positive effects on readers, even if only subliminally. This is set in contrast to the overall effect of reading fiction about the ancient world, which gives an initial feeling of domestication and plausibility: we must feel we can enter into the world. The strong focalisation of both styles, with Lawrence's multiple protagonists, and Davis' first person narration, both creates immediacy and allows for distance and scepticism. The authors choose styles and modes of learning appropriate to their readers: puzzles, vivid experiences and short sound-bites dominate in Lawrence, while learning in Davis can involve lectures and in-depth

discussion and debate. Both allow women to play a crucial role in acquiring and presenting knowledge. The explicit message which endorses love of, and encouragement for, learning comes through strongly from both books. Both books work well on different levels for readers with varying levels of knowledge of the material. I first read both books before looking in depth at primary and secondary literature on the Alexandrian libraries, and many subtle effects passed me by on a first reading. Both books allow and encourage divergent responses, perhaps Davis even more than Lawrence, in Falco's dislike of too much 'boring detail'. There is a great deal of shared material; both authors have an instinct for the compelling details in the ancient sources that will attract, amuse and interest readers of all ages: the humourous, macabre, surprising. In many ways the differences between individual readers' situations, knowledge levels and responses are more important than the overall distinction between the target audiences of adults and children, but the range must surely be much larger in adult fiction, while Lawrence is much more careful to avoid alienating her child readers and more determined to keep them reading.

Narnia and Metamorphoses

Chapter 11

Ovid Misunderstood: The *Metamorphoses* in Narnia

Geoffrey Miles

The possibility that C. S. Lewis's 'Chronicles of Narnia' were influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is such an obvious one that it seems surprising that critics have almost entirely ignored it.³⁸¹ After all, metamorphosis is a recurring motif in the Narnia books, from the White Witch's petrifications of her enemies in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to the final transfiguration of time into eternity at the end of *The Last Battle*. The *Metamorphoses* is one of the most influential texts in the western literary canon, and Lewis, who took an Oxford Classics degree in addition to his English one, and was an omnivorous reader with an encyclopedic memory, unquestionably knew it well. References to Ovid are scattered

³⁸¹ The most notable exception, Huttar (2012), appeared after the delivery of the paper on which this chapter is based. Huttar's treatment of Lewis's place in 'the mythography of metamorphosis' (17) ranges across biblical, classical and Renaissance sources, and devotes only a few paragraphs to Ovid; specific overlaps with my chapter will be noted. Huttar (1977) briefly suggests an Ovidian influence on the creation scene in *The Magician's Nephew* (123). Hinten (2005), a lively if unscholarly survey of Lewis's influences, suggests a few Ovidian connections: Vertumnus and Mr Tumnus (11), Daphne and the tree metamorphosis in *Prince Caspian* (29-30), Icarus and Aslan's warning to Fledge in *The Magician's Nephew* not to fly too high (74-75). Among standard reference works on Lewis and Narnia, Ovid has no entry in Ford (1986), Schultz and West (1998), or Duriez (2013), and only passing mention in Hooper (1996); nor does he receive any significant attention in such major critical studies of the Narnia books as Manlove (1993), Schakel (2005), Downing (2005), or Ward (2008), or in Jacobs (2010).

throughout his scholarly works and his letters.³⁸² In *The Discarded Image* he names Ovid as one of the three key sources – the others being Virgil and the Bible – that any reader of medieval and Renaissance literature must be familiar with.³⁸³ His most famous critical work, *The Allegory of Love*, begins with Ovid (though here it is the amatory poetry rather than the *Metamorphoses* which is in question), raising the question of how far the whole tradition of courtly love which the book explores can be traced back to ‘Ovid misunderstood’.³⁸⁴ Why, then, have critics been so reluctant to consider a possible connection between Narnia and the *Metamorphoses*?

The answer is also obvious: Lewis and Ovid were probably as temperamentally antipathetic as it is possible for two writers to be. Lewis’s critical comments on Ovid range from chilly appreciation to outright distaste. A reference to Ovid’s ‘flippant and sophisticated brilliance’ might from another critic sound positive, but in Lewis’s critical vocabulary flippancy is not a virtue and ‘sophisticated’ always has an overtone of its older senses – ‘not pure or genuine’ (*OED* 1), ‘altered from ... primitive simplicity or naturalness’ (*OED* 2a), ‘not plain, honest, or straightforward’ (*OED* 3).³⁸⁵ ‘[M]etallic perfection of form’ might also sound positive until one recalls Lewis’s characterisation of the metallic ivy in Spenser’s Bower of Bliss as a symbol of art opposed to nature, denoting ‘artifice, sterility, death’.³⁸⁶ Other comments are more openly condescending or hostile: Ovid’s ‘pert dexterity’, his ‘almost puerile cleverness’, his ‘smirking’ and ‘pornographic’ treatment of sexuality.³⁸⁷ Lewis’s characterisations of Ovid

³⁸² Edwards (2010) notes that Ovid is ‘seldom praised by Lewis, but quarried more than any author but Cicero and Horace in *Studies in Words*’ (61). There are more than twenty references to Ovid throughout Walter Hooper’s edition of Lewis’s *Collected Letters* (2000, 2004, 2007).

³⁸³ Lewis (1964) 22.

³⁸⁴ Lewis (1936) 7. I will return later to the implications of this formula.

³⁸⁵ Lewis (1954) 251.

³⁸⁶ Lewis (1954) 486; Lewis (1936) 325-26 (commenting on *Faerie Queene*, 2.12.61).

³⁸⁷ Lewis (1954) 486, 250; Lewis (1936) 97, 196.

recall his satiric description in *Surprised by Joy* of the young schoolteacher Pogo, seen by his dazzled pupils as offering ‘sophistication, glossy all over’ but in fact teaching them only worldliness and ‘Vulgarity’.³⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Lewis does make a partial exception for the *Metamorphoses*, which he admires for the sheer energy of its storytelling: ‘it is puff-pastry (the finest ever cooked) but puff-pastry enclosing a homely and nourishing food.’³⁸⁹ (‘Homely’ is definitely a positive term in Lewis’s critical vocabulary.) As a storyteller and a lover of myth and legend, Lewis could not avoid the influence of the *Metamorphoses*. All the ‘classical’ elements in Narnia – fauns and satyrs, centaurs and minotaurs, nymphs and dryads and river gods – come directly or indirectly from Ovid, though they are taken out of their classical context and mixed up with elements of other traditions – Norse myth, Grimm’s fairy tales, the *Arabian Nights*, the Bible, Father Christmas – in Lewis’s eclectic mythscape.

They are also somewhat sanitised. Elements of Ovid’s poem – its eroticism, perverse sexuality, violence, and horror, and its often startlingly jaunty black humour in dealing with such topics – are clearly inappropriate for a children’s story, and Lewis’s Narnian versions are tamed and domesticated. The orgiastic violence of a Bacchic frenzy, such as the ones that kill Pentheus (*Met.* 3.708-33) and Orpheus (*Met.* 11.1-43), is transformed in *Prince Caspian (PC)* into an apparently harmless ‘Romp’, the jocular capital letter carrying a whiff of *Winnie-the-Pooh*; and the predatory sexuality associated with satyrs and fauns in Ovid is almost entirely absent in the cuddly and respectable Mr Tumnus of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (LWW)*.³⁹⁰ Nevertheless, darker Ovidian possibilities are not entirely effaced. There are hints of the potential dangerousness of Bacchus in Edmund’s description of him as ‘a chap who

³⁸⁸ Lewis (1955) 68-71.

³⁸⁹ Lewis (1954) 251.

³⁹⁰ Line references to the *Metamorphoses* are taken from the Loeb edition (Ovid 1921).

might do anything – absolutely anything’, and Susan’s nervous comment that ‘I wouldn’t have felt safe with Bacchus and all his wild girls if we’d met them without Aslan’ (*PC* 136-38).³⁹¹ There is a faint undertone of threat in Tumnus’s encounter with Lucy, and the titles of the books on his bookcase – including *Nymphs and their Ways* and *Men, Monks and Gamekeepers: A Study in Popular Legend* (*LWW* 19) – could be seen as a sly wink to the adult reader, reminding us that fauns are not really that innocent.³⁹²

In keeping with the overall theme of the volume, this chapter will focus primarily on Lewis’s use of the Ovidian theme of metamorphosis. This is the central subject and structuring principle of Ovid’s poem; it is less central to the ‘Chronicles of Narnia’, but all the novels contain transformation scenes of some kind, and nearly all of these have Ovidian analogues. Lewis’s use of Ovid, however, is subtle enough that his borrowings are not obvious. Rather than copying a particular Ovidian metamorphosis in detail, he tends to mix and match, combining elements from different Ovidian scenes, or applying an image in an unexpected context.

The most obviously Ovidian episode in all the Chronicles, for instance, is the Bacchic ‘Romp’ towards the end of *Prince Caspian* (chapters 11 and 14). The passage in which a classroom is transformed into a forest glade – ‘Ivy came curling in at the windows of the classroom. The walls became a mass of shimmering green, and leafy branches arched overhead where the ceiling had been’ (*PC* 171) – echoes the similar but more sinister and uncanny transformations of Acoetes’ ship (*Met.* 3.658-91) and the house of the Minyades (*Met.* 4.389-

³⁹¹ The film *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* (2008) omits the Bacchus scenes altogether. This may be because they are narratively dispensable, or because they would have puzzled contemporary audiences unfamiliar with classical myth; but the filmmakers may also have feared that a sympathetic treatment of such a flamboyantly pagan figure would have played badly with the conservative Christians who were an important part of the film’s target audience.

³⁹² When Tolkien cited this passage in grumbling about Lewis’s fantasy writing – ‘It really won’t do! I mean to say: “Nymphs and their Ways, The Love-Life of a Faun”!’ quoted in Carpenter (1978) 204 – it may have been the hint of naughtiness (‘puerile’ and ‘smirking’?) that offended him.

415), where wild nature in the form of vines and ivy and prowling beasts invades the man-made world. In these scenes the humans who had defied Bacchus's power are also metamorphosed, into dolphins and bats respectively. Lewis's episode likewise includes two human metamorphoses. The transformation of a cruel child-beater into a tree (*PC* 171-72) echoes Bacchus's punishment of his own maenads for their murder of Orpheus (*Met.* 11.67-84). But the transformation of a herd of cheeky schoolboys into pigs (*PC* 172-73) seems to echo Circe's transformation of Ulysses' companions (*Met.* 14.277-90), an Ovidian episode which has no connection with Bacchus.

Again, the White Witch's habit of turning her victims to stone has a whole range of Ovidian analogues (Aglauros, Niobe, the Propoetides, Anaxarete, the various victims of Medusa's head); and Aslan's reversal of the spell echoes the rarer Ovidian depetrifications (for instance, Deucalion and Pyrrha's creation of human beings out of stones in *Met.* 1.400-15, or Pygmalion's ivory statue turned into a real girl in *Met.* 10.280-89). But if the White Witch herself has an Ovidian analogue (she has more obvious fairy-tale ones, of course), it is probably Circe, who was famous for turning her victims not into stone but into animals. The cup of something 'very sweet and foamy and creamy' with which the Witch tempts Edmund (*LWW* 36) echoes the brew of 'roasted barley, honey and strong wine / And creamy curds' which Circe offers to Ulysses' men, its 'sweet' taste disguising the magical drugs (14.273-76).³⁹³ And Edmund's approach to the Witch's house, first terrified and then eerily unnerved by wild beasts which turn out to be made of stone (*LWW* 86-90), seems like an imitation and transposition of the approach of Ulysses' men to Circe's house through crowds of living but uncannily friendly 'wolves and she-bears and lionesses' (14.254-61).³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Translation by A. D. Melville (Ovid 1986); unless otherwise noted translations from *Metamorphoses* are from Melville's version.

³⁹⁴ Lewis may also be recalling the original version of this episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, 10.210-19.

A more complex case is Eustace's transformation into a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (VDT). Ovid's only draconic metamorphosis, that of Cadmus and Harmonia into giant serpents (*dracones*), is quite different from Eustace's both in its tone of romantic pathos and in its technical presentation, in which we observe the metamorphosis in precise detail (*Met.* 4.563-603). Eustace is transformed while he sleeps, and we discover what has happened to him only gradually as he discovers it on waking. He is first horrified to see 'a hideous shape' beside him, that of a dragon's claw; he tries to move away from it and 'Oh horror! there was a dragon's claw on that side too'; he thinks he is trapped between two dragons who are 'mimicking whatever he did'; only when he bolts out of the cave and sees his reflection in a pool does he realise that *he* is the dragon (VDT 80-81). This ironic device whereby a character tries to flee in horror from a monster only to discover that the monster is himself is, I would suggest, borrowed by Lewis from a quite different episode in Ovid, in which Scylla bathes unawares in a bay which has been enchanted by her love-rival Circe:

Scylla came
And waded in waist-deep, when round her loins
She saw foul monstrous barking beasts. At first,
Not dreaming they were part of her, she fled
And thrust in fear the bullying brutes away.
But what she feared and fled, she fetched along,
And looking for her thighs, her legs, her feet,
Found gaping jaws instead like Hell's vile hound.
(*Met.* 14.59-65; Melville's translation)

This is one of the cruellest and most horrific scenes in the *Metamorphosis*, its cruelty only enhanced by the 'pert dexterity' of Ovid's epigrammatic wit. Characteristically, Lewis tones down its visceral body horror into a more child-friendly kind of scariness, but he retains the crucial irony of 'what (s)he feared and fled, (s)he fetched along.'³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Scylla is the most brutal example of an ironic device Ovid is fond of, a character's belated and appalled realisation of his or her own transformed shape: compare Io, 1.630ff ('in the water, / Mirrored she saw her muzzle

The transformation of Rabadash into a donkey at the end of *The Horse and His Boy* (HB) deserves closer attention.

‘The hour has struck,’ said Aslan: and Rabadash saw, to his supreme horror, that everyone had begun to laugh. They couldn’t help it. Rabadash had been wagging his ears all the time and as soon as Aslan said, ‘The hour has struck!’ the ears began to change. They grew longer and more pointed and soon were covered with grey hair. And while everyone was wondering where they had seen ears like that before, Rabadash’s face began to change too. It grew longer, and thicker at the top and larger eyed, and the nose sank back into the face (or else the face swelled out and became all nose) and there was hair all over it. And his arms grew longer and came down in front of him till his hands were resting on the ground: only they weren’t hands, now, they were hoofs. And he was standing on all fours, and his clothes disappeared, and everyone laughed louder and louder (because they couldn’t help it) for now what had been Rabadash was, simply and unmistakably, a donkey. The terrible thing was that his human speech lasted just a moment longer than his human shape, so that when he realised the change that was coming over him, he screamed out: ‘Oh, not a Donkey! Mercy! If it were even a horse – even a horse – e’en – a – hor – eeh – auh, eeh-auh.’ And so the words died away into a donkey’s bray. (HB 183-84)

There are a number of possible sources and analogues for Rabadash’s metamorphosis. Niall Slater, elsewhere in this volume, makes a detailed and very persuasive case for the influence of Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*. Huttar independently notes the Apuleius connection and also suggests Ovid’s Midas (*Met.* 11.85-145).³⁹⁶ Hinten suggests the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:33).³⁹⁷ Among more modern sources, there are echoes of Bottom’s ‘translation’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and perhaps of the transformation of Lampwick in Walt Disney’s

and her horns, / And fled in terror from the self she saw’), or Actaeon, 3.198-201 (‘Actaeon ... marvelled in his flight / At his new leaping speed, but, when he saw / His head and antlers mirrored in a stream, / He tried to say “Alas!” – but no words came’).

³⁹⁶ Huttar (2012) 20-21; and see also note 19 below.

³⁹⁷ Hinten (2005) 65; but the Daniel passage, though sinisterly vague, suggests an ox rather than a donkey.

Pinocchio (1940).³⁹⁸ A less obvious source is one of Ovid's less famous myths: the transformation of Ocyrhoë into a horse.³⁹⁹ Her father, Chiron the centaur (like Lewis's centaurs Glenstorm and Roonwit), is a stargazer and prophet, and Ocyrhoë has inherited his powers. As she is foretelling the future fates of the newborn Aesculapius and of Chiron himself, the gods (apparently) decide that she knows too much and take drastic steps to silence her:

Still other fortunes waited to be told,
but with a deep sigh and flowing tears, she said,
'The fate that changes me prohibits speech,
and makes my own voice inaccessible. [...]
It seems my human form is being taken:
the thought of grass for dinner pleases me,
and open fields, where I can freely ride
as I become my relative – a mare!
Whole horse? But why? My father is but a centaur!
Her whining, waning, becomes whinnying,
as mind and speech both grow confused together,
and for a moment seemed a sound between
the noise a horse makes and a human word,
more like someone who imitates a horse,
before the sound turned clearly into neighing,
as she went on all fours through the tall grass.
Her fingers fused together and a single
band of light horn surrounded them, a hoof.
Her neck and mouth were both increased in size,
and her long robe was turned into a tail
while the hair that used to stray across her neck
became a mane that fell on her right side;
made over now in voice and form completely. (2.655-674)⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Lampwick's transformation follows much the same course as Rabadash's, beginning with the ears and ending with a descent to all fours. I know of no evidence that Lewis saw *Pinocchio*, but he did watch *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1939, and described it as 'almost inconceivably good and bad' – bad in the 'vulgarity' of the treatment of the dwarfs, 'but all the terrifying bits were good, and the animals really most moving' (letter to Alfred Jenkins, 11 January 1939, in Hooper (2004) 242).

³⁹⁹ Huttar (2012), who discusses the Rabadash episode at length (17-26), independently notes the Ocyrhoë parallel (21-22). He places less emphasis than I do on the linguistic aspect of the metamorphosis, though his footnote 9 (34) makes interesting observations about the motif of 'loss of speech' in Lewis.

⁴⁰⁰ The translation here is by Charles Martin (Ovid 2004, 78-79).

Rabadash's transformation shares with Ocyrhoë's a kind of physical specificity characteristic of Ovid's metamorphosis scenes, tracing how each human body part (ears, face, hair, arms, hands) is transformed into a corresponding animal part. More striking is the shared image of human speech gradually degenerating into inarticulate animal noises. Lewis adds a touch of Ovidian verbal dexterity in the transformation of Rabadash's last words 'even a horse' into the donkey's 'eeh-auh'. (Charles Martin's translation does something rather similar in the line 'Her whining, waning, became whinnying', echoing the strangled half-whinny of 'Whole horse? But why?' There is no corresponding verbal effect at this point in the Latin.)

Of course, the tone of the two passages is very different. Ovid's scene is characteristically cruel: Ocyrhoë is an innocent victim, suddenly and mysteriously silenced by unseen powers as punishment for speaking the truth. Equally characteristically, Lewis softens the cruelty and injustice, just as he did in adapting Scylla's fate into Eustace's.⁴⁰¹ Rabadash is an absurd and contemptible figure, and his transformation into a donkey is a thoroughly enjoyable comic comeuppance. Moreover, it is inflicted by Aslan, the ultimate embodiment of divine goodness and justice; Rabadash has received and disregarded repeated warnings; and it is made clear that his transformation is temporary rather than permanent. The reported reactions of the spectators – 'everyone laughed louder and louder (because they couldn't help it)'; 'and that was also so funny that everybody laughed all the more' – guide the reader's reaction: this is a comic scene.

But one phrase strikes a different note: 'The *terrible* thing was that his human speech lasted just a moment longer than his human shape' (183, my italics). *Terrible* is not entirely a joke; there is something genuinely unnerving in this deprivation of human speech, with Rabadash's last words attempting to express a horrified protest at what is happening to him.

⁴⁰¹ Hinten (2005) shrewdly notes that 'When Lewis alters sources in the Narnia books, he tends to alter them in a direction that will serve justice better' (30).

The loss of language in metamorphosis is a recurring motif in Ovid. Lycaon, transformed into a wolf, ‘howled his heart out, trying in vain to speak’ (1.233). Io, transformed into a cow, finds that ‘[w]ould she complain, a moo came from her throat, / A startling sound – her own voice frightened her’ (1.637-38); she weeps with frustration as she wishes to explain her plight to her family, ‘if only words would come’ (647). Diana taunts Actaeon, ‘Now tell / You saw me here naked without my clothes, / If you can tell at all!’ (3.192-93); transformed into a stag, ‘He tried to say “Alas!” – but no words came; / He groaned – that was his voice’ (201-02), and dying in the jaws of his own hounds, ‘He gave a wailing scream, / Not human, yet a sound no stag could voice’ (237-39).⁴⁰² When Dryope is transformed into a tree, the last stage of the transformation is the bark covering her mouth: ‘In the same moment did she cease to speak and cease to be’ (9.392, Loeb translation). Ovid the great wordsmith is peculiarly aware of the horror of being silenced, losing the central marker of human identity.

Language and the loss of language are also important motifs in the ‘Chronicles of Narnia’. The distinctive quality which marks out the intelligent creatures of Narnia from their merely animal counterparts is that they are ‘Talking Beasts’. For them the most frightening transformation is the loss of their power of speech, and with it their status as sentient beings, their ‘humanity’, one might even say their souls. The point is vividly made in *The Last Battle* (LB) when the cynical cat Ginger, having sauntered coolly into the stable containing the false Aslan, emerges literally speechless with terror:

‘Aii – Aii – Aaow – Awah,’ screamed the Cat.
‘Art thou not called a *Talking Beast*?’ said the Captain. ‘Then hold thy devilish noise and talk.’
What followed was rather horrible. Tirian felt quite certain (and so did the others) that the Cat was trying to say something; but nothing came out of its mouth except the ordinary, ugly cat-noises you might hear from an angry or frightened old Tom in a backyard in England. And the longer he caterwauled the less like a Talking Beast he looked. Uneasy

⁴⁰² This is particularly close to the uncanny effect of Ocyrhoe’s (and Rabadash’s) last words, caught in mid-transformation between human speech and animal sounds.

whimperings and little sharp squeals broke out from among the other Animals.

‘Look, look!’ said the voice of the Boar. ‘It can’t talk. It has forgotten how to talk! It has gone back to being a dumb beast. Look at its face.’

Everyone saw that it was true. And then the greatest terror of all fell upon those Narnians. For every one of them had been taught – when it was only a chick or a puppy or a cub – how Aslan at the beginning of the world had turned the beasts of Narnia into Talking Beasts and warned them that if they weren’t good they might one day be turned again and be like the poor witless animals one meets in other countries. ‘And now it is coming upon us,’ they moaned. (*LB* 101)

The contrast between Ocyrhoë’s loss of language and that of Rabadash or Ginger suggests a basic difference between Ovid and Lewis. For Ovid a key part of the horror of such situations is, very often, their injustice. Ocyrhoë, Io, Actaeon, Dryope – all are innocent victims, suddenly stripped of their ability to speak by some arbitrary power. We may recall that Ovid himself was himself (later) silenced by imperial authority and banished to a remote foreign place where his most acute misery was his inability to communicate: ‘Here it is I that am a barbarian, understood by nobody’ (*Tristia* 5.10.37).⁴⁰³ For Lewis, the loss of language is a moral issue. Ginger’s sly cunning and smooth talk, which he had used in the service of a corrupt cult, are stripped away from him as ‘he’ is reduced to an ‘it’; and the Narnian beasts are (implicitly) quite right to suppose that this is a just punishment likely to be inflicted on other Talking Beasts who misuse the gifts of intelligence and speech that Aslan/God has granted them.

This points to a larger distinction in Ovid’s and Lewis’s treatment of metamorphosis. In Ovid, for the most part, metamorphosis is an arbitrary fate imposed from outside: people lose their human form because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, or had the misfortune to attract the envy or the sexual interest of a god. Some of Ovid’s metamorphoses, though, do have a moral dimension, in which the character’s physical transformation manifests their true inner nature. The bloodthirsty tyrant Lycaon, turned into a wolf, retains ‘[t]he same

⁴⁰³ Translation from Ovid (1924).

grey hair, the same fierce face, the same / Wild eyes, the same image of savagery' (*Met.* 1.238-39): his metamorphosis merely confirms the essential wolfishness already implied in his name. The Propoetides, the first prostitutes, hardened by their mercenary trade, 'turned with little change to stones of flint' (10.242), and the same fate befalls the envious Aglauros (2.815-32) and the frigid Anaxarete (14.753-58); in each case their essential hardness of heart is manifested in a literal hardening into stone.

This is by far the more common pattern in Lewis. Though some of his metamorphoses are of the arbitrary Ovidian kind, such as the White Witch's petrifications, for the most part they are justified and revelatory. The unpleasant schoolboys who 'looked very much like pigs' literally become pigs (*PC* 172). Rabadash thinks of himself as a brave and noble warrior prince, but in actual fact he is simply an ass, and Aslan's metamorphosis of him makes that truth visible to everyone.

The idea is most explicit in the case of Eustace. 'Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself' (*VDT* 81). The inner quality that his transformation makes manifest is not simply his greed, but his anti-social self-centeredness. Throughout the early chapters of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* Eustace has revealed himself as a monster of selfishness, and his punishment is to become literally 'a monster cut off from the whole human race' (83). A dragon is a quintessentially solitary creature – the narrator reminds us that, thanks to their taste for eating one another, 'you ... seldom find more than one dragon in the same country' (83) – and encased in a hard scaly armour of self-sufficiency. The transformation lets Eustace painfully discover his longing for human companionship, his need to communicate with others – his attempts to write messages in the sand (89) recall Io scratching her name in the dust with her hoof (*Met.* 1.649-50) – and '[t]he pleasure (quite new to him) of being liked and, still more, of liking other people' (90). Only after he has learned this lesson does Aslan peel off the scaly hide to reveal the naked

human being underneath, and allow him to be born again and baptised into a new life.⁴⁰⁴ It is a thoroughly Christianised and allegorised version of an Ovidian metamorphosis.

What Lewis does with Eustace's dragon transformation, and with other metamorphoses in the Narnia stories, is quite in line with medieval and Renaissance interpretive tradition. Faced with the apparently amoral or immoral quality of many of Ovid's stories, medieval commentators – and their Renaissance successors well into the seventeenth century – responded by reading the stories against their literal grain as moral and spiritual allegory. The principle is summed up by Arthur Golding in the Preface to his 1567 translation of the *Metamorphoses*, when he assures his anxious Christian readers that Ovid's tales of human-to-animal transformations must be read not literally but as metaphors for the loss of humanity that follows when human beings succumb to their 'beastly lusts':

For if the states that on the earth the room of God supply
Decline from virtue unto vice and live disorderly,
To eagles, tigers, bulls and bears and other figures strange,
Both to their people and themselves most hurtful, do they change.
And when the people give themselves to filthy life and sin,
What other kind of shape thereby than filthy can they win?
So was Lycaon made a wolf, and Jove became a bull;
The t'one for using cruelty, the t'other for his trull.
So was Elpenor and his mates transformèd into swine
For following of their filthy lust in women and in wine;
Not that they lost their manly shape as to the outward show,
But for that in their brutish breasts most beastly lusts did grow.
.....
Now look how long this clod of clay to reason doth obey,
So long for men by just desert account ourselves we may.
But if we suffer fleshly lusts as lawless lords to reign,
Than are we beasts; we are no men; we have our name in vain.
And if we be so drowned in vice that feeling once be gone,
Then may it well of us be said, wee are a block or stone.
This surely did the poets mean when in such sundry wise
The pleasant tales of turnèd shapes they studied to devise.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Huttar (1977) 27: 'The movement from utter self-centeredness to life in human community has begun.'

⁴⁰⁵ Golding (2002) 'Preface to the Reader', lines 89-100, 109-16 (25-26).

That such an allegorical reading lies behind the human-to-animal transformations in Narnia is made fairly explicit by a passage in *Prince Caspian*. Lucy has been almost killed by ‘a great grim-looking grey bear’, which Susan hesitated to shoot because she feared it was a Talking Beast rather than (as Trumpkin explains) a mere savage animal in search of ‘Little Girl for his breakfast’. Lucy confides to Susan ‘a horrible idea’: ‘Wouldn’t it be dreadful if some day, in our own world, at home, men started going wild inside, like the animals here, and still looked like men, so that you’d never know which were which?’ (PC 106-107). Lucy, the most reliable moral compass among the children, is pointing up the *moralitas* for the child reader as Golding does for his readers. It is interesting to compare this passage with the version of the scene in the 2008 film. There, after Lucy has attempted to talk to the bear with almost fatal consequences, Trumpkin implies that it originally *was* a Talking Beast which had degenerated into savagery in the harsh environment of Narnia under the Telmarine tyranny, and bitterly comments: ‘Get treated like a dumb animal long enough and that’s what you become.’ At once developing and contradicting Lewis’s moral, the filmmakers present the loss of humanity as a response to external ill-treatment, rather than, as Lewis’s (and Golding’s) tougher Christian outlook would have it, a failure of moral will and surrender to original sin.

Of course, Lewis was familiar with the interpretive tradition Golding represents. Discussing Golding’s Ovid in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, he specifically engages with the arguments of the Preface, explaining that ‘like the medievals who had “moralized” even the *Romance of the Rose*, [Golding] believes that Ovid is profitable and philosophical,’ reading into him a ‘dark Philosophie of turned shapes’ (Golding’s phrase) which has complex moral, political, and metaphysical ramifications and is even compatible with Scripture. Lewis goes on:

I think we shall misunderstand the age if we take this to be the special pleading of the ‘Humanist’ in Golding against the ‘Puritan’. He is not merely finding excuses. This is how our ancestors really approached Ovid. The all-embracing syncretism of their thought and a readiness

(inherited from the Middle Ages) to expect multiple senses and heterogeneous pleasures from a single text made it natural for them to do so.⁴⁰⁶

What is intriguing here is the faintly defensive or patronising tone that Lewis adopts towards the allegorical tradition. Of course (he implies) Ovid did not really have a ‘dark Philosophie’, and you may find it hard to credit that anyone ever seriously thought he did.⁴⁰⁷ As a scholar and critic, Lewis seems anxious to reassure his readers that he knows perfectly well that Ovid – cynical, pert, sophisticated, smirking Ovid – could not possibly have intended the moral messages that medieval and Renaissance readers read into his stories. And yet, when Lewis as an imaginative writer engages with Ovid in the Narnia books, he does so in precisely the way that ‘our ancestors’ did, reading his tales through the old allegorical spectacles, and using Ovidian stories and Ovidian techniques to serious Christian moral purpose.

At the start of this chapter I mentioned Lewis’s provocative suggestion in *The Allegory of Love* that ‘the whole tone of medieval love poetry can be explained by the formula, “Ovid misunderstood”’: medieval readers of Ovid’s amatory poetry, failing to appreciate his cynical irony, misinterpreted his tongue-in-cheek praise of the lover’s life as the basis for a serious cult of ‘courtly love’ with immense consequences for subsequent western culture.⁴⁰⁸ For Lewis, the allegorical reading of the *Metamorphoses* is another case of ‘Ovid misunderstood’: Ovid’s flippant, frivolous, amoral tales (as Lewis sees them) do not in fact carry the philosophical significance that medieval and Renaissance readers tried to attach to them. But in adapting the

⁴⁰⁶ Lewis (1954) 252.

⁴⁰⁷ The tone is rather similar in a letter to the *Guardian* about the miracle at Cana, in which Lewis commented that ‘on the hypothesis of the story being fiction, we can attach to it, as our ancestors did to the miracles in Ovid, any number of edifying *moralitates*’ – ‘attach’ clearly suggesting that the *moralitates* are imposed on the story rather than intrinsic to it (16 October 1942, in Hooper (2004) 533).

⁴⁰⁸ It should be noted that Lewis carefully hedges this claim, raising it only as ‘a question’ and immediately adding that ‘we see at once that this is no solution ... yet the thought is a good one to keep in mind as we proceed’, (1936) 7-8.

tales for his own use in his children's stories, he self-consciously endows them with the moral seriousness and Christian purpose which he believes they lack. Part of Lewis's creative strategy in the 'Chronicles of Narnia' is Ovid, quite deliberately, misunderstood.

Chapter 12

The Horse, the Ass, and Their Boys: C.S. Lewis and the Ending of Apuleius's *Golden Ass*

Niall W. Slater

Juno Lucina fer opem.

--- Terence, *Andria* 473, quoted by C. S. Lewis
in 1955 as he began *Till We Have Faces*⁴⁰⁹

Effects of C. S. Lewis's classical education are apparent throughout his works. As a distinguished mediaevalist, he was also deeply interested in the persistence of story themes and patterns of influence. His beloved *Narnia* books for children are no exception, with allusions ranging from a straightforward Dionysiac *thiasos* complete with Silenus and maenads near the ending of *Prince Caspian* to the more recherché reworking of Theseus's attempt to rescue Pirithous chained to a chair in the Underworld in *The Silver Chair*.⁴¹⁰ Lewis had a particular

⁴⁰⁹ In a letter to Katherine Farrer, 2 April 1955 (Hooper (2004) III 590).

⁴¹⁰ Montgomery (2000) 62-63 notes the importance of the classical *catabasis* motif in Lewis in general and in *The Silver Chair* in particular. Cox (1977) 162-163 suggests a particular influence of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, where Mammon offers Sir Guyon a "siluer seat" (II. 7. 53) within the "Garden of Proserpina." This may indeed be the reason the chair in Lewis is silver, but while Mammon tempts the knight to accept his worldview, there is no suggestion the "siluer stoole" (II. 7. 63) itself will imprison him—as the chair in classical myth does Pirithous. While Lewis undoubtedly will have known Horace *Odes* 4.7 directly, an obvious source for the myth, one wonders if A. E. Housman's famous translation of this poem might have had some influence as well: 'And Theseus leaves Pirithous in the chain / The love of comrades cannot take away.' For the impact of Housman on Lewis, see Jacobs (2005) 77 and Hooper (2004) I 832. For a further survey of classical elements in the *Narnia* books, see Slater (2015).

interest in the works of the Latin sophist Apuleius of Madaura, which he discovered in his first year at Oxford in 1916-17.⁴¹¹ Lewis himself acknowledged Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche in his *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass* as the 'source' of his novel *Till We Have Faces*, and numerous studies have further explored that connection.⁴¹² Until very recently, there has been no discussion of another influence of the Roman author's 'curious romance'⁴¹³ on the ending of *The Horse and His Boy*.⁴¹⁴ The allusion is not only of intrinsic interest for Lewis's own storytelling; given its placement and prominence in the book, Lewis's version gives us a strong indication of how he interpreted the ending of its classical original.

The Horse and His Boy is the only one of the novels in the series set completely within the Narnian world. As the title implies, the novel works out some of the ethical issues of a world in which talking animals live with humans, for the talking horse of the title, Bree, has a claim

⁴¹¹ Hooper (2004) I 268 n. 8 notes that Lewis read the Adlington translation of Cupid and Psyche over the Christmas vacation of 1916, which he mentions briefly in a letter of 28 January 1917 to Arthur Greeves. He then purchased his own copy, presumably the copy of the Medici Society limited edition, *Psyche Et Cypido* (London 1913), now in the Lewis Library holdings of the Wade Center at Wheaton College (I thank the archivist, Laura Schmidt, for information on this copy). In another letter to Greeves, 13 May 1917 (Hooper (2004) I 304-305), he notes: 'I have found [Apuleius'] complete works in the college library and their brooding magic no less than their occasional voluptuousness & ridiculous passages have made me feel that I must get a copy of my own.' The reference must be to Helm's Teubner edition; Lewis's copy of volume one, containing the *Metamorphoses* and inscribed 'C.S. Lewis, University College, Oxford, 1917', is now in the Rare Books collection of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (my thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Chenault of UNC for this information).

⁴¹² Although the first British edition, Lewis (1956), lacked any authorial comment, the American edition included an afterword from Lewis with this explicit acknowledgement, Lewis (1957) 313: 'I felt quite free to go behind Apuleius, whom I suppose to have been [the story's] transmitter, not its inventor ... Apuleius was of course a man of genius: but in relation to my work he is a "source", not an "influence" nor a "model."' For further discussions of the Apuleian source cf. Kilby (1977), Van Der Weele (1977), and Schakel (2010).

⁴¹³ Lewis (1964) 40: 'Apuleius, born in Numidia about 125 AD, is now usually (and deservedly) remembered for his curious romance, the *Metamorphoses*.'

⁴¹⁴ After giving the talk on which this chapter is based in summer 2009, I learned of the work of Midori Hartman, now available as Hartman (2010). I am most grateful to her for sharing a copy of this thesis. See in addition now Huttar (2012).

to and responsibility for 'his' boy, Shasta. The plot is one of lost and recovered identity.⁴¹⁵ The opening of the story finds Shasta living with a poor and mercenary fisherman in a southern land. When a visitor seeks to buy him, Shasta discovers that he had been lost in infancy and only found and brought up by the fisherman for his labour value. He escapes with the visitor's horse, who reveals himself to be a talking horse named Bree from Narnia. Bree was old enough when kidnapped / stolen to know his own identity as a talking horse—and the importance of concealing it in captivity if he is to have any hope of escape. Without their knowledge, at least at first, the lion Aslan, creator and guardian of the whole Narnian world, guides Bree and Shasta on their northward journey home—for Shasta proves to be the abducted prince of Archenland, whose real name is Cor.⁴¹⁶ At the novel's end, the forces of Calormen, the land in which both Bree and Shasta had been enslaved, are fighting the forces of Narnia in that human kingdom of Archenland that lies between Calormen and Narnia. The novel's final chapter is entitled 'Rabadash the Ridiculous' and is named after the rash young heir to the throne of Calormen who leads the military expedition.

Prince Rabadash is characterized by lust, ferocity, and lack of self-control. He launches the war in an attempt to seize Queen Susan who has refused to marry him. As the final chapters unfold, multiple aetiologies for the epithet 'the Ridiculous' emerge. When surrounded by Narnians near the end of the battle, Rabadash attempts to leap down from an exposed position, but with unexpected results:

... he meant to look and sound – no doubt for a moment he *did* look and sound – very grand and very dreadful as he jumped, crying, "The bolt of Tash falls from above." But he had to jump sideways because the crowd

⁴¹⁵ Cf. the nice treatment of Schakel (1979) 81-88 of the "lost child" motif here.

⁴¹⁶ Ward (2008) 153 argues persuasively for another classical allusion here in the 'lost twin' motif of the novel's plot. Shasta / Cor is the lost elder twin and encounters the Narnians when he is mistaken for his brother Corin. Shasta / Cor is obviously associated with horses, while his brother Corin becomes famous as a boxer thereafter. Ward suggests that Cor and Corin are at some level the Dioscuri, whom Homer in *Iliad* 3.237 calls: 'Castor, tamer of horses, and Pollux, the fine boxer.'

in front of him left no landing place in that direction. And then, in the neatest way you could wish, the tear in the back of his hauberk caught on a hook in the wall. ... And there he found himself, like a piece of washing hung up to dry, with everyone laughing at him. (*The Horse and His Boy* 218).⁴¹⁷

While his situation is inherently comic, what makes Rabadash a *spectacle* of derision is his own behaviour. Tash is the chief god of Calormen, so Rabadash's shout as he leaps is an attempt to dramatize himself as a divine instrument.⁴¹⁸ He tries to defy his captors and offers a challenge to single combat, but he is refused on the grounds that his surreptitious attack in a time of peace proves his lack of honour. Rabadash is taken away 'shouting, threatening, cursing, and even crying. For though he could have faced torture he couldn't bear being made ridiculous' (*HHB* 219).

The next day the victorious Narnians offer Rabadash his freedom on condition of a promise of good behaviour, but he is even more defiant, works himself into rage, and repeats his boast in battle: 'Beware! Beware! Beware! The bolt of Tash falls from above' (*HHB* 244). At this point Aslan appears and speaks to Rabadash, warning him to accept mercy and peace. Rabadash continues his defiance, even making faces at his enemies. As the narrator drily notes,

⁴¹⁷ The text is quoted from Lewis (1954), hereafter abbreviated as *HHB*.

⁴¹⁸ Calormen is polytheistic, honouring numerous 'gods and heroes' (*HHB* 61), although only a couple others are named, including 'Zardeenah, Lady of the Night and of Maidens' (*HHB* 43, perhaps an Artemis figure?). *HHB* contains no physical descriptions of Tash, and Ford (2005) 423 suggests that 'in *HHB* [Tash] is merely the antithesis of Aslan's qualities'. Tash appears in the final book of the series, *The Last Battle*. King Tirian and others see the figure of Tash moving northward against Narnia: 'It was roughly the shape of a man but it had the head of a bird; some bird of prey with a cruel, curved beak. It had four arms which it held high above its head, stretching them out Northward as if it wanted to snatch all Narnia in its grip; and its fingers—all twenty of them—were curved like its beak and had long, pointed, bird-like claws instead of nails' (*LB* 99-100). Tirian identifies it by the representation 'carved in stone and overlaid with gold' that he had seen as a boy when visiting Tashbaan. Only in its final appearance do we see Tash has 'a vulture's head' (*LB* 163). Whether Lewis had this avian image of Tash fully in mind at the time of writing *HHB* may be questionable, but it gives a possible further context for Rabadash's repeated claim that 'the bolt of Tash falls from above'.

this had been quite effective for him in Calormen, since ‘it is very easy to frighten people who know you can have them boiled alive the moment you give the word’ (*HHB* 245), but here he only makes himself more ridiculous. Rabadash loses all self-control:

"Demon! Demon! Demon!" shrieked the Prince. "I know you. You are the foul fiend of Narnia. You are the enemy of the gods. Learn who I am, horrible phantasm. I am descended from Tash, the inexorable, the irresistible. The curse of Tash is upon you ... " (*HHB* 245)

Aslan speaks three times, twice offering him the chance to repent, but the third time announcing: ‘The hour has struck.’ In the midst of making faces and wagging his ears, Rabadash begins to change:

Rabadash had been wagging his ears all the time and as soon as Aslan said, "The hour has struck!" the ears began to change. They grew longer and more pointed and soon were covered with gray hair. And while everyone was wondering where they had seen ears like that before, Rabadash's face began to change too. It grew longer, and thicker at the top and larger eyed, and the nose sank back into the face (or else the face swelled out and became all nose) and there was hair all over it. And his arms grew longer and came down in front of him till his hands were resting on the ground: only they weren't hands, now, they were hoofs. And he was standing on all fours, and his clothes disappeared, and everyone laughed louder and louder (because they couldn't help it) for now what had been Rabadash was, simply and unmistakably, a donkey. (*HHB* 246-247)

Rabadash realizes what is happening and begins to plead just as he loses his human voice and starts to bray.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁹ The donkey's attempt at human speech that turns into a bray is a regular feature of the ass narrative. In Apuleius, as robbers lead Lucius the donkey away, he attempts to appeal to Caesar: ‘*inter ipsas turbelas Graecorum genuino sermone nomen augustum Caesaris invocare temptavi. et “O” quidem tantum disertum ac validum clamitavi, reliquum autem Caesaris nomen enuntiare non potui*’ (‘I tried amidst those crowds of Greeks to invoke the august name of Caesar in my native tongue. And indeed I shouted the “O” by itself, eloquently and vigorously, but I could not pronounce the rest of Caesar's name’, 3. 29). Text and translation of Apuleius throughout are from Hanson 1989. Lewis achieves a certain pathos by locating the transformation in the middle of a speech, as Rabadash cries ‘“Oh, not a Donkey! Mercy! If it were even a horse—e'en—a hor—auh, eeh-auh.” And so the words died away into a donkey's bray’ (*HHB* 247). Geoffrey Miles (elsewhere in this volume) argues powerfully for the story of Ocyrhoe in *Metamorphoses* 2.655-674 as a key Ovidian intertext here: Ocyrhoe, fully

Aslan has one more thing to say:

"Now hear me, Rabadash," said Aslan. "Justice shall be mixed with mercy. You shall not always be an Ass." ...

"You have appealed to Tash," said Aslan. "And in the temple of Tash you shall be healed. You must stand before the altar of Tash in Tashbaan at the great Autumn Feast this year and there, in the sight of all Tashbaan, your ass's shape will fall from you and all men will know you for Prince Rabadash. But as long as you live, if ever you go more than ten miles away from the great temple in Tashbaan you shall instantly become again as you now are. And from that second change there will be no return." (*HHB* 247)

The narrator relates that Rabadash was indeed sent home and regained his human form at the temple as promised, in front of 'four or five thousand people'. The result is that everyone in his kingdom knows his real story. When he succeeds to his father's throne, he keeps the peace of necessity, never venturing far from his capital nor allowing any ambitious generals who might challenge him for his throne to win military successes either. Thus:

His own people never forgot that he had been a donkey. During his reign, and to his face, he was called Rabadash the Peacemaker, but after his death and behind his back he was called Rabadash the Ridiculous ... (*HHB* 249)

Apuleius's *Golden Ass* must be Lewis's inspiration for Rabadash's fate. The original metamorphosis narrative in the *Golden Ass* certainly contains a number of the same features, although in different order:

sed plane pili mei crassantur in setas, et cutis tenella duratur in corium, et in extimis palmulis perditio numero toti digiti coguntur in singulas ungulas, et de spinae meae termino grandis cauda procedit. iam facies enormis et os prolixum et nares hiantes et labiae pendulae; sic et aures immodicis horripilant auctibus. (*Golden Ass* 3. 24)

human daughter of the centaur Chiron, is transformed by the gods into a horse specifically to silence her prophetic voice. Miles stresses the importance of loss of language in both Ovidian and Lewisian metamorphoses in general; on the centrality of language to humanness in the Rabadash transformation, see also Ward (2008) 157.

Instead my body hair was thickening into bristles and my soft skin
hardening into hide. At the ends of my palms my fingers were losing
their number and being all compressed together into single hoofs, and
from the end of my spine came forth a great tail. My face was immense
now, mouth spread, nostrils gaping, lips sagging. My ears too grew
immoderately long and bristly. (trans. J. A. Hanson)

Lewis begins with the ears, Apuleius ends with them, but the connection is still clear.⁴²⁰ While a Greek version of the story of a man magically metamorphosed into a donkey survives also,⁴²¹ the decisive argument for Apuleian inspiration is that only the *Golden Ass* situates the protagonist's metamorphosis back into human form at a religious festival—a festival in honour of the goddess Isis. The parallel is indeed so clear that it may seem to be worthy of no more than a footnote—but the differences have significance both within Lewis's novel and for an understanding of the Apuleian original.

The fundamental variation is that Rabadash's metamorphosis back into a human being is not permanent; it only endures so long as he remains near the temple. The *Golden Ass* offers no hint that Lucius's transformation in his story is not permanent—but neither does Lucius ever consider leaving the service of Isis thereafter. Rabadash, praised to his face as a peacemaker and mocked behind his back, is a prisoner in his own capital. Lewis repeatedly notes in the novel that all of Calormen's citizens are slaves of their one absolute ruler (called the Tisroc). Even as heir to the throne, Rabadash is subject to the absolute will of his father.⁴²² His only

⁴²⁰ Huttar (2012) 21 wishes to discount Apuleian influence here, with one of his explicit arguments being that 'for Lucius all parts of his body seem to be changing at once', but Apuleius's paratactic Latin is less likely to imply simultaneity than sequence. Huttar is no doubt right to suggest that the story of King Midas's mobile ass's ears in Ovid influenced Lewis as well. Hinten (2007) 77 suggests some reminiscence of 'the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar in the biblical book of Daniel' as well.

⁴²¹ *Lucius* or *The Ass* (*Onos*), transmitted with the works of Lucian but almost certainly not by him.

⁴²² As he is reminded in a key scene before he sets out on his expedition (chapter 8, 'In the House of the Tisroc'). In fact, his father is willing to send him out because the son's rash temper has made him a danger even

hope for real freedom is to become Tisroc himself—but Rabadash is enslaved by the decree that he will lose his humanity if he ever goes beyond his narrow bounds.

In Aslan's words 'You have appealed to Tash, ... And in the temple of Tash you shall be healed', there may be an echo of the words of the governor Festus to Paul in Acts 25: 12: 'Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go.' Rabadash has proved himself incapable of living by, let alone understanding, the values and the world of Aslan. He is sent back to the world he seems to understand—but where his power to choose to do harm is taken away.

The status of Tash within the narrative is intriguing. If one knows Lewis as a Christian apologist, from outside the world of the story it seems improbable that readers should take Tash seriously as a divinity.⁴²³ Nothing in the wording of the text suggests that Tash is the agent of Rabadash's re-transformation into a human—but neither do Aslan's words question the power or existence of Tash. The key here seems to be popular perception: the people of Calormen react to an apparent miracle with neither awe at the demonstration of divine power nor sympathy for their prince saved by that miracle—but only ridicule for Rabadash's previous asinine state and contempt for his resultant pacifism. Rabadash's story has made him 'the Ridiculous', and he becomes a byword for stupidity: 'to this day in Calormene schools, if you do anything unusually stupid, you are very likely to be called "a second Rabadash"' (*HHB* 249-250).

For many centuries the weight of scholarly as well as general readerly opinion has tipped toward finding a genuine religious statement in the ending of Apuleius's *Golden Ass*: Isis's

to his father, who would not be devastated to lose such a son. Cf. the discussion of hierarchy in Calormen in Manlove (1993) 85-86.

⁴²³ I speak of a first reading here. Tash later appears in *The Last Battle* (see n. 10, above) where, though an opponent, he is said to be as 'real' as Aslan himself.

rescue of Lucius from his ass form seems to show Isis to be worthy of worship and praise. Saint Augustine himself apparently considered it possible that Apuleius's book was narrating things that could have happened, even if it would only show that Isis was herself a demon with real power in the world. Only recently have more voices begun to point out that, as is the case in the Greek version of the ass story, Lucius has known from the beginning how to make himself human again: he simply needs to eat some roses, and although he finds roses at Isis's festival, she is not the only possible provider. Jack Winkler's justly famous narratological study of the novel, *Actor & Auctor*, argues that nothing in the first ten books of Apuleius prepares the reader for the appearance of Isis in the eleventh book, and far from being straightforward Isiac religious propaganda, the novel leaves readers shuttling back and forth between a first, comic reading of the story, and a second, religious re-reading of the story.⁴²⁴

Lewis's reworking of Apuleius incorporates both serious and comic elements, but the balance tips toward the latter. For its young readers, the final chapter title sets the framework of interpretation: Aslan neutralizes the danger that Rabadash represents by the power of ridicule. In the end Rabadash is not redeemed but only controlled,⁴²⁵ by fear of his own commanders and his own certain fate if he yields to his warlike nature. Lewis leaves it to more philosophical readers to contemplate what it means to keep peace out of fear rather than genuine desire.

For those who know Apuleius, Lewis's treatment suggests what he nowhere else says explicitly: although Rabadash is not simply an avatar of Apuleius's Lucius, their situations are similarly ridiculous. If Rabadash's nature has not changed for the better as a result of his

⁴²⁴ Winkler (1985).

⁴²⁵ Although Hartman (2010) 49 admits that 'Rabadash may not be cured of his pride and greed', her analysis (esp. 40-43, 47-50) emphasizes Rabadash's re-integration into Calormene society. Huttar (2012) 26 is more agnostic about the ultimate state of Rabadash's character, while Hilder (2012) 102 sees in his fate 'the essential slavery of a servant of Tash'.

transformations, did Lewis see in Lucius as worshipper of Isis a model of real religious enlightenment? Lewis's treatment of Rabadash as a spectacle, honoured publicly but mocked everywhere else, suggests that he saw in the figure of Apuleius's Lucius a similar spectacle. We have only the word of the oft-mistaken first person narrator of the *Golden Ass* to assure us that, after his many adventures, Lucius is better off as a worshipper attached to the temple of Isis in Rome. It seems quite possible that Lewis heard behind Lucius's self-congratulation for his career as Isiac priest and Roman lawyer the mockery of the Roman author's offstage laughter.

Afterword

Inheriting the past: Children's voices and parenting experiences

Caroline Lovatt, Helen Lovatt and Jonathan Lovatt

This book is about literature aimed at, or received by, a young audience and has explored receptions of the Greek and Roman worlds in a number of texts often read in childhood. Scholarship on literature is slow to incorporate and give prominence to the voices of young readers themselves.⁴²⁶ Methods of approaching the reading experiences of children and young people include quantitative and qualitative: most often, surveys and questionnaires, or interviews.⁴²⁷ Since we are dealing with a specific set of issues and materials, large scale

⁴²⁶ Even a book such as *Trust your Children: Voices against Censorship in Children's Literature* (West (1997)) includes interviews with authors, publishers and anti-censorship activists, but not with children. Lundin (2004) explores competing ideas about canons of children's literature, and calls for the power of the reader, but in the section about readers uses her own remembered reading experiences.

⁴²⁷ For instance Hall and Coles (1999) is the result of a large multi-year project, surveying 8000 children and interviewing 87. It compares reading habits between 10 year olds, 12 year olds, and 14 year olds, girls and boys, in 1994 in comparison with a previous survey in 1971. The only definitively Classical book to receive more than 50 mentions in the survey is the *Asterix* series of comics; more tangentially related are *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Hobbit* and *The Secret Garden*. Interestingly, C. S. Lewis is the only author to maintain his position between 1971 and 1994. The annual surveys of the National Literacy Trust addresses some of the same questions, but without reporting on popularity of individual books and authors, or interviewing children. See for instance Clark and Foster (2005). Clark (2014) gives a snapshot of the reading landscape in 2013, in which popular books include *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Hobbit*, *War Horse*, *Horrible Histories* and the works of David Walliams. The authors most borrowed from libraries in 2013/14 included six children's authors: Daisy Meadows (Rainbow fairy series); Julia Donaldson (*Gruffalo*); Francesca Simon (*Horrid Henry*); Adam

quantitative investigation seemed inappropriate, as well as beyond our resources.⁴²⁸ This afterword is therefore a tentative start at a qualitative exploration. This is certainly the first attempt at a qualitative study of the attitudes of young readers to Greek and Roman material in children's literature.

I wanted close involvement and discussion with young readers, both so that complex concepts could be explained and so that open questions could allow them to respond in their own ways, developed in discussion. I therefore chose to set up conversations with my own children, Jonathan, at time of writing age twelve, and Caroline, age nine.⁴²⁹ The fact that they are my own children is both an advantage and a disadvantage: the disadvantage is that it is often hard to unpick what comes from me and what comes from them, through my involvement in the discussion, influence and the deep interconnectedness of our lives; the advantages are that I have been observing their reading practices for twelve years, they trust me and feel comfortable disagreeing with me, as I know not just from these discussions.⁴³⁰ Jonathan in particular was keen to challenge me, disagreeing with my illustrative examples, sceptical about concepts and terms I introduced, and pointing out when he knew more about a book than I did.

First a few words about their reading histories and family situation. It is very hard to unpick my own experience of the children's reading from theirs.⁴³¹ I started by choosing books for

Blade (*Beast Quest*); Jacqueline Wilson (*Tracy Beaker*); and Roald Dahl. All of this shows that there is a great deal of turnover in children's reading.

⁴²⁸ Coats (2001) calls for a plurality of methodologies.

⁴²⁹ A similar process was adopted by Richards (1993), who interviewed his daughters, four and eight, about their attitudes to television, and revealed some interesting material, about gender, parental control, sibling relationships and social situations. More reflection on the difficulties of qualitative research with children: Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell and Britten (2002); Hill (2006).

⁴³⁰ Richards (1993) 24-6 reflects on the oddness of performing ethnographic research on one's own family. A more substantial example of ethnographic research which reveals children's voices is Maybin (2006).

⁴³¹ On personal voice and Classical scholarship, Hallett and Van Nortwick (1997), with the critical review of Hubbard (1998).

them and reading to them. But they always had agency and choice: they could decide which book it was that they wanted read to them again and again and again, and they frequently did. Children can always say no, and Jonathan did that very effectively, even as a tiny baby. Jonathan age three or four would go and sit in Caroline's room and 'read' to her himself, from a book that he had memorised. Now I watch them reading, occasionally still read to Caroline, buy and borrow books for them, find that some are rejected and some are repeatedly read almost to the point of destruction. I certainly have opinions about books and I am sure they are aware of them, though they might not choose to follow them, and in fact often do not. Their father, Andrew, has also read to them, gives them books, talks to them about books and makes them aware of his own opinions and interests. Although I am a classicist, Andrew is an engineer with very little interest in or experience of the ancient world. They are probably more classically informed than the average child reader, though neither has studied much Greek or Latin, or done any Classics at school beyond the normal 'Greeks and Romans' topics at Key Stage 2 (age 8 to 11 in primary school) and an after school club in Latin that I ran for two years when Jonathan was 8 and 9. This allows them to engage with the material discussed in this book.

It is hard for adults to remember what it is like to read as a child, or even as a young adult.⁴³² I remember reading E. Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* at about the same time as watching a television adaptation of it, lending the book to a friend, and never getting it back.⁴³³ The story remained in my mind as an unattainable paradise to which I could never return. I re-read the book as an adult and could not recover at all the sense of immersion and delight that I remembered, even if I did not actually remember much about the story, except the image of the

⁴³² On constructing false memories using fake photographs, see Wade, Garry, Read and Lindsay (2002). The 'Memories of Reading' project at the University of Sheffield (<http://www.memoriesofreading.org.uk/>, accessed 23.11.15) is collecting memories through social media, interviews and archive research.

⁴³³ Nesbit (1907).

statues coming to life. Memories of reading are complex and fallible, but remain one of the only ways in to the experience of reading.

It is also hard for children to remember what it was like for them to read books at an earlier stage of life. In the course of the discussions, Jonathan frequently uses his inability to remember the books as a way of closing down discussion: I asked him to give me an example, and he replied 'Um. Silence. Well, I can't really remember anything past yesterday.' This is a real problem which literary critics gloss over in the fiction of a seamless presentation of a first-reading experience, without multiple re-readings and referencing. It is even harder for children to articulate what they feel or think, especially to come up with questions that they want to address. The questions that formed the basis of our discussions were devised by me in response to my editing of this book, with the aim of producing open reflection, much as in seminar discussion with students, and with the same variable results.⁴³⁴ The first conversation was exploratory, taking the themes of this book and asking open questions which allowed both children to offer their own thoughts. I then transcribed the discussion and reflected on the ideas and issues raised, and devised questions for the two further individual discussions. The second set of questions were much more complex and difficult, so I felt that discussing with each child individually would allow me to make sure they had understood and remove the complicating factor of the dynamic between the two, which while interesting, tended to close down discussion rather than open it up.

My children certainly like reading, but Jonathan in particular finds it hard to see the point in talking about books (unless coming up with ideas for writing them). I discussed child-centred

⁴³⁴ I did not incentivise them to take part in the exercise. Caroline has also participated voluntarily in medical research and very much enjoyed the feeling of making a contribution, and learning more about herself and what research involves. The conversations took place in relaxed settings, first during a holiday, then at home out of school hours. Transcription was done by me and excerpts were chosen as representative of the conversations.

criticism with Jonathan the day after we recorded the first discussion; I talked to him about this book and asked him what it would be like if he were writing it. 'Very short,' he replied.

In this afterword I intersperse transcriptions from the discussions with the children that I recorded in October and November 2015 with thoughts and memories of my own about their reading histories. We are, of course, one family, from a particular context (rural Cambridgeshire), of a particular socio-economic class (middle class), with particular interests and tendencies. My children certainly have similar reading habits to those of many of their friends, but their friends tend to be fairly similar to them in background, education, class, ethnicity: white, middle class, state educated, comfortably off. It remains a valuable exercise to include children's voices, even if they are not representative, as well as those of practitioners.

Helen: What sort of books do you like reading and why?

Caroline: Um I think I like mystic, like mystic kind of things, like magical, lots of mythical creatures. ... Um *Inheritance* series. I like the, *The Three Musketeers*. *Teeth* was good.⁴³⁵

Jonathan: I like thriller/sci-fi/horror sort of things. Well, that have a kind of deep plot that makes them a lot more interesting?

H: What do you mean by a deep plot?

J: A plot that's complex and normally quite difficult to follow.

H: Can you list any books that you've read recently that you've enjoyed?

J: *Maze Runner*, *Hunger Games*, that sort of books really.⁴³⁶

H: Caroline can you think of any others that you'd like to mention?

C: Yes, but I can't remember what their names are.

Similarities and differences

There are two main differences between Caroline and Jonathan: gender and age. Caroline is a self-confessed tomboy, who refuses to wear dresses or anything pink, has had her hair cut

⁴³⁵ The *Inheritance* series: Paolini (2004); Paolini (2006); Paolini (2008); Paolini (2011). Other books mentioned: Dumas (1896 [1844]) and Moskowitz (2013).

⁴³⁶ Dashner (2014) and Collins (2012).

short and is friends with the boys in her class. Jonathan is comfortable being a boy, and on the cusp of being a teenager. Both enjoy sport, music, science and maths. It is hard to tell if their reading tastes are gendered, or more age-related.⁴³⁷ Their ages match well the ages of children surveyed in Hall and Coles (1999), Caroline at about the age of the youngest group, Jonathan between the two older groups. They have read about 80% of the same books as each other, but Jonathan excludes more: things that are 'too young for him', things that are dated, that are 'for girls', things that are 'boring'. Neither child feels that implausibility or difficulty of subject matter would put them off reading a particular book: they only stop reading if books are 'boring' (C: I think it's boring or it's boring.). Jonathan found it hard to describe what boring meant in a particular reading experience (Terry Pratchett's *Going Postal*) other than lack of a compelling plot, which he defines as 'deep'.⁴³⁸ (J: It didn't feel like it had any point to it really. It just felt like there was just, I don't know, there was just a random guy who was just going round doing random stuff which made absolutely no sense.) In contrast, Jonathan defines a 'deep plot' as 'A plot that's complex and normally quite difficult to follow.' Things must 'make sense', then, in order not to be boring: a certain level of knowledge and understanding is required to produce engagement, and perhaps the framework of the ancient world, both myth and history, provides that level of basic knowledge from school.

Caroline reads very widely, and spends more time reading, although she reads the same things many times over (currently my husband's collection of *Beano* comics from the 1970s and 1980s). Caroline is still willing for me to read to her, and all the books are gradually making

⁴³⁷ In the quantitative surveys cited above, girls read more and re-read more; both, particularly boys, read less as they get older. Adventure is the most popular subject matter for both girls and boys, but science fiction is one of the few genres (along with war stories and sport stories) of which boys read more. This fits with Jonathan's relatively typical gender identification, and Caroline's more idiosyncratic position with some feminine and some masculine traits.

⁴³⁸ Pratchett (2014).

their way across from Jonathan's room to Caroline's. Jonathan's room is minimalist, Caroline's is chaotic and full of things. When they discussed the similarities and differences in their reading habits, Jonathan wanted to emphasise the differences, Caroline the similarities:

Helen: Do you agree with each other about what sorts of things you like reading?

Caroline: Yes.

Jonathan: What? No.

H: What similarities and differences are there between the things you like reading?

C: We both like fighting and sci-fi.

J: That's not true. Caroline just likes mythical fighting with fire and dragons and stuff. But I like sort of getting away, and more thriller than action books now.

...

H: How about old books, things that were written fifty or sixty years ago? Does that make any difference?

C: No that doesn't make any difference.

J: Sometimes. Depends what it is.

Caroline as the younger sibling and a girl seems to feel the need to be like Jonathan, while Jonathan asserts his difference. I read many of the same books with the two of them (the Narnia series, the Roman Mysteries, Harry Potter) but I have read some things only with Jonathan (*Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*, *Black Hearts in Battersea*) and others only with Caroline (*Little Women*, *The Three Musketeers*).⁴³⁹ In the individual discussions, both children were open to creative adaptation of ancient material, although Jonathan was more disapproving of inaccuracy; Caroline was more interested in and attracted by the concept of metatextuality; both were open to and interested in moral ambiguity; but Jonathan was reluctant to admit to identifying with any characters, while Caroline straightforwardly identified with strong girl

⁴³⁹ Adams (2002 [1979-1992]); Aiken (2004 [1965]); Alcott (2012 [1868]).

characters (Flavia in *The Roman Mysteries*, Hermione in Harry Potter, Meggie in *Inkworld* and Hero in Sulari Gentill's books).⁴⁴⁰

Helen: How do you think your reading tastes have changed?

Caroline: Well when I was younger, I used to like *Hairy Maclary*, but now I like big books, big, fat books with lots and lots of plot and interesting things in it.

...

H: Jonny how about you? How have your tastes changed as you've ... as your age has changed?

J: Um. What sort. Um. Well, my taste is a lot thinner. So I like more specific things now than I did before.

When they think about definitions of children's literature and how their tastes have changed with age, they focus a great deal on size and plot, both in its magnitude and complexity. Caroline's taste in books has become fatter, Jonathan's thinner. With reference to classically related books they mainly remember those set in the Greek or Roman periods (the Roman mysteries), or those based around Greek or Roman myth (*Corydon* and *Percy Jackson*), or both (Sulari Gentill's Hero series: *Chasing Odysseus*, *Trying War* and *Blood of Wolves*, based on the *Odyssey*, the *Argonautica* and the *Oresteia*, and the *Aeneid*, respectively).⁴⁴¹ They also remember learning about Greek myth from Lucy Coats' *Atticus the Storyteller*, but deny learning any Greek myth at school.⁴⁴² They do not in general notice smaller Classical references in books with other settings or priorities, such as Harry Potter and the Narnia books, or feel that they are significant.

Reasons for reading: textuality and metatextuality

⁴⁴⁰ Flavia: Lawrence (2001); Hermione: Rowling (2001 [1997]); the *Inkworld* series: Funke (2004 [2003]); Funke (2006 [2005]); Funke (2008 [2007]); the Hero trilogy: Gentill (2011); Gentill (2012) and Gentill (2015).

⁴⁴¹ First of the *Corydon* series: Druitt (2005); first of the *Percy Jackson* series: Riordan (2005).

⁴⁴² Coats and Lewis (2002).

Caroline finds it hard to articulate why she likes stories with Greek and Roman connections, but is committed and enthusiastic, while Jonathan explains thus:

J: I quite like it how all the stories are based around each other, sort of, and that when you read books they're all, they're all sort of in the Greek era? So they've all got slightly different plots to them, so...

H: So when you say the stories are based around each other, you mean that ... what do you mean by that?

J: There are the same sort of characters. Like. I don't know. [H: They re-use] They have the like ... They re-use the same sort of characters that were in the myth. And the same monsters. And stuff. And the things they do. [H: So you like recognising the stories?] Yeah. So. And you know what is going on, a bit.

The sophisticated and knowing tone, the self-conscious textuality of many recent children's books that use Classical mythology seems to be an important attraction for these two children, who grew up on metatextual picture books such as *Each Peach Pear Plum* (Janet and Allen Ahlberg), *Charlie Cook's Favourite Book* (Julia Donaldson), and *Who's afraid of the big bad book?* (Lauren Child) Both children also enjoyed the Inkworld series (Claudia Funke) in which characters read themselves into books, and which features *Inkheart* itself, in a *mise-en-abyme*.⁴⁴³ Jonathan, however, challenges the idea that metatextuality is outside the norms of fiction:

J: Well I've never really... Well, whenever I've found it, it feels like it's something that's in the book, it's not really something that's going on here, the metatextuality thing. So not really. So I don't really. I'm not really bothered by it, it's just feels like part of the book.

H: OK, yeah, I see that. Every story world has its own set of rules and in that story world one of the rules is that you can go in and out of books.

J: Yeah.

⁴⁴³ On the Inkworld series and metafiction, see Bhadury (2013), with further bibliography on metafiction and children's literature and culture. On metafiction: Waugh (1984). On metafiction and classics see Hodkinson (2016).

However, he does acknowledge that some children's fantasy books handle their fantasy elements with a higher degree of self-consciousness than others: he agrees that the Percy Jackson books are more metatextual than Harry Potter, or Narnia. (J: Well in a way, because it's like loads of Greek myth stuff, and then they all have like mobile phones and stuff.) The alternate universe of myth in Percy Jackson is not securely separated as in the Narnia books, while the muggle and the wizarding worlds in Harry Potter exist alongside each other, but the myths that come to life are always securely in the complex space of the wizarding world, while in the Percy Jackson books gods and monsters slide between myth and normality. Metatextuality itself is not straightforwardly a feature of children's fiction associated with the ancient world: Caroline Lawrence and Sulari Gentill, for instance, operate their metatextual references through readers' knowledge of ancient literature and myth. But this way in which the stories reinforce and relate to each other by drawing on a clearly defined and canonical body of history and myth gives some child readers a sense of power and awareness, and helps others with comprehension and involvement.

Both children are positively attracted to books that play around with and adapt the ancient material. In fact, the children's reading of fiction related to the Greek and Roman worlds has formed their ideas about them. For Jonathan, though he now denies this, at the time he pointed out that the Percy Jackson books had taught him Greek mythology, which he then used at school. For Caroline, Sulari Gentill's versions of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* are now canonical:

H: But for Caroline say with Sulari Gentill with her *Chasing Odysseus*? Did you know the *Odyssey* before you read *Chasing Odysseus*?

C: Yes.

H: So you knew what to expect?

C: Yeah.

H: But now when you think of the Odysseus myth do you think of a retelling from a book or do you think of the Sulari Gentill version?

C: I think of the Sulari Gentill version.

She has corrected me on numerous occasions for telling the story according to Homer or Virgil. Children's literary culture is rich, complex and ever-changing. There is a new canon of children's books growing, replacing Rudyard Kipling and Enid Blyton, and in that literary culture, the classical world plays an important role. Those books I have mentioned were read several times by the children; others went unread (Rosemary Sutcliff's *Eagle of the Ninth*, for instance; Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*).⁴⁴⁴ Although they both feel that parents most influence their choice of reading, parental influence is limited to offering possibilities, which are accepted or rejected by the children. Jonathan places much more importance on the appearance of the book and whether his friends are reading it than Caroline does, and Caroline has much more influence from Jonathan.

Power, control, and different media

The issue of control and perception of control interests me: if adults define and control childhood, children and children's literature, is there any possibility of agency for children? My children may be too effectively embedded in the systems of control to realise they are there; or they may genuinely feel that they do have a reasonable amount of agency. For me, reading was a space outside adult control, but Jonathan and Caroline feel differently:

H: How much do you feel in control of your reading? Do you think, do you feel that other people control what you read? Or? And your life in fact?

C: No I don't think other people control what I read. It's ... I just like picking out books that look good and then reading them, like searching it.

H: Do you read all the way through from the start to the finish without...?

J: Not always.

C: Not always no, because I sometimes, I think oh look there's an interesting bit over there and I accidentally miss out bits 'cause I go to the top of the page and I look at something else that's interesting on the page and I miss out a whole page doing that.

H: Do you ever read the end before you are supposed to?

⁴⁴⁴ Sutcliff (2004 [1954]); Kipling (1987 [1906]).

C: No. No.

J: Only in English classes. Because we read so slowly that I just can't be bothered to wait all that time.

H: Do you think you do what the author wants you to do?

C: Yes. Yes, I do.

J: Probably not.

H: Because I don't. I chop around, and I do what I want to do. I skim read, I go backwards and forwards, I take things in a different order. When I am um, because I felt fairly out of control as a child, that I didn't have much control over my life, but that when I was reading books that I had a lot more control over what I was doing, and that it was a sort of space of my own, I think, but I don't know if you guys feel like that.

J: Sort of.

H: Why do you read? What do you enjoy about reading? How is it different from the other sorts of cultural things that you engage with? Like films? Or?

J: It's easy to do any time pretty much.

C: You can just do it over and over and over again at your own pace and in your own time.

The textual medium of literature is important in allowing faster movement between different parts, in encouraging active involvement (you are already turning the page, why not turn two, or ten?), and active imagination. While Jonathan thinks he has more control and Caroline claims to be obedient, in fact it is Caroline who gives a very lucid and honest explanation of how and why she moves around the text she is reading. But when in the follow-up discussions we reflected on the differences between computer games and books, Caroline felt that: 'books they, it drags you into it, it makes up the plot for you. But in computer games you have to do the plots.' Having said that, her favourite computer game is Minecraft in which she mainly builds her own structures and does not follow other people's plots. Jonathan, on the other hand, felt that each medium had its own limitation, that while you could, for instance, choose where you walked and what action you took in a computer game, there was a limited range of possibilities (as with other sorts of games, such as board games), and that there were many more opportunities for interpretation and wider imagination in books.

H: So, yeah, so on the whole you feel more in control in the world of reading than you do in other aspects of life?

C: Yeah.

J: Well I feel alright in life ...

C: I feel demoted.

H: Sorry?

C: I feel demoted.

H: You feel demoted? You think you don't have enough control in life, other people make too many of the decisions. Yeah I felt like that as a child, I think it's quite normal. It's good that Jonathan doesn't feel so much like that.

J: No I don't really.

H: Maybe you don't want to make decisions.

J: Well I want to make some decisions, but not all of them.

It is also hard to define why Caroline feels less in control of life than Jonathan: as the youngest in the family, perhaps she has to struggle to make herself heard. But my impression is more the reverse: that she has very strong opinions and would like to control everything very exactly (food kept separate on the plate), while Jonathan prefers not to have to make the effort of taking decisions, at least some of the time. It is possible that as a girl Caroline feels her life is more constrained (her discomfort with femininity is a good example of that, and something I experienced at the same age). Both, however, feel in control of their reading.

Domesticity and defamiliarisation

H: How do the Greeks and Romans compare to other settings?

J: Well, the Greek and Romans were a lot more advanced. They were quite an advanced era. [C: Yeah they were.] So most of life nowadays, so quite a bit of it, like some, it pretty much all comes from the Greek and Roman era, because the Baroque was trying to get all the Roman and Greek stuff back, and do all the music and art and stuff, so quite a lot of nowadays is quite fairly similar to it. So like they have I don't know, they have houses, like proper houses not like random mud buildings, and they have baths and toilets, proper toilets that like connected to streams, so they have their own sewage system, so they were quite advanced really, which means that its sort of easier to understand what's going on.

The role of technology, especially toilets, in the perception of cultural similarity is interesting here, as is the focus on the Classical tradition, apparently influenced by school art

history projects, rather than lectures from me. Caroline Lawrence's habitual use of a sponge stick at schools' talks is clearly well-judged. The children also conceded that this combination of similarity and difference is not specific to the Greeks and Romans, and that other historical periods were equally acceptable (Medieval: 'C: Those are also good, yeah.' Egyptian: 'C: I like the Egyptians. They're really quite cool. But when you get to the other stuff about poking the brains out of the nose, that's quite gross.') *Horrible Histories* is another important recent cultural influence (although both children prefer to use their screen time for games and watching things over the internet, rather than television).

H: So do you think, what about Greek myth? Is there something distinctive about Greek and Roman mythology compared to other types of mythology?

J: Well in Greek and Roman mythology it's more obvious that it's all made up.

H: OK, what do you mean by that?

J: Well, there are a lot more monsters, there are like massive fire-breathing dragons with seven heads and I don't know minotaurs and things, and a maze which you can't escape which they're all sound, they're all really made up.

H: So it's the fantastic nature of it, [Yup] the fact that it is a long way from reality. And you find that a good thing or a bad thing?

J: Good. Well, yeah.

If Roman history is about familiarity and making a connection, Greek mythology seems to be about deliberate distancing, exaggerated fictionality (even if the seven-headed fire-breathing dragon is more Percy Jackson than Hercules). The Latin in Harry Potter is part of this process of distancing, making an exotic world:

H: There is quite a lot of Latin in Harry Potter for instance. Do you find that alienating?

J: Not really. It's sort of, it's not, well it is a bit Latin, but it's partly made up from them as well. So...

H: So you just figure it out from the context?

J: Yup.

H: Is it fun to have some Latin in it?

J: Er. Sort of, yeah.

H: Any sense why?

J: Because new words, that mean quite fancy things.

H: So does it give you a sense of power that you know things that other people don't know?

J: Not really as such in that way. But. A bit.

H: It's playful and ...

J: Yeah. It's definitely made up.

Classical references in otherwise non-classical books are less important to Jonathan and Caroline, for whom they simply reflect a world in which there are also classical references (although fewer live dryads and epiphanies of Bacchus). The principal effect of Latin is to add to the playfulness, the exotic nature of the text (Aramaic is equally acceptable).

Moral ambiguity is also a feature of many books that both children enjoy: Jonathan also hints that this is part of what constitutes a 'deep plot'. Caroline points to the character of Pollius Felix in the Roman Mysteries:

C: Because he's kind of ... In the *Sirens of Surrentum*... in everything else, so in the eruption of the volcano, [in Vesuvius, yeah] yeah, that one, he's good because he helps the main characters, but in the *Sirens of Surrentum* he kind of, he almost makes his wife commit suicide [Yup] which shows he's not morally good, cos that's the mystery they are trying to solve. Who's trying to make her...

Her favourite book in the series is *The Gladiators from Capua*, in which the character Jonathan fights as a gladiator, convinced that he is responsible for causing a fire in Rome and killing thousands of people.⁴⁴⁵ This character was also the character with which Jonathan Lovatt identified, positively attracted by his angst and the representation of mental illness. The many negative aspects of ancient society, negotiated with subtlety by Lawrence, perhaps build towards Jonathan's current interest in dystopian fantasy (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Maze*

⁴⁴⁵ Lawrence (2009 [2004]).

Runner). In contrast the obviously fantastic elements of stories based on myth provide relief and distance.

H: How do you think your reading has changed you?

C: Er, I don't talk to my parents as much.

H: [Laughs] That's true. You go off into your own little Caroliney world, don't you?

C: Yeah.

H: But then you come out again.

C: Eventually.

H: But you've always done that, though, Cara.

C: Yeah, I guess. Well I've always been reading, it's just part of me. So it hasn't changed me much, really it's just made me know more facts.

H: Right, it teaches you things?

C: Other than that it's just plain old life to me.

The small incremental changes of reading as you take on and are taken in by particular values, systems and ideas, you confront things that have not happened to you, and are highly unlikely ever to do so, and work through them, to understand yourself and society better: for Jonathan and Caroline these are invisible; the only possible learning is 'facts'. But although they cannot (or will not) articulate it, their rejection of books that are 'boring' shows a desire to be challenged as well as to escape.

This exercise has shown that is possible to engage with children on their own terms, and on ours, about their reading practices, experiences and thoughts, although with limitations. It shows how the Greeks and Romans and their stories are transformed both by domestication and its opposite in children's literature and culture, and how two particular children respond to different representations of the ancient world. For Caroline, ultimately, reading is about escaping from life, but also crucially from thoughts of death: reading itself is life. Children's literature has the capacity to bring the ancient world back to life for a new generation of enthusiasts. For children, the ancient world offers sufficient distance to be exotic and sufficient familiarity to be reassuring, reassuring enough to face difficult material and issues.

I agree with Jacqueline Rose's case for the 'impossibility' of children's literature: the concepts of children and childhood are constructed by adults. I feel passionately that children are people and should be respected and valued as people. Children are also the future of society, and therefore have a special importance, that deserves protection and consideration. In the same way, children's literature is an impossible category, but one that should be respected and valued as literature. However, its importance as formative and potentially transformative should be acknowledged. We should begin by giving children's literature a special place to overcome the discrimination which has held it apart from serious study in the past, and move towards integration of material for young readers with wider cultural studies. In Classical reception studies, I would like to see plays, texts, films, games and other cultural products aimed at (and read by) children given the same status and consideration as those aimed at adults. Similarly, the Greeks and Romans have a privileged place in Western culture, long forming the basis of Western education and cultural literacy. The reaction against this privilege has threatened (and still does) the existence of the Classical world as an object of academic study. We should not claim for it a cultural centrality that it no longer has, but classical elements come into many cultural products aimed at children, and the intersection of Classics and children's literature offers a new perspective on both.

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