

THE IMAGINED CHILD

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg 2014

Declaration:

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree of examination to any other university.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter One – What is this thing called childhood?	7
Chapter Two – <i>David Copperfield</i> by Charles Dickens	18
Chapter Three – <i>The Go-Between</i> by L.P. Hartley	53
Chapter Four – <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee	75
Chapter Five – <i>The Children’s Day</i> by Michiel Heyns	104
Chapter Six – Through the child, our adult selves	125
Conclusion	166
Bibliography	172

Introduction

My PhD comprises a work of fiction and a dissertation, both of which explore issues surrounding childhood, children and parenthood. This theme has fascinated me throughout my writing career. Four of my five novels focus on the ways in which children are affected, and sometimes damaged, both by their parents and their social context.

The Imagined Child, the novel that forms part of this PhD, closely examines the nature of parenthood, the expectations inherent in the parent-child relationship, and the responsibilities that society imposes on parents.

In this dissertation, I approach childhood as a literary device and explore the different purposes to which it has been put by novelists, and the diverse strategies they have used to achieve their aims.

To do this, I have first to tackle the concept of childhood as a social construct – a product of history, cultural values and norms – and consider the ways in which childhood and parenting have changed in recent, Western history.

I examine the representation of this construct in four texts. Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) have all directly influenced my own writing. These three texts allow me to consider the significant shifts in the Western notion of childhood between 1850 and the present day. Michiel Heyns's *The Children's Day* (2002) brings the argument of this dissertation back to South Africa, and give me the opportunity to explore the version of childhood have we inherited and to consider how this differs from British and American models.

All four texts are narrated by an adult looking back on his or her own childhood. This narrative strategy allows each author to give us a glimpse of the prevailing attitudes in two periods: that of the adult narrator, and the time in which each childhood plays out. All are examples of the *Bildungsroman* – a coming-of-age story focusing on the protagonist's moral and psychological development.

These texts may be seen to represent a historical progression along a Western strand of childhood. In each case the writer has the advantage of hindsight: Dickens was writing of a period in Victorian England some twenty to thirty years before the publication of *David Copperfield*; L.P. Hartley's novel depicts a 1900 upper-class English childhood; Harper Lee sets her depiction of southern American childhood in the 1930s Depression years; *The Children's Day* gives us a representation of childhood in a small Free State town in the 1960s.

Through a textual analysis, I explore how much each text represents the prevailing outlook – at the time the book is set and in the period it was written. This analysis also shows that an understanding of the cultural perception of childhood enhances our understanding of the texts.

By giving attention to the author's use of child and adult voices, and the presence or absence of nostalgia, I examine the manner in which each narrator expresses his unique experience of childhood and the effect this has on the reader's understanding of the work, their attitude to the characters and to the time in which it is set.

I give some attention to traditional and contemporary African notions of child- and parenthood in order to investigate the degree to which an African setting has influenced white South African childhoods. And finally, I explore my own work in relation to the four texts, both with regard to their representation of childhood, and to the felt experience of childhood and how it is expressed.

All the novels discussed demonstrate the existence of certain shared Western values in the way childhood has evolved over time. But they also show historical differences and cultural variations. By exploring the issues that informed the image of childhood in different societies and historical periods, I have been able to investigate different versions of culture – and the degree to which literature both informs and is influenced by each prevailing ethos.

Chapter One - What is this thing called childhood?

Forging a new set of values for post-apartheid South Africa, Nelson Mandela placed the concerns of children on the agenda when he said: “There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children” (1995).

And yet, given “the slippery nature of the customer” (Heywood 2013, 170), how are we to judge the way a society treats its children? Dictionary definitions are unhelpful in describing the way children are viewed in society or the kind of parent regarded as ideal. What is considered to be a “good”, or even a “normal” childhood?

Fixed meanings of “child” and “childhood” are impossible. These notions have not remained constant through history or indeed, across class, gender and cultural divisions. It is now a widely accepted view that childhood is not wholly natural or biologically determined, but is, to a significant extent, a social construct whose meanings have always been hotly debated.

“The meanings assigned to childhood and the actual experience of childhood have changed dramatically over time and will no doubt continue to change,” declares Steven Mintz (2012), re-iterating his earlier assertion that all aspects of childhood – “including children’s household responsibilities, play, schooling, relationships with parents and peers, and paths to adulthood – have been transformed over the past four centuries...both the definition and experience of childhood have varied according to changing cultural demographic, economic and historical circumstances” (2004, viii).

It is a view shared by other historians of childhood. Paula Fass draws attention to the importance of status, class, wealth and poverty to the childhood experience (2013), while Willem Frijhoff points out that childhood is as much biological and psychological as it is cultural, affected by changing sensibilities, definitions and images. Calling for an evolutionary approach, Volk points out that different environments and circumstances have led to differences in the way children are viewed and treated.

Colin Heywood’s conclusion is that “...no one can doubt such phenomena as the changing conceptions of childhood in the West down the ages and the impact of mass schooling on the experience of young people” (2010).

And in the beginning...

And in the beginning, there was Ariès (Heywood 2013, 403). Philippe Ariès (1914–1984), is generally credited with the launch of a new branch of historical study with childhood as its focus, now regarded as an essential element in understanding modern Western development (Fass 2013).

Before Ariès's ground-breaking *Centuries of childhood* (1962), the field was largely “marginal, excessively sentimental, and under-theorized” (Mintz 2012). Since he put childhood on the map, “historians have contributed to a recognition of the social construction of childhood, cross-time comparisons being as instructive as cross-cultural ones” (Heywood 2013, 200–208).

Not that Ariès' theories have gone uncontested. After decades of hot debate over his handling of sources, his “present-centeredness” and his overdrawn conclusions (Heywood 2013, 431–486), prominent historians now seem to agree that his more controversial views – most notably, that a concept of childhood did not exist pre-1600 – are “dead in the water” (2010).

Peter N. Stearns flatly states that Ariès and some of his more ardent followers “got it wrong”, overdoing the contrast between past and present.

And no current history would still contend that the twentieth century magically invented the first acceptable treatment of children...Indeed it is tempting now to dismiss the whole debate around Ariès as over and done with, not worth mentioning anymore (2006, 11–12).

Children's long helplessness means arrangements need to be made for their feeding and care, and for training to prepare them for adulthood. Stearns argues that these arrangements differ from one historical period and place to the next. Thus the way pre-modern children were treated, and even the way parents expressed love, differ from expressions of childhood, love and parenthood in contemporary Western society (2, 13).

The experience of childhood in non-Western societies would, therefore, also have encompassed certain standard features throughout history, but would have differed according to a number of criteria, enumerated more fully in the next section. Besides the values, religious beliefs and cultural norms in each society, childhood would have been affected by degrees of industrialisation, the universality of schooling and the availability and quality of

health care. But few societies which experienced either colonisation or the work of missionaries could have remained untouched by Western notions and their influence on child- and parenthood over the centuries.

Despite the arguments against his work, Ariès is still regarded as the father of childhood research and it would be hard to find a theorist who does not refer to his pioneering work. He was right in some of his conclusions, according to David Archard, most notably in pointing out the features that distinguished the modern age in its conception of childhood in the West.

However, his original view of childhood has clearly been superseded. In its stead, Heywood suggests Archard's view that all societies through history have had a concept, or notion of childhood, but that they differ in their conception (2013, 389).

Time changes everything

Childhood has changed over the centuries for many reasons. Stearns suggests "the clearest transformation in childhood's world history involves the replacement of agricultural with industrial societies (and the imitation of industrial patterns, like mass schooling, even in societies still striving to complete the industrialization process)" (2006, 9).

While some aspects of childhood are "simply natural", its basic purpose has often been redefined (9). He mentions three movements that prompted adjustments to the conditions of childhood in the West: a movement from work to school; a lower birth rate, bringing about smaller families, and a corresponding fall in the death rate (2006, 9). Taking an evolutionary approach, Anthony Volk also cites the significance of infant death rates. "It does an infant little good to have the potential to be a successful adult if they die beforehand" (2011).

There is general agreement that the role of children in the Western family has changed significantly from 1500 to 1900 and that, by the twentieth century, a recognisably "modern" conception of childhood had been more or less universally accepted. In 1500, according to Hugh Cunningham, children of about seven began a "slow initiation into the world of adult work".

At the end of the period [1500 to 1900] in nearly every country regular schooling was compulsory for all children. Many historians see compulsory schooling as the end

point of a journey in which children and their families had moved from a peasant economy, often via a proto-industrial one to an industrial one (79).

But socio-economic changes are not the only significant markers of specific kinds of childhood. Moral and philosophical trends have been equally persuasive. The spread of Christianity has had a huge influence (Stearns 2006), as have thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Heywood 2013) and John Locke, the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (Gavin 2012a), and authors of baby-care manuals like Frederic Truby King, C. Anderson and Mary M. Aldrich, and Benjamin Spock (Hardyment 1984).

The Puritans, with their belief in “original sin”, had an enormous influence on the way children were perceived and treated from the 1600s, with variations, through to the twentieth century and, some would argue, even beyond. Their influence spread across Britain, through Europe and as far as colonies like America and South Africa. Their supremacy was broken, however, firstly by Locke (1632–1704), and secondly by the enlightened ideas of Rousseau (1712–1778) – both enormously influential in developing the thinking which eventually led to the modern view of childhood.

Locke reacted against the Puritans by claiming that, far from being corrupted by original sin, children were blank slates who could improve through experience and careful education. Parents could mould them from infancy to absorb virtue and reason. He didn’t approve of corporal punishment, believing instead in the efficacy of disgrace and praise.

When I say therefore that they [children] must be *treated as rational creatures* I mean that you should make them sensible by the mildness of your carriage and the composure even in your correction of them that what you do is reasonable in you and useful and necessary for them and that it is not out of *caprichio*, passion, or fancy that you command or forbid them anything (Quoted in Fass, 2000, 45).

Rousseau took contemporary thinking still further from the Puritan view, and closer to the conception of childhood as a separate state, distinct from adulthood. His influence, not only on poetry and fiction, but on child rearing through the Victorian era and beyond, will be dealt with in a later chapter. In general, he believed in the innate goodness of children, and in a commitment to cultivating their individual potential and creative spirit. He saw children as close to Nature and thought they should be free to discover the world in a natural way, before only later being guided by a receptive teacher (Stearns 2010, Gavin 2012a, Archard).

Brought up in the spirit of our maxims, accustomed to make his own tools and not to appeal to others until he has tried and failed, he will examine everything he sees carefully and in silence. He thinks rather than questions. Be content, therefore, to show him things at a fit season; then, when you see that his curiosity is thoroughly aroused, put some brief question which will set him trying to discover the answer (Quoted in Fass 2000, 292).

As soon as the preservation of life ceased to be an over-riding anxiety, parenting involved more abstract concerns. Initially, parents saw their role as “teaching the taboo” and inculcating society’s basic rules and restrictions (Georgieva), while Puritans believed their responsibility was to the spiritual well-being of their children (Mintz 2004) and twentieth-century parents cared about happiness and emotional adjustment.

Contemporary parents, in contrast, hold themselves responsible “not only for children’s physical well-being but also for their psychological adjustment, personal happiness, and future success” (Mintz 2004, ix). They believe themselves honour-bound to create smart, successful, emotionally and intellectually balanced beings (Hardyment 2007).

The difficulties of childhood

As a relatively new field, historical research into childhood is nonetheless essential, argues Steven Mintz, who calls it the true missing link – connecting the personal and the public, the psychological and sociological, the domestic sphere and the state (2012).

Writing specifically about America, Mintz makes a point that is universally applicable. While children’s powerlessness makes them less visible than other groups, he maintains their history is “inextricably bound up with broader political and social events in the life of the nation – including colonization, immigration and war – and children’s experience embodies many of the key themes of American history” (2004, viii).

William L. Langer argues for its importance to any study of human society, saying: “...for if, as it is said, the child is father to the man, it should be possible, with an understanding of any individual’s or any group’s past, to form a more intelligent judgment of their performance as adults” (52).

Despite the general, though relatively new-found acknowledgment of its importance, historians bemoan the lack of source material and have turned to such sources as portraits, photographs, official policy and reports, toys and books (Heywood 2013, 225).

This source material, though, does not provide explicit information about the emotional or felt experience of children. Autobiography might fill this gap, but Frijhoff tells us that, before the nineteenth century, autobiography rarely included childhood or adolescence.

“Today one might go as far as to assert that childhood reminiscences are generally the most successful part of an autobiography,” writes Heywood, “...Yet this fascination with the childhood years is a relatively recent phenomenon” (2013, 126).

Except for *The Confessions of St Augustine*, written between 397 and 398 AD, European life-writing gave little space to childhood before the eighteenth century, “arguably coinciding with a more general cultural shift in the perception of children”, according to Kate Douglas, citing Valerie Sanders. Once people began to recognise childhood as a separate developmental stage to adulthood, it became worthy of consideration in itself (8).

Since the 1990s, stories of childhood have become an industry. Douglas discovered over a thousand new autobiographies of childhood listed on Amazon in the fifteen years before 2010 when her book appeared – and that figure takes account of only those within mainstream publishing.

The most notable and perhaps most infamous publishing trend of the 1990s was the autobiography of childhood. Mary Karr, Frank McCourt and James McBride burst onto the American literary scene in the mid-1990s, paving the way for a plethora of similarly styled texts to follow (1).

These recent autobiographies have been distinguished by their depiction of “challenging, often traumatic” childhoods, like McCourt’s poverty-stricken early years in *Angela’s Ashes*. She mentions also Dave Pelzer’s tales of child abuse and dysfunction, *A Child called ‘It’* and *The Lost Boy*, “bad girl” narratives like Koren Zailckas’s *Smashed: Growing up a Drunk Girl*, those dealing with issues of health, such as Judith Moore’s *Fat Girl* and crimes against children, most notably, *Girl in the Cellar*, Allan Hall and Michael Leidig’s documentation of Natascha Kampusch’s kidnapping.

However, even when it does cover childhood, autobiography is not without its difficulties as historical source material. But for a few rare examples, like Anne Frank, children are not direct sources. Frijhoff goes so far as to call them “mute”. “Adults speak for children, often and loudly, not only throughout history, but also in the writing of history itself.” This bias is still more extreme beyond the literate classes, where children are doubly mute.

Early representations of childhood were shaped by the gender and class inequalities of their times. In the eighteenth century, stories of boyhood prevailed over those of girlhood, and the early lives of saints overwhelmed those of ordinary people (Douglas).

Even in the contemporary situation, autobiography represents a construction as much as an exercise in memory. “The adult autobiographer constructs the child self, bringing the child back to life a generation on” (Douglas, 15).

The difficulties of this process are well-documented. Childhood memories are “at best fragile and fragmented and at worst impossible to retrieve” (Douglas, 21).

Autobiographies are laden with memory loss, memory gaps, false memory, and a plethora of other memory-related controversies. Autobiography is a genre weighed down by public suspicion, and memory, along with truth, remains a key stake in authorizing autobiographies of childhood (ibid).

Besides difficulties of access, memory is always mediated through prevalent discourses in what we read, see and hear. These provide a range of cultural templates through which we remember our own and the childhoods of others.

In representing childhoods past, these autobiographies reveal more about the present than they do about the past. These texts are deeply imbued with the preoccupations of the present – children’s rights, children’s futures, education, violence against and by children, socialization, and childhood sexuality...individual lives become emblematic of wider social concerns about childhood (Douglas, 6).

As David Peace, author of *The Damned Utd* and the *Red Riding* quartet, puts it: “There is no such thing as non-fiction – you cannot write every single moment in a person’s life. Therefore you must select the bits to tell. Because you are being selective, it becomes a subjective telling” (Peace).

Fiction has also provided source material for historians but Heywood, citing the work of Roger Cox, warns against reading in a straight-forward way. As with all reading of fiction, an “act of interpretation must intervene” (Heywood 2013, 231). The reasons for historians to approach non-fiction with caution apply equally to fiction. But childhood in fiction must also serve a literary purpose, which may well supersede its documentary merits, thus creating an added basis for care.

Children in fiction

Childhood remains an enduring literary topic, Adrienne Gavin believes, because “...the figure of the child continues to raise for writers and readers more questions – about self, youth, life, sexuality, interiority, innocence, evil, hope, loss, life, death, justice, imagination, nature, nurture, the past, the future, the here and now, and the hereafter – than it can ever, even symbolically answer” (2012a, 17).

She acknowledges a dislocation between “real life” and the literary child. Yet literature is not entirely divorced from life. Conversely, some literary portrayals have influenced real life. Here Gavin (2012a) mentions the way Charles Dickens’s literary children raised public concerns over child neglect and mistreatment (3), particularly among the children of the poor (Diniejko). Through his vast readership, he was able to “bring the desire for social reform to the common individual” in a way they could understand and identify with (Teachout).

During a long writing career, his interests shifted from the individual to the hardships wrought by an industrial society, dealing with issues of poverty, class division, industrial relations, bad sanitation and privilege. His writing is thought to have contributed indirectly to a number of legal reforms. His criticism of the Poor Law of 1834 and the administration of the workhouse, for example, was influential in the abolition of imprisonment for debts (Teachout, Diniejko).

Like Gavin, though, my concern is not the literary depiction of children for the sake of historical verity. Even where writers are attempting a “true-to-life” portrait of childhood, they will make use of imperfect memory and, consciously or sub-consciously, they are influenced by current thinking as well as emotion –about childhoods in general and their own in particular.

Perhaps more importantly, the needs of the literary work itself will influence the image portrayed. The type of childhood depicted might serve to contrast with childhood in another time, or as emblematic of attitudes or issues the author wishes to highlight.

Even so, it is perhaps most vividly through literature that we gain a sense of the “felt life” and how changing notions of childhood have practical expression in the reality of the day-to-day world. Psychological, historical and sociological studies attempt an objective view of childhood, while literature allows us to place ourselves in the shoes of others in a way distinct even from film or television.

Fiction and narrative non-fiction allow the reader to enter what Tom Wolfe calls the “subjective and emotional life” of the characters, by the use of scenes, dialogue and interior monologue (Wolfe, 35). We become privy to all their fears, flaws and vulnerabilities. Reading isn’t passive observation. The fiction writer provides a map, but the reader is forced to take the journey.

We should be able to enter the book or the bed like Alice entering the Looking-Glass Wood, no longer carrying with us the prejudices of our past and relinquishing for that instant of intercourse our social trappings. Reading or making love, we should be able to lose ourselves in the other, into whom – to borrow Saint John’s image – we are transformed: reader into writer into reader, lover into lover into lover (Manguel, 181).

Nonetheless, it is useful to gain some insight into the historical and sociological context in which a particular novel was written in order to appreciate fully its meaning, themes and significance in society.

For example, L.P. Hartley’s *The Go-Between* (1953) is set in 1900 when his protagonist is twelve. Viewed through the prism of contemporary standards, with a failure to appreciate the extent of Leo’s sexual innocence and the importance placed on it, its intimations of dread and looming ruin might contain a sense of bathos.

In my view, the 1970s film adaptation of *The Go-Between* falls into this trap. Produced in a radically different time, the film is nominally faithful to the events leading up to the climax, but misses the *zeitgeist*. It fails to transmit any sense of the gathering horror or the life-abrogating stakes for Leo.

Fictional lives of children

Children were mostly absent from literature during the early modern period in England, asserts Heywood, "...be it Elizabethan drama or the major novels of the eighteenth century. The child was, at most a marginal figure in an adult world" (2013, 137).

Since then, children's concerns have been the focus of any number of novels. Many, such as Charlotte Brontë's 1847 classic *Jane Eyre*, Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), have used the device of an adult narrator looking back on childhood, giving us access and sometimes limiting us to the child's perspective, but adding explanation or perspective where necessary.

Other novels, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) use the child as narrator. More contemporary examples, which use child narrators who are simultaneously naïve yet knowing in adult realities like violence and terrorism, include *Pigeon English* by Stephen Kelman (2011) and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer (2006).

All childhood narrators presuppose some level of unreliability, and recent novels like Emma O'Donoghue's *Room* (2010) and Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (2003) compound this unreliability by using narrators who are either extremely young – the narrator of *Room* is five – or, in the case of Haddon's narrator, constrained by Asperger's Syndrome.

In *What Maisie Knew*, Henry James uses an external narrator who leaves the reader in no doubt as to his opinion of Maisie's parents, yet mostly limits the perspective on their behaviour to that of Maisie, allowing the reader to gain insights that Maisie does not have access to (18).

"This was an effect in which Henry James later specialised," writes David Lodge, "telling the story through the consciousness of characters whose understanding of events is partial, mistaken, deceived, or self-deceiving" (797).

Writers focus on the lives of children for different literary reasons. Thomas C. Foster suggests what he believes to be the most common of them:

More often than not, the child narrator's task is to provide the Martian perspective...Even when the narrator has left childhood behind, looking back through

his younger eyes affords the novelist this same defamiliarization of the ordinary, adult, world (59, 60).

This is a device more fully explored in the next chapter, but a character like Pip in *Great Expectations* offers us a critique of Victorian society by forcing us to view class distinction and privilege anew, through the naïve and “innocent” eyes of the child.

However, I believe the emotional appeal of a child’s voice often has less to do with this “Martian view” than with the reader’s visceral reaction to the sensual experience that children retain, before they grow jaded and less aware. This concentration on the senses, and its association with emotion, recalls for adults their own intense reactions to life and invokes nostalgia for their childhoods.

As Leo recalls in *The Go-Between*: “...the smell of home exhaled by the trunk and tuck-box, drowning the smell of school” (Hartley, 26).

The Dickens children, though, allow us a glimpse into the kind of childhood that most middle-class, nineteenth-century readers had no conception of. He showed his contemporaries the lives of working-class children, which caused a groundswell of public opinion.

Besides leading to legal and policy change, his work amplified the view of reformers that children should be in school rather than at work. In this, he was influential in changing the lives of children through the next century – and the conception of childhood forever.

Chapter Two: *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens

Among Charles Dickens's numerous children – the innocent and the abused, the dying and those who became strong adults – it would be hard to find one who has sunk into obscurity. Each influenced public opinion over the way childhood was regarded in society, both during Dickens's lifetime and for several decades after his death (Collins, 1965).

In 1812, Dickens was born into a society in which the meaning of childhood was ambiguous (Hendrick). The concept was keenly affected by class difference, which determined at which age a child would enter the adult world. A century later, after what Heywood (2013) suggests was the greatest turning point in the construction of Western childhood, much of this uncertainty had been resolved and what it meant to be a child had largely been agreed upon, at least to the satisfaction of the middle and “respectable” working classes in the West.

A recognizably 'modern' notion was in place: childhood was legally, legislatively socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalized (Hendrick, 36).

By the early years of the twentieth century, doctors, psycho-analysts and welfare workers had had their say and the concept accepted by the policy makers and, to a large extent, by society as a whole.

Dickens lived through a time of revolutionary change in the way society conceived of children. And having experienced its turmoil in his own life, he used his writing to influence its ferment (Cox, Gavin 2012a, Collins). Peter Coveney goes so far as to argue that, without him, Britain would have felt very differently, particularly about children (119).

The language of childhood

The discourse around children through Dickens's lifetime was torn between two extremes. Locke, and even more so, Rousseau, had destroyed the notion of original sin in favour of the more humanist view of the morally neutral child, with capacity for good (Hendrick, citing Plumb and Houlbrooke). While Locke favoured the idea that the child should merge into adulthood as soon as possible, Rousseau gave us the modern perception that childhood, as a separate state, should precede adulthood.

Few would question that the innocent child was manufactured by Rousseau, with refinements by Wordsworth and a thousand lesser writers, interior decorators, and producers of greeting cards. Prior to the eighteenth century, says Ariès, nobody worried about soiling childhood innocence because “nobody thought that this innocence really existed” (Kincaid, 72).

From Rousseau, with his “validation of Nature”, emerged the Romantic view of childhood espoused by the turn-of-the-century poets, like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, for whom the child became central to their attempts to investigate “the Self”. Original innocence became a symbol of protest against the increasing materialism of a society in the grip of the industrial revolution (Hendrick, 38) and childhood a means to reflect on human development (Douglas). Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, for example explained “the development of the artist’s mind, the loss of innocence, and the rise of experience” (8).

Both Blake and Wordsworth, however, also “‘provide a forward-looking nostalgia’ – a sense of nostalgia that seeks to create a strong present and a stronger future”, writes Gavin (2012a), citing Roderick McGillis (8).

Wordsworth continued this theme in *Intimations of Immortality* and *My Heart Leaps up*, which contains the line much quoted by those who study and write about children: “The child is father to the man”.

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die! (Wordsworth, 3)

Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* uses the Romantic view of adulthood as a “falling away from childhood’s innocence” (Gavin 2012a, 8). In *Infant Joy*, he writes of the bliss of innocence that is ours at birth:

I have no name

I am but two days old.'

What shall I call thee?

'I happy am

Joy is my name.'

Sweet joy befall thee! (Blake, 16)

At the other extreme of childhood discourse lay the inheritors of John Wesley's more puritan view, within the nineteenth-century evangelical movement, discussed more fully below. These two views ran in counterpoint through the century so that, as C. John Sommerville points out, the period highlighted "one of the greatest puzzles of our history" – that the "greatest exploitation of children coincided with greatest glorification of childhood". (160)

Neither of these views, however, remained static. Most theorists seem to agree that, despite their disparity, they succeeded in influencing each other to the extent that, by the end of the century, society had more or less settled on a stance which borrowed from both.

The Romantics were initially challenged by reverberations from the French revolution which elicited some alarm over insurrection across the channel. Fear ushered in a suppression of liberties and concern over the notion of "freedom". Simultaneously, the industrial revolution was accompanied by a utilitarian acceptance of the need for child labour, both to create a cheap labour force and to supplement family incomes (Hendrick 39, citing Thomas & Holt and Stevenson).

Despite these challenges, Romanticism survived into the early twentieth century, but the intervening years rubbed the radicalism and subtlety from the child-Nature relationship espoused by Rousseau, replacing it with the "crude view" of a "natural incapacity and vulnerability" (Hendrick 38, citing Sommerville and Coveney).

While the broad evangelical movement was laying the foundations for middle-class domestic life in the nineteenth century (Cox 102, citing Davido & Hall), Victorian Romanticism became influenced by the "near-divine" status afforded by Evangelicals to the bourgeois family and, in particular, the middle-class mother (Hardyment 1984). By the end of the century, Romanticism had become a far more sentimentalised and domesticated creature than Rousseau had envisaged (Hendrick, Cox).

Across the field of combat from early nineteenth-century Romantics were ranged evangelical writers like Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More – but without the full ferocity of the Puritan concept of “original sin”. Harry Hendrick argues that, along with other Evangelicals of her time, More never underestimated the importance of education. She thought adults should invest time, concern, thought and money in their children (39, 40), while Trimmer believed in rooting out subversion and emanating “a rationality which left the hierarchy undisturbed”. To her mind, children should not be aware of passions like envy or jealousy (Cox 100, citing Grylls and Salway).

Their variety of religious child rearing lacked the “standardized indifference or brutality” of earlier centuries (Robertson 422). Though More believed in man’s corrupt nature, she nonetheless thought it best dealt with through mildness, steady insistence and obedience.

Cox believes it is largely due to novelists like Dickens that commentaries through the next century were so dismissive of writers like Trimmer and More. While their preoccupations and methods might sound odd to the contemporary ear, there was nonetheless a “deep moral seriousness about their approach to children which carried the tradition of Locke, and before him of the Puritans and the Humanists, far into the nineteenth century” (102). The diminishing of this, he suggests, is the real loss to children.

Treating children as innocent may grant them more freedom to develop in their own way and at the own time, but it can also lead to adults shaping children in their own image of childish innocence (115).

Sommerville agrees. While Victorian writers tried to sympathise with children, he believes their idealisation may have made many parents more repressive of behaviour that did not fit that ideal (172).

As far as generalisation is possible, the prevailing doctrine that carried through the century was Evangelical, but suitably influenced and toned down by the Romantics (Cox). The notion of childhood innocence was easily absorbed into the Evangelical tradition, once innocence became defined as a lack, or an emptiness, to be filled with care. The child’s relationship to Nature itself was domesticated – for bourgeois children it was reduced to “the garden” in which innocence could be nurtured, while adults took from it “the lost paradise of childhood happiness” (Cox 113, Kincaid, Coveney). Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*, in which Mary Lennox, an unloved and unlovely

child, and her sickly cousin Colin Craven, are both rejuvenated by creating a natural paradise from the neglected plants in an enclosed garden.

From the Puritan side, the doctrine of original sin ends not with a bang but a whimper, lapsing into irrelevance or rather...merging with Romanticism and evolving into theories of recapitulation in which the primitive, the child, has to evolve into the civilised adult (Cox 114, citing Briggs and Cunningham).

A notable exception to the view of a tempered Victorian evangelicism is offered by Jacqueline Banerjee. She claims the century saw a “great tide” of evangelicism swamp Rousseau’s belief in the innocence of man’s natural state and bring back “with a vengeance” the Puritans’ belief in original sin (1996, 50, 51). As evidence, she cites the children’s writer whom Heywood refers to as the most intense of a group of early nineteenth-century moralist writers (2013, 2960), best known for *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818).

Besides taking his squabbling children to see a rotting corpse as a moral lesson (Heywood 2013, 2960), Mr Fairchild says, in his “strident voice”: ”I stand in the place of God to you, whilst you are a child...” (Banerjee 1996, 51)

Heywood also believes the idea of original sin died hard (2013, 799). As evidence, however, both writers refer solely to a particularly didactic strand of children’s fiction, which carried its potent evangelical message through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (2947–2952).

Like the Puritans, the evangelicals did batter at the “laxities” of their age, and sought morality through discipline and family life. Examples of what Coveney refers to as “religious savagery” can certainly be found, but such “extreme examples, literary or real, should be regarded with care”, according to Cox. *The History of the Fairchild Family*, for example, while widely read, was also much ridiculed and condemned (104–107).

Fiction is influenced by prevailing attitudes, but cannot in my view be taken as evidence of historical conditions. The intention of Mrs Sherwood and her contemporaneous band of worthy Puritans was prescriptive rather than descriptive, just as Dickens himself may have been reformatory rather than strictly documentary in much of his writing. The voices of these moralists may well have been louder than their numbers would suggest.

So much for the middle classes. The working-class child in the nineteenth century had a very different life from that suggested by the advice books for parents. Any debate over childhood innocence had little relevance to most young people, who were being fed into the working world of adults at an early age (Heywood 2013, 804).

The children of the poor

The factory child emerged as a result of economic pressures and the utilitarian belief in the good of labour for the “dangerous classes”.

It is useful to point out that Victorians did not invent child labour. Throughout history, particularly in rural areas, children had been expected to contribute to the economy of their families. Proto-industrialisation familiarised the idea of young children in regular employment so that, with few exceptions, Cunningham suggests middle- and upper-class observers were in favour of stemming the “idleness” of children. The “burden of original sin” might lie somewhat lighter in didactic fiction, but it was quickly replaced by a utilitarian morality – that hard work and enterprise leads to just rewards (Cox 118, 119).

A number of nineteenth-century authorities saw industry as a solution for women and children living in poverty (Heywood 2013), while for the working class, whose families grew larger under industrialisation, child labour became a necessity for survival.

Heywood puts a slightly different complexion on working children. “Despite the grisly images”, he reckons that much of their work tended to be casual and undemanding (2013, 3814). Children drifted gradually into work, making themselves useful on farms or in workshops from the age of about six, taking on appropriate tasks. Training for more skilled tasks only took place after ten, at the earliest.

Whether industrialisation did in fact increase the number of children employed is a matter of dispute among British historians, Heywood argues. It is not clear whether the peak of children’s employment occurred during the proto-industrial phase, or from the start of the factory phase in the 1830s and ‘40s. By 1851, only 3.5% of children under nine were working. Even with a high margin of error, he suggests that the vast majority of this age group did not work, while only 30% of the ten to fourteen age group worked.

But “most historians” would accept that industry generally brought a more intensive work regime in certain occupations. Children in the cotton mills and urban “sweatshops” were in

the minority, but faced “more regular employment through the year, longer hours and a more sustained level of effort than their peers” (3964).

Industrialisation did not entail a mere shift of workplace from home to factory, argues Cunningham. Besides its increased regularity, entry into work was sudden rather than phased. Children, who often began work at ten or younger, could no longer work under the supervision of their own families. “The family as an institution may have survived the industrial revolution, but many individual children did not” (89).

On the whole, however, Heywood argues that the “often distressing experiences” of children working in factories were “far from typical” – “yet it was their plight that loomed large in the debates over child labour launched by social reformers” (2013, 4046).

Rescuing the children

The first objections to child labour came from doctors in the industrial towns. But their case was not as clear-cut as one might think, says Heywood, since the health risks had to be weighed against the benefits of “combating the debilitating effects of poverty” (2013, 4065). Employers liked to claim that children’s health was more at risk from the poverty and living conditions in the slums (Cunningham).

Throughout the century, reformers debated the age of childhood, the quality of labour and, through that, the quality of childhood itself came under discussion. This fostered a move towards an ideal, which eventually led to a universal acceptance of what it meant to be a child (Hendrick, Cunningham).

Reformers approached the issue from both an evangelical and a Romantic standpoint. Evangelicals saw their work as a Christian crusade – a way of purifying and strengthening the nation. But the most concerted objections came from those of a Romantic persuasion. Their view of childhood “became embedded in the rhetoric of the factory movement” of the 1830s and ‘40s. It had the advantage of emotion, which won over the “reason” espoused by the utilitarians and evangelicals (Cunningham 141–143).

Both the evangelicals and the Romantics hoped to restore children to what they all now saw as a “real childhood”, a time of happiness, safety, under the protection of adults, and a state of innocence (Hillel 146, 150).

By the middle of the century, when Dickens began serialising *David Copperfield*, middle- and upper-class children did not work. For many working-class children, however, work was a necessity. Nonetheless, the childhood ideal had been largely accepted and this ideal played a large part in the growing opposition to child labour, with its aim of saving children for childhood (Heywood 2013). And those who did most to crystallise this opposition were the writers and artists of the day (Sommerville). Lewis Sadler documented children in factories through his photographs, while Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Kingsley and George Eliot all wrote of the lives of English children.

The childhood ideal eventually declined into sentimentality, with a rise of rhetoric and pathos (Cox, Coveney). “Children were portrayed, in middle-class literature, as wondrous innocents, full of love and deserving to be loved in turn” (Stearns 2006, 78, 79). Innocence, and the redemptive qualities of children were common, and central to the themes of works like Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* and George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* (Banerjee 2007).

This idealisation, like the virgin-whore dichotomy in the treatment of women, has its opposing side of the coin. The evangelical desire for education and the Romantic longing for a return to innocence worked hand-in-hand with a fear of the working classes which followed the French revolution. Out of a Romantic core – the ideal of the mythical child – grew a fear of the criminal propensities of street children, or “street Arabs” as they were referred to (Hendrick, Cunningham). This proclivity was dramatised, in Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*, by the reaction to Tom the chimney sweep in a middle-class household:

Up jumped the little white lady in her bed, and, seeing Tom, screamed as shrill as any peacock. In rushed a stout old nurse from the next room, and seeing Tom likewise, made up her mind that he had come to rob, plunder, destroy, and burn; and dashed at him, as he lay over the fender, so fast that she caught him by the jacket.

But she did not hold him. Tom had been in a policeman’s hands many a time, and out of them too, what is more... (Kingsley 25).

The Romantic child – by this stage suitably domesticated – contrasted sharply with the knowing child of work, who had become to all intents and purposes an adult (Hendrick, Cunningham).

Children who did not fit the ideal were feared and viewed as bestial. Hendrick cites a Victorian writer, M.D. Hill (1855), who compares “the city Arabs” to the “‘ownerless’ dogs

of Constantinople” Significantly, he declares the “little stunted man” knows too much about life. Having lost trust and requiring no protection, he has “consequently much to unlearn – he has to be turned again into a child...” (Hendrick 43).

The literary child

Literature both affects and is influenced by attitudes within society. In Romantic poetry, for example, childhood represented a longed-for state, but for the Victorians, it no longer serves this need. Instead childhood is often a vulnerable state in which the child is the victim of adult power, neglect or brutality. Brenda’s *Froggy’s Little Brother*, for example, recounts the tear-jerking story of an orphaned seven-year-old trying to work and keep his baby brother alive in the East End of London.

Children lose some of their symbolic value and become more human and distinct as characters. Think of Lewis Carroll’s Alice, Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, and Dickens’s Oliver Twist, Pip and Little Nell (Gavin 2012a, 9).

Adult literature does still contain some didactic and symbolic child figures, who play the role of examples or teachers, but this moralistic literature does not imply that children are evil by nature. Rather, according to Sommerville, it shows the world as full of evil and likely to influence them. “The more writers regarded children as naturally innocent, the more efforts were made to protect them from a threatening world” (144).

The *Bildungsroman* makes its appearance felt, with Dickens vying with Charlotte Brontë and Thomas Hardy to use fictional forms to “explore the (often difficult) physical, social, psychological and/or spiritual development of the protagonist from child to adulthood” (Douglas 8).

Unlike contemporary autobiographers, for whom childhood becomes innately important, these writers use childhood as a means to an end. Childhood forms part of the protagonist’s progress as they find their place in the social order. In so doing, though, writers like Dickens and Brontë were certainly still concerned with the rights of the child in their representation of child mortality, class and gender inequality (Douglas).

Before the nineteenth century, little literary space was given to working-class children. They make their appearance now, but are dealt with quite differently from middle-class children (Banerjee 1996, Gavin 2012a). Street and working children are shown as prematurely adult,

savage and animalistic (Hillel). And it is this apparent contradiction which leads Thiel to argue that the dilemma facing Victorian novelists is to reconcile these “animalistic” images with the Romantic child. Citing Monica Flegel, she claims that it would be tempting to see this dichotomy purely in class terms, but views this as simplistic. Some working-class protagonists, she points out, are inherently innocent, although their peers may be “untamed” (133, 134).

To my mind, however, there is little real contradiction. By its nature, angelic must have its demonic counterpoint – the flip side of the ethereal coin. If working-class children have not yet sunk into degeneracy, child-rescue literature shows them as victims, worthy of being saved – and often pretty and appealing beneath the grime (Hillel 151). *Oliver Twist*, for example, retains his saintly innocence throughout Dickens’s eponymous novel. His innate nobility leads not just to his rescue, but to his ascendancy as a lost member of the aristocracy. The Artful Dodger, on the other hand, is portrayed as a drinking, swearing small adult, who has subsided into the degeneracy of Fagin’s boys, and therefore cannot be saved.

The untamed “child savage”, particularly for Dickens, does in any case not reflect an inherent immorality, but is rather the vulnerable and powerless victim of societal or familial neglect. The notion of natural innocence is therefore retained, even for working-class children.

If these children are not yet beyond the pale, the child-rescue genre dispenses the slightest hint of unruliness, either by religious conversion or by the child’s removal from the degenerate world. Like thirteen-year-old Mary in Brenda’s *Nothing to Nobody*, those who straddle the line or show any evidence of degeneracy, can indeed still be saved – though not for a return to the happy innocence of an ideal childhood – but at least to virtue (Thiel).

Early death is a trope often used with heavy pathos and sentimentality, the dying children shown to be angelic and closer to God (Gavin 2012a). Death is shown to be preferable to corruption and premature maturity – an extreme saviour perhaps. Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Match Girl* and little Nell in Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* are both appealing, pretty children who die before the corruption of the world can despoil them while, for Kingsley’s Tom the chimney-sweep, death (and resurrection) offer a release from the cruelties of the world.

Banerjee (1996), however, disagrees. She argues that Dickens and his contemporaries were not trying to “domesticate death and take it in by the fireside”. Death, she says, was already a

“familiar presence at the family hearth”. Highlighting the spiritual strength of the dying child was a way of creating positive meaning out of premature death (88).

The Dickens childhood

Charles Dickens both existed within this literary tradition and helped create it. Coveney believes that, through Dickens, we can survey the Victorian childhood. Yet to write of his literary children is to write also of Dickens himself. “The child was at the heart of his interest; at the centre of the Dickens world” (111). In fact, John Carey believes this thread of autobiography runs through novel after novel: “the bright, pure child in the mouldering house” (2743).

Gavin says Dickens became the pre-eminent writer of Victorian childhood – not only because of the numbers of memorable children he created, but because his books typify, and helped create – so many of the features of the Victorian literary child: “sentimentalized child deaths, humanizing of child characters, focus on children as victims, and didactic or symbolic use of child figures” (2012a, 9).

Dickens makes use of different categories of literary children. His saintly portrayals of children “too good for this fallen world” (Wood 2012, 117), like Little Dorrit and Nell, are there to “gratify the ideals of the adult reader” (Carey 2391). Johnny, the doomed child in *Our Mutual Friend* is pretty, with shy manners, blue eyes and “fat, dimpled” hands (Dickens 2011, 133). He is uncorrupted by having been brought up in a poor house, but is ultimately drawn away by “the Power and the Glory” (218) before he can lose his innocence.

In *Bleak House* (2013a), a novel replete with inequities and social ills, Dickens paints a pathetic portrait of Jo, a friendless orphaned street sweeper who is illiterate and ignorant beyond his knowledge that “a broom’s a broom” (2475). His death allows Dickens to comment on the fate of vulnerable children:

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day (10564).

Esther’s childhood is typical of the Victorian literary childhood described by Gavin (2012a): lonely and neglected, she a powerless victim of adult power and hypocrisy. Her godmother’s “darkened face had such power over me that it stopped me in the midst of my vehemence. I

put up my trembling little hand to clasp hers or to beg her pardon...but withdrew it as she looked at me, and laid it on my fluttering heart” (Dickens 2013a, 348).

On her birthday, she is told: “It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday, that you had never been born!” Her mother, adds her godmother, “is your disgrace, and you were hers” (351).

This is true also of the childhood depicted in *Dombey and Son*, in which Frances is shamefully neglected in favour of the son who dies at the age of six. Both *Hard Times* and *Nicholas Nickleby* show children as victims of adult power and brutality, and both illustrate Dickens’s intense interest in education by providing trenchant commentary on the nature of learning and schools.

Responding to the Children’s Employment Commission Report on “the miseries suffered by many poor children” (Diniejko), Dickens produced *A Christmas Carol*, which documents the differences between the type of Christmas experienced by rich and poor, and portrays the selfishness and greed of his society.

His more “realistic” recollections of childhood, “most of which turn up in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*” (Carey 2391), offer criticisms of a society which failed children. Yet to discuss Dickens as a realist or to examine the precision of his social commentary, argues Coveney, is to “confuse the essential purposes of his art. His account of the world was continuously moral” (114).

In his novels, evil emanates both from individuals and from societal institutions, but goodness always comes from individuals who are possessed of empathy and caring for others (114).

Dickens is known as a reformer, but equally as a sentimentalist (Heywood 2013, Coveney). Oscar Wilde apparently joked that one needed a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing (Heywood 2013, 1077).

But was Wilde’s quip on point or was he unfairly cynical? Sentimentality is a difficult concept to pin down at the best of times and is further complicated by changing tastes. Coveney makes two points on this. Firstly, in his most powerful depictions of childhood, Dickens mingles both the sentimentality of sadness and idealisation with that of the squalid.

Secondly, he argues that one should distinguish carefully between apparent sentimentality and the deep feeling appropriate to the situation he writes of.

This is the argument most often associated with his defenders. If sentimentality is defined as an imbalance of feeling and insight, then a book which leaves us with nothing but feeling is sentimental. If we are invited to take from it more than meaningless emotion, then it does not fall into the same trap. It could be said that Dickens manages to avoid the charge of pure sentimentality by conferring significance on the pathos of his literary children.

Dickens had personal knowledge of the working-class experience. His family was imprisoned in a debtors' prison when he was ten and he was sent to work in a boot-blackening factory for six months. Coveney believes he was able to use this alongside his intelligence, humour and social awareness – and in so doing transform his weakness, at least sometimes, into his strength.

Dickens remains a folk hero – and the touchstone for writing about children – precisely because of this. He allowed the middle classes to see the children of the poor – both working and street children – with the same eyes as their own children (Cox 120).

His children...exemplify the kind of interests he brought to the novel, and the methods within which he worked...David Copperfield and Pip in *Great Expectations* are among the most remarkable evocations of childhood in the whole range of the century's literature, and scarcely pale before the more consciously psychological creations of our own (Coveney 157, 158).

David Copperfield's childhood

It is clear that Dickens's influence was Romantic – but in the Victorian sense, rather than that of the Romantic poets.

The natural state of his literary children is virtue and his novels reiterate Wordsworth's view of the child "as father to the man" (Locke 13). Good men have remained so by retaining the best of their childhood selves: according to Copperfield, a "freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood" (Dickens 2010, 370). Yet, while he worked within these assumptions, his sentimental, sometimes morbid sensibility is not found in Blake or Wordsworth (Coveney 139, 140).

His dying children do so “with a rustle of angel’s wings”, a concept which would have been ridiculous to Milton or Donne, for whom the angel was mightier than man in power and intellect. “The deterioration of the angel is a further sign of Victorian religion ebbing into sentiment” (Carey 2553).

There are also aspects of the Romantic tradition not found in Dickens’s writing. He was a man of the city rather than of Nature. Even his “most indignant descriptions” of London have a “relish and particularity” never found in his country scenes (Collins 212).

Collins argues that Dickens was unlikely to have drawn his Romantic ideas from the poets, except possibly Wordsworth, since he never read much poetry and owed more to the essayists of his age who acted as “Romantic middlemen” (213). Largely though, Dickens was a “do-it-yourself” thinker, who drew some basic sympathies and assumptions from his own childhood (211). His ideas were often “homespun”, since he was not always well-informed on his favourite topics and “not much given to reflection”.

Many of his ideas need not be traced to...the Romantic ethos, or to any source more recondite than common sense and a good heart; this does not make them bad ideas...Dickens’s ideas and understanding are often limited, but they are generally pointing towards the truth, not galloping logically towards nonsense (218).

David Copperfield is one of his more realist works. The narrator is more complex as a character and is certainly less idealised than characters like Little Nell or Oliver Twist. As such, the novel does not reflect either his penchant for what Wood refers to as the “doomed angelic child” (2012, 117) or for the angel rescued from depravity – although the novel contains echoes of both, in the shape of subsidiary characters, Little Em’ly, and the two pretty child brides, Clara and Dora. As innocents, all three are adored for their beauty and purity, but with the implicit realisation that this quality cannot survive into true adulthood – it must become debased, or they must die.

Clara and Dora inevitably succumb. Little Em’ly, who becomes a fallen woman, can be saved by her adoring Uncle – but only to virtue. Like Mary in *Nothing to Nobody*, she cannot be restored to society, or to innocence. She must be transported, and live a virtuous life, but alone.

David himself, though, is in a sense rescued by Miss Betsey, but has far greater agency in saving himself than many within the child-rescue trope. Unlike *Oliver Twist*, the novel does

not “show” a “principle”, according to Richard Locke. David is not static, but changing, and his childhood is both a resource for creativity and a curse that must be overcome (23, 24).

In my view, the five phases of childhood represented in *David Copperfield* provide, between them, a complete overview of the different forms of childhood described through the Victorian period. The novel is interesting specifically because the protagonist crosses these boundaries, from middle to working class and back.

God grant you find one face there, You loved when all was young¹

The first phase of David Copperfield’s childhood plays out with Peggotty and his mother in their middle-class home, The Rookery. This is a happy time despite the fact that his mother does not conform to the ideal of the saintly Victorian mother. Miss Betsey explicitly refers to her as a “child” and a “very baby” (Dickens 2010, 197), while the Murdstones don’t trust her with household management and treat her as still requiring training and discipline (2462). Even Peggotty speaks to her as a child (2313).

She is evidence of the fact that, for vulnerable children, even those not of the working classes, childhood does not extend into or beyond the teens. As an orphan, she was working as a nursery governess when she met David’s father and, at barely twenty, she is already a widow and a mother.

She behaves like a child, hiding behind a chair when Miss Betsey comes to call. She is David’s companion, gathering berries, playing games and dancing with him (421).

She appears to form the pattern for his first choice of marriage partner and, even in his early childhood, she is more like a beloved older sibling than a parental figure – although certainly an object of sensual admiration: “I watch her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straightening her waist, and nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty” (421).

The importance of home and family, however, is strong in his description of his “nest”, and of Clara as his “comforter and friend” (925).

¹ I have drawn the headings in this section from Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*. A contemporary of Dickens, Kingsley was concerned with many of the same social issues. *The Water Babies* is an important novel in relation to Victorian childhood, exemplifying the Romantic ideal of the innocent child for whom death, and resurrection, offer an escape from the brutalities of the world.

Peggotty holds sway, since they submit to her direction and she stands *in loco parentis* to both. David reads to her in the evening while she does the household sewing, and he is frequently pressed to her comforting bosom, squeezed till her buttons fly off. David regards her as beautiful, though in a different style from his mother.

Christina Hardyment (1984) tells us that a servant/nurse was a common figure, even in middle-class homes, so *The Rookery* was not unusual in this. In many ways, though, Peggotty appears to conform to the idea of the idealised mother described in the parental advice manuals of the times.

David does not attend school, but is given classes by Peggotty and his mother. This is typical of the ideal bourgeois home of the times, in which mothers were urged to provide early education for their children. Only later would boys be sent to public schools and girls consigned to the care of governesses (Hardyment 1984).

Even in this happy setting, though, the adult-child relationship sounds strange to the contemporary ear. The narrator does not appear to regard it as out of the ordinary that both his mother and Peggotty should marry without consulting or even informing the child, or having him present at their nuptials. David's first knowledge of his baby brother is when he comes home and finds a baby in his mother's arms.

Sweet is the love which Nature brings

David's time with the Peggottys is a childhood after the Rousseauian ideal. He and Little Em'ly exist in a state distinct from that of the adults, they are innately innocent and good, and are left free and unconstrained to discover the world through Nature. "The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play" (Dickens 2010, 847).

We strolled a long way, and loaded ourselves with things that we thought curious, and put some stranded starfish carefully back into the water...and went in to breakfast glowing with health and pleasure (838).

In his approbation for this style of childhood and the language he uses to extol its virtues can we most clearly see Dickens's Romantic sensibilities, his love of gallantry (849) and echoes of the angelic Victorian girl-child.

If, any sunny forenoon, she had spread a little pair of wings and flown away before my eyes, I don't think I should have regarded it as much more than I had had reason to expect (844).

A man who was nailed to a cross

The quality of his childhood changes abruptly when he returns home to find the Murdstones ensconced in his home. "...with their 'gloomy taint', with their 'austere and wrathful' religion, [they] are particular villains of the Dickens world," Coveney remarks (127).

Two diametrically opposed modes of parenting are in conflict here, a fact demonstrated by David's shock when he first encounters the new regime: "A word of encouragement and explanation, of pity for my childish ignorance...might have made me respect instead of hate him" (Dickens 2010, 1032).

Neither his mother nor Peggotty has the strength to oppose the Murdstones – their villainy inscribed even in the pun of their name – and his mother is forced to embrace him secretly and whisper that he should obey the new lord and master of the house.

Murdstone is the stereotype of the withdrawn and severe Victorian father, who uses harsh corporal punishment liberally and then instructs David to: "'Wash that face, sir, and come down with me'" (1024).

He is the undisputed ruler of the household. As the adult voice of the narrator comments: "...nobody else in his world was to be firm at all, for everybody was to be bent to his firmness" (1084).

It is interesting that Dickens reserves such ire for parents and step-parents. As Cox remarks, they tend to be cruel and demanding, pompous and insensitive, distant and unloving (120), while Carey says the child's view of grown-ups is "not just unflattering but alien, barbaric" (2464). Yet was this true to his times, or was it a result of his own unique experiences?

"Extreme oppression of children for their own good", argues Hardyment, was not typical of middle-class parents with good intentions, and the myth of the harsh Victorian father was a rarity, perpetuated by a few "fire and brimstone addicts". Most middle-class parents of common sense fell between the "child martyrs and the imps of Satan". A common metaphor for child rearing was the seedbed, with parents as gardeners. Advice books stressed kind

words and a lack of harsh words, while children should be held apart from the harsh realities of adulthood (1984, 77–79).

She finds it hard to see how parents could in reality have been the caricatures created by many social historians. “The message that emerges most clearly is that of affection – powerfully tinged with Christian respectability, but affection none the less” (86).

Dickens’s own experiences might have had some bearing on this representation. He never forgave his mother for opposing his removal from the boot-blackening factory to attend school (Jiwani). However, despite the fact that his father was the author of the family’s misfortune, Dickens remained tolerantly amused by his own father (2). Perhaps more importantly, though, the villainy of parents serves a literary function in delivering the necessary conflict. The tyrant provides a useful aesthetic counterpoint to goodness, giving the “good child” something to oppose.

For Dickens, the dividing line between the childhood David Copperfield experienced before, and that meted out by the Murdstones, is religion. He equates the Murdstones’ harshness with Puritanism, as it was conceived in the seventeenth century. Their religion is “austere and wrathful” (Dickens 2010, 1130), while Miss Murdstone utters “miserable sinners” (1136), as though she were berating the entire congregation. She rails at David, who is not yet ten, to “repent” (1339). They send him to a school, symbolically named Salem House, at which he is treated with unrelenting harshness.

Banerjee believes this reflects the mood of the times. She expresses no doubt that much physical and emotional damage was inflicted in order to save souls. The authority of the strict and pious father-figure was guarded by law and extended, she says, to step-fathers, schoolmasters and even factory supervisors (1996, 51).

Opposed to hers was the belief that, while the patriarchal Victorian father might have replaced the “vengeful God of puritanism”, he had become, according to Cox, a “poor confined, domesticated figure...” (115).

The nineteenth-century evangelists strove for respect and kindness and taught their children to share the joy and love of religious faith, but our use of the word Puritan to describe “almost any religious influence upon child-rearing” tends to cloud our vision of the time (103).

The history of religious influence upon child-rearing is insidiously rewritten in the nineteenth century by an increasingly antagonistic and sentimental Victorian Romanticism...its anti-Puritan invective has produced one of the most significant myths of the twentieth century Anglo-Saxon world (Cox 108, 109).

As the proponent of a Romantic ideal, Dickens would have contributed to this view. Romanticism increasingly became “a stick with which to beat the hegemony of the evangelical rationalism” (Cox 125).

In his publicly expressed views on childhood, Dickens was “much exercised” by the rival claims of imagination and reason, “of fancy and fact”. In his essays, he conflates rationalism with evangelicism and attacks them equally for what he sees as their kill-joy desire to kill the essence of childhood (122).

Dickens objected to church intervention in education (Litvack) and his novels show antipathy to any philosophy which appears to crush childhood’s “fancy”. Thomas Gradgrind, the headmaster in *Hard Times*, attempts to fill the children with facts, like utilitarian vessels (Dickens 2014), while in, *David Copperfield*, children are treated as naturally vicious creatures, whose evil needs to be beaten out of them.

Besides the use of the name Salem, very little need be explained about Murdstone’s religious proclivities to conjure the “myth of a repressive Puritanism”, says Cox (109). Yet Dickens clearly cannot resist the occasional passage of explicit exposition: “As to any recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that; for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers...” (Dickens 2010, 1195).

Citing Adreian and Andrews, Cox suggests that in Dickens’s hands, religion loses its link to domestic striving and becomes instead an “inevitable source of oppression” (109). The caricature of villainy portrayed by the Murdstones does not attempt a considered critique of evangelist child rearing, but confers on it an almost inescapable hypocrisy and expediency.

Dickens does, however, provide the reader with some suggestion that the Murdstones’ harshness may be due to individual rather than generic qualities. The “gloomy taint that was in the Murdstone blood, darkened the Murdstone religion...” (2010, 1130).

Because of their emphasis on the idealised mother, the nineteenth-century middle-class evangelicals began to distrust the moral influence of servants, according to Hardymont

(1984), and this we do see in the Murdstones, who disapprove of the child's association with Peggotty. However middle-class households also strove to find time for children, while in contrast, David is isolated and neglected in the home.

This phase of childhood is marked by vicious punishments, meted out, Dickens lets it be known, not in the sincere, if misguided desire to rid children of the devil. In his representation of evangelist characters, he appears to equate the Puritan spirit with sadistic intent. "He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death," David declares of his treatment at the hands of Murdstone, after which he lay fevered, hot, torn and sore (2010, 1249).

Of the cruel Mr Creakle, headmaster at Salem House, he declares:

I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite (1872).

Writing from within a more contemporary construction of childhood, Richard Locke refers to the punishment depicted in *David Copperfield* as child abuse though, of course, the term was foreign to the society in which the book is set. It was only in the period between 1880 and 1914 that the "modern concept of 'child abuse' was socially constructed" (Cunningham 151, citing Ferguson).

Until the late nineteenth century, parental rights were paramount. Any form of discipline was permitted within the family, and by agents of the family, to ensure obedience or moral and spiritual compliance. The first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established in Liverpool in 1883 and in London the following year. Only in 1889 was the Children's Charter legislated – the first time in history the law could intervene between a child and their family (Bilston).

Nonetheless, the level of violence shown to David Copperfield, if the historians are to be believed, was unusual for the middle classes. Robertson tells us brutality was the exception, although children had "to mind" and have their spirits curbed.

Robertson cites Cunningham's view that punishment began to shift from physical to mental during the 1840s, "but I have not discovered good evidence for such a change", and remarks

on the fact that caning never ceased in British public schools and only in the late nineteenth century did parents spare the rod and abandon birching (415).

Fear and shaming – like the wearing of placards or dunce caps – were favoured punishments of the time (Robertson 2012).

Interestingly, both Murdstone and Creakle rely on a combination of physical and mental punishment. Murdstone appears to wield guilt as liberally as his cane. “My stripes were sore and stiff...but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal...” (Dickens 2010, 1257).

At home he is excluded and confined and at school ritually humiliated. He is locked in a room for five days by Murdstone, deprived of any contact with his mother and released only for evening prayers and a short morning walk. At school he is sent to Coventry and forced to wear a sign that reads: “Take care of him. He bites” (1659).

Because of his Romantic influences, Dickens allows David to be acutely aware of the effect this phase of childhood has on him, making him “sullen, dull, and dogged” (Dickens 2010, 1198).

Interestingly, though, despite his mockery of it, Dickens appears unwittingly to have absorbed elements of his society’s evangelical sensibility. David Copperfield espouses the importance of formal schooling, of hard work and industry, as well as the centrality of the bourgeois family and the idealised mother, whom he finally finds – at least for his own children – in the form of his second wife, Agnes.

As for chimney-sweeping...he took that for the way of the world

In the most typically Romantic phase of his childhood, the narrator notes in passing that Ham works as a fisherman alongside Mr Peggotty. While Ham’s age is not clear, he is certainly still a child or adolescent. This occupation permits Ham leisure time and the necessity to work does not appear to concern David on his behalf.

However, everything changes for David, now aged ten, when he is forced to work in a warehouse labelling bottles. This is the end of his childhood.

At the time Dickens was writing *David Copperfield*, two Acts had attempted to control child work. The first Factory Act was passed in 1802, but was in effect powerless. The reform

movement grew until the Factory Act of 1833 prohibited children under nine from working and limited the working hours of those under thirteen to eight hours. More legislation in the 1840s extended these limitations to industries besides the mines and textile mills, but thousands remained excluded, including the children of the rural poor on farms and in cottage industries.

Murdstone's attitude to work appears to combine a utilitarian desire for David to be involved in improving labour, with the puritan view that a child in need of correction should have his spirit bent and broken.

Victorian utilitarians did not oppose child labour *per se*, but thought time should be set aside for school and physical growth (Cunningham). These niceties, however, do not appear to concern Murdstone, who tells David he can afford no more schooling and does not see it as advantageous to the boy.

David Copperfield is not unusual in the age he is sent out into the world. Heywood (2013) tells us that most children started at ten or twelve or, in the heavy industries, in their teens. The average age was eleven and a half. He is unusual, however, in his class. Middle-class Victorians of his time either educated their children at home or sent them to school. It is in this phase of his childhood that David makes the transition from middle to working class.

The conditions in which he works are grim: rats and dirt, decaying floors, rooms discoloured by the "dirt and smoke of a hundred years" (Dickens 2010, 3178). He is employed to rinse, wash and examine empty bottles for flaws, and affix labels, corks and seals to full ones. He works long hours – finishing at eight with an hour off for dinner and half an hour for tea. For this he is paid six shillings a week, with sixpence for dinner. These long hours were not uncommon, even for such a young child.

What is perhaps even more surprising for someone raised under different conventions is the swiftness of his conversion from child to adult. As he enters the workplace, the ten-year-old becomes a lodger, with no adult help or support, and is entirely responsible for feeding, clothing and taking care of himself. He eats and drinks in public houses – there appears to be no constraint on children drinking alcohol – and his landlords, the Micawbers, treat him as an adult.

He takes on the responsible task of selling or pawning the couple's belongings and Mrs Micawber tells him: "You have never been a lodger. You have been a friend" (3545). He

continues to be a companion, even when Mr Micawber is consigned to the workhouse, and David is permitted to pass in and out without restriction.

What does seem clear is that children were not permitted to leave their employment, which put them in the position of serfs. David is forced to leave his job in secret and cannot pursue the thief of his belongings for fear that there may be a hue and cry after him.

Despite working in a repugnant environment alongside base companions, drinking and keeping the company of men, David conforms to Dickens's Romantic view of the noble child among the shepherds. David Copperfield remains "...an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things!" (3463).

This phase is marked as the lowest in his life, not due to the effort of the work, it seems, nor to any cruelty on the part of his employers – but for the change in class and circumstance it forces upon him, making of him a "little labouring hind" (3167).

His hopes of growing up to be "a learned and distinguished man" have been dashed. Despite the brutality of the school he has left, he mourns the loss of his education. All he has wanted to become he sees passing away and he feels deep misery and, interestingly, shame (3198).

David dislikes working alongside "common men and boys", becoming a shabby child who "lounged about the streets". "I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond" (3325).

In this aversion, he is not alone. More than the health and safety of child workers, reformers feared for children's moral and educational development. While some working-class children might even have looked forward to entering the world of men and contributing to their family budgets, reformers disapproved of the "coarse language, licentious horse-play and sometimes outright brutality" they were prey to (Heywood 2013, 4110).

They wanted childhood to be a separate stage, in harmony with nature, and in which manual labour had no part (Cunningham 143, 144).

David's brief period as a homeless child chimes with how most historians describe societal views on street children. He is shamelessly exploited by adults, seen as a "common vagabond" and assumed to be delinquent and a beggar. Shopkeepers dislike his appearance and say they have nothing for him.

Although he lives by his wits, his week on the road does not follow the tradition of roguish Picaresque heroes. Again, the Romantic child remains unsullied by circumstance, while he is victimised and cheated by a “drunken madman”, to whom he attempts to sell his jacket, and terrified by a tinker who yells: “Come here, when you’re called...or I’ll rip your young body open.”

His experiences as a “wayfarer” occur entirely within the week it takes him to leave London and reach his aunt in Dover. Treated as an interregnum between his time as a labourer and his rehabilitated life as a schoolboy, this is a journey which carries him from one stage of life to another, rather than a phase of childhood in its own right (Dickens 2010, 3650–3860).

If you don’t like my story, then go to the schoolroom...

When he finally reaches Miss Betsey and re-enters school – and the world of children – he is forced, in the words of M.D. Hill, to “unlearn” what he has learnt and be turned again into a child. He is ashamed of being “knowing” about London streets and for having lived through experiences foreign to the other schoolchildren of his own age (Dickens 2010, 4613–4627).

And so David Copperfield passes into the final phase of his childhood. Under the protection of his firm, but caring aunt, he attends a boarding school under the headmastership of the kind Dr Strong.

This phase comes closest to the modern conception of childhood. The school described is not worlds apart from boarding schools still existing today. These middle-class youths have the kind of prolonged childhood that would not become universal until compulsory secondary schooling was legislated. In 1880, all English children from five to ten had to attend school. This was later extended to eleven, then thirteen, and only in 1918 would the school-leaving age be extended to fourteen.

Before education became compulsory, school had been mainly a middle-class institution and, through the nineteenth century, increasingly common up to secondary level. For working-class children, there were scattered charity schools, Sunday schools, dame schools, workhouse and ragged schools.

The 1833 Factory Act did allow a half-time system, which specified half a day of work and half of school. But up to the time *David Copperfield* first made its appearance, a large

number of children never attended school at all, or attended irregularly until the age of ten or eleven (Hendrick 45).

Dickens himself initially attended an inadequate, private “dame school”, after which his educational experience was more positive at the school of the Rev. William Giles. He began at the Wellington House Classical and Commercial Academy in 1825, after his brief period in a boot-blackening industry. Dickens let it be known that the sadistic principal, William Jones, was the model for Mr Creakle, and that his experience there inspired his descriptions of Salem House. In an essay, *Our School*, he noted that Jones was determined “to make as much out of us and put as little into us as possible” (Litvack).

“...what are the sorts of schools I don’t like,” said Dickens in an 1857 speech. “I found them, on consideration, to be rather numerous. I don’t like, to begin with ...the sort of school to which I once went myself” (Collins 7).

As his comment seems to suggest, he was stronger on criticism than positive suggestion. More confident on the spirit than the content of education, he seems to concentrate on needs and shortcomings, and tends to be “feeble in his positive ideas”, argues Collins, not just because he was a satirical writer, but because he was hampered by “not knowing or caring enough” (216, 217).

However, later critics challenge this view of a man who did not know or care. Leon Litvack agrees that, while he believed firmly in universal, non-sectarian education, he “stopped short of offering practical solutions to problems”. But in his view, Dickens’s work demonstrates a keen interest in and knowledge of educational developments in his time.

Hard Times, for example, contains tough commentary on a new-fangled teaching method. In an exchange between Gradgrind, Bitzer and Sissy Jupe, Bitzer – having rote-learned his description – defines a horse as a “Quadruped” and “Gramnivorous” (Dickens 2014, 70).

Dickens did not join societies for educational reform and, according to Litvack, “seemed more comfortable dealing with particular cases and large principles, rather than legislation and administration”. His general view on the subject is perhaps best captured in this extract from a speech:

If you would reward honesty, if you would give encouragement to good, if you would stimulate the idle, eradicate evil, or correct what is bad, education – comprehensive liberal education – is the one thing needful, and the one effective end (Litvack).

He was not an educational theorist, writes Coveney, and did not concern himself with curricula or the class problem of public schools. Instead, he wrote most passionately about the emotional effects of education on children. Besides giving specific emphasis to the importance of formal education and learning, Dickens is particularly harsh about teachers and schools through much of his literature:

School-teachers in Dickens are legion...a savage tally of brutality, ignorance and hypocrisy, of mental, physical, and emotional bludgeoning. For the most part it is a negative account. He gives few alternatives to the evils he savaged and lampooned...Dr. Strong's Academy in David Copperfield is perhaps the nearest he came to a positive account of what he would have liked... (125,126).

However, in my view, Dickens's deep caring is evidenced in his support of education for the poor and his frequent visits to "ragged schools". Dickens even wrote to an ally in this endeavour, suggesting they personally establish a model ragged school: "surely, you and I could set one going" (Litvack).

Summing up his influence on education as a whole, Collins is qualified. If his immediate influence on educational reform was hard to pinpoint, he certainly helped create "the ambience within which these changes, in legislation and in spirit, could take place" (221).

Litvack, however, is more effusive:

In the year of his death Parliament passed the Elementary Education Act, which...effectively inaugurated compulsory schooling. If Dickens made any practical contribution to achieving this end, it was by reinforcing the public's sense of moral feeling, and providing additional momentum for change.

The Academy that David Copperfield attends after his period in the boot-blackening factory provides a positive example of schooling. It works on an honour system and the headmaster requires hard work, but does not rely on corporal punishment. The boys have a code, play "noble games" out of hours, as well as games like pegtop, marbles, hare and hounds and cricket.

From this school, David is permitted to slide gracefully into a second “adulthood”, posturing a little in his adolescence with a gold watch and chain, a ring on his little finger, a long-tailed coat and “a great deal of bear’s grease” in his hair (Dickens 2010, 5401).

He had never been in gentlefolks’ rooms

Nowhere are the class divisions of childhood more clearly portrayed than through David Copperfield’s unwilling crossing of them.

Despite Dickens’s reputation as the great reformer, nothing in *David Copperfield* leads one to suppose that he was a revolutionary. The order of society is fixed and, despite pointing out the evils visited upon the children of the working class, he has not set his narrative skill at overthrowing the class system.

Despite his early crush on Little Em’ly, and her aspirations to become a lady, David feels it right and fitting that she should marry the kind, but bovine Ham. In fact, her disgrace as a fallen woman is a direct consequence of her aspirations.

Mrs Micawber, brought low by Mr Micawber’s profligacy, is trailed by children and never without a twin attached to a breast. The image is more beast of the field than exalted Madonna. This was the patronising image many middle-class do-gooders had of working-class mothering, and which led inevitably to welfare programmes encouraging health and hygiene towards the end of the century (Hendrick).

Dickens’s children tend to be moulded from Romantic stuff, misplaced gentlefolk in adverse circumstances. In this, David Copperfield follows in *Oliver Twist*’s footsteps. As Carey says, the tragedy of David’s blighted childhood restates the sense he has of his own, with its “unmentionable horror of descent into the working class” (2765).

And, although he vividly shows the evils of employment in the rat-infested warehouse, David does not form a bond with the other boys on the basis of mutual discomfort. As subsidiary characters, they are not fully realised, but portrayed as dull, ugly and debased, not worthy of being plucked from their ignoble setting. The implication one is left with is that this life is all right for some...

On the other hand, Dickens was not a simplistic traditionalist. One should not overlook the fact that one of his most notable skills was in making middle-class adults see working-class children with the same eyes as his own.

[Tom] thought only of her delicate skin and golden hair

Dickens was a man of his time, unconscious of the fact that some half a century after he wrote *David Copperfield*, Freud would introduce a shocked new century to the concept of infant sexuality. As Michel Foucault puts it: “Everyone knew...that children had no sex, which was why they were forbidden to talk about it, why one closed one’s eyes and stopped one’s ears whenever they came to show evidence to the contrary...” (4).

In fact, even the Romantic, Dickens would probably find the idea abhorrent. Romantic children were plump cherubs, innocent of adult knowledge and sexual abasement.

And yet, he was a man of his time in more than one respect – particularly with regard to a certain confusion or inconsistency around the sexualisation of children.

One of the most baffling of the many mysteries of Victorian culture is this split between little Oliver Twist in the novel and little Oliver Twist in life. One is fawned over, protected, lusted after; the other is beaten, starved, imprisoned, transported. It’s not that Dickens is unaware of this split; in fact, he exploits it (Kincaid 74).

Victorian writers did indeed want to believe in the perfect purity of children. Marah Gubar cites a letter by Lewis Carroll, in which he writes: “Their innocent unconsciousness is very beautiful, and give one a feeling of reverence, as at the presence of something sacred” (Gubar).

This sanctification of childhood simplicity was echoed in sermons, poetry and prose, art and periodicals. A cult of childhood proposed children, and the viewing of children, as an antidote to the tawdriness of life. Women were encouraged to inhabit the same space – representing something pure and separate from the rough and tumble of the industrial world outside.

Gubar tells us that, as religious doubt spread in the wake of Darwin and other thinkers, some commentators even suggest that the child “gradually replaced God as an object of worship” . But this worship was not as ascetic as it purported to be.

But although adherents to the cult of the child described their appreciation in religious and/or aesthetic terms, the art they produced reveals a disturbing tendency to conceive of the child as the ideal romantic partner (Gubar).

She mentions novels like Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno* and J.M. Barrie's *The Little White Bird* in which "besotted bachelors pursue children rather than women". Dowson, who extolled the charms "Of a Little Girl" in a sonnet sequence, fell in love with an eleven-year-old and proposed to her when she was fourteen. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury wooed young girls, while child prostitution was accepted and deplored in equal measures.

Foucault clarifies this inconsistency somewhat by showing that, in the general climate of repression in which sex was admonished to disappear in silence, it was necessary to make room for "illegitimate sexualities...if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance..." (4).

The very silence around sex produced an increase in "regulated and polymorphous" (34) discourses around sex in the "field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it" (18).

We can see this in what Louise Jackson calls the historical antecedents to the late twentieth-century construction of "child abuse": the campaigning and legislation over child prostitution, incest and the age of consent in Victorian England. All this mobilisation, however, concerned only girls, since only they could "fall" and have their innocence defiled.

David Copperfield's childhood crushes are pretty, but pure. The love he and Little Em'ly share is that of innocent babies. "She and David form an affective tableau of innocent flirtation, eroticism on the surface, desire that never leaves off and never is satisfied...he makes her innocent by confirming his own purity" (Kincaid 307).

Even his high school romance with the pretty Miss Shepherd – a "little girl in a spencer, with a round face and curly flaxen hair" (Dickens 2010, 5347) – appears unsullied.

He touches Miss Shepherd's glove and feels "a thrill go up the right arm of my jacket, and come out at my hair" (5352). His adoration is exalted. He worships girls for their purity.

Richard Locke sees childish erotic fixation as central to the book. He draws attention first to the attraction he feels for his mother, the childish widow (30).

Certainly, the infantilised mother who loves and later rejects him forms the pattern for his choice of the pretty child-bride, Dora. His description of her – a "wax doll" and "a very Baby" – lacks earthiness. And yet it is perhaps indicative of the kind of eroticisation prevalent in the Victorian cult of the child: the sublimation of sexuality in sanctification. Her

innocence makes her worthy of worship, but not of any more dangerous emotion. The same could be said of Dora, who so resembles his mother in David's descriptions – particularly her hair. This infantilisation of women is a theme present also in *Little Dorrit*, the child-like object of love (Dickens 2003).

There has been some suggestion, by Richard Locke (33, 34), that Dickens shows more sexuality in his description of Steerforth than of his beloved second wife Agnes: "...where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm" (Dickens 2010, 1855).

But Steerforth is handsome, charming and has great power. Of course the rejected and abused boy would adore him, and wish to be him. And surely, from within a tradition that saw collegial admiration as innocent, Dickens would have less constraint in describing a crush than were he writing a hundred years later. He would have felt greater ease in describing sensuality in relation to another boy at a time when women and girls were either untouchable or degenerate. The untouchable variety were to be placed on pedestals – either as pretty children with curls about their round faces, or as idealised wives and mothers. The degenerate were not to be spoken of.

All in all, Locke takes the view that David Copperfield fails as a representative man on the grand Victorian scale. While he does indeed turn out to be the hero of his own life, he argues that in his marriage he remains a damaged child.

Agnes, whose name suggests the lamb of God, reminds David of a stained-glass window. Like Esther, who carries the keys to Bleak House as a symbol of duty and perhaps control (Dickens 2013a), Agnes also has a propensity for carrying keys (notably different from Clara and Dora). Locke believes this tendency recalls Fidelity or St Martha, the housewife saint. Her most significant gesture – "ever pointing upward...ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things!" – carries an unfortunate association with the angel of death (35).

Carey, however, sees the problem not with Agnes, but with David's initial blindness towards her, caused by his inability to associate maturity with sex. "David's obtuseness is enough to make any girl weep. For Agnes has perfectly normal instincts, in fact, and is pointing not upwards but towards the bedroom" (3145).

Agnes is not a sexless saint. If David initially sees her as such, it is because his fear of a mature woman turns her into “something untouchable”. Dickens, says Carey, uses David to satirise his inclination to force women into categories: child-bride, frump, stained glass window.

Agnes actually combines purity and sexual desire and household efficiency. She spans the Dickensian categories. Blind David just can’t take it in until she tells him – ‘I have loved you all my life!’ (3164–3167).

Like Carey, I don’t believe his reticence necessarily reflects upon Agnes as a sexual being. It strikes me that to view Agnes this way is to see David Copperfield’s attitude through the prism of a different time. He was a Victorian being. And as Foucault tells us, the frankness that existed around sex until the seventeenth century disappeared and, for the Victorian bourgeoisie, sexuality became “carefully confined; it moved into the home”. The only space considered proper for sex, or talk of it, was the parents’ bedroom (4).

Surely his descriptions of Agnes have more to do with his unwillingness to describe a respectable woman in sexual terms. Perhaps Dickens was trying to show that David Copperfield finally works through the damage his childhood inflicted on him, and lets go of his mother, the eternal child-woman, sufficiently to accept the love of a real woman.

I am too old to sing that song...you are too young to understand it

All novels exist in constant dialogue between many elements and on many levels simultaneously, in the view of Michail Bakhtin. Amongst these, the author engages in a dialogue with his characters and his audience while, at another level, the adult narrator in a *Bildungsroman* will engage in a dialogue with the child he once was (Holquist).

Referring to autobiography, Kate Douglas makes several points that are equally applicable to the *Bildungsroman*. “Whether romantic, self-important, self-critical, or shifting in tone, these voices are subject to different degrees of narrative control.” The balance of power between the two voices is crucial to an understanding of the work, since the different voices are used to generate “particular reader investments” (88).

The first-person point of view used for this novel grants the reader direct access to the narrator’s consciousness – as child and adult. “I” is a shifty character, though. It has no concrete association in our minds, and is entirely relative to the speaker who makes use of it.

Each “I” is loaded with the world vision, and expresses itself in the voice of the speaker, in this case either the adult or child. Even at the level of language, words and concepts used by the child might have different meanings to the adult, who has lived through different experiences and who exists in a different time, with different cultural values (Holquist).

As pointed out in chapter 1, the child’s view has the ability to present the world in a novel way. While Victorian novels in the “neglected child” trope tended to use first person to spirit the reader more poignantly into the child’s experience, the increasingly realistic *Bildungsroman* tended also to make use of first person. This developed into “the child as Peeping Tom” technique associated with works like Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew*, in which the child’s perspective acts as a “lens for adult flaws” (Gavin 2012a, Hillel).

What Maisie Knew makes use of a limited third person perspective, which allows us access to an adult narrator, but remains for the most part closely attached to the child, Maisie. In contrast, the tone and voice of *David Copperfield* are largely those of the adult narrator, who recalls, comments and interprets.

The adult David relates much of the book in a sardonic tone (Dickens 2010, 145). And his frequent use of adult irony provides the narrative with a light touch, despite its grave and sometimes tragic events:

...for he was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having once...made some hasty but determined arrangements to throw her out of a two pair of stairs’ window. These evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him off... (158).

While the adult sensibility is evident in this rather satirical view of the world, the child is recalled through the vivid sensory impressions, which are so strongly associated with memories of childhood. The narrator recalls the smell of Peggotty’s storeroom as one of “...mouldy air...in which there is the smell of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff...” The Salem House classroom gives off the smell of “mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books” while, after his mother’s funeral, he is aware of “the faint, sweet smell of cake, the odour of Miss Murdstone’s dress and our black clothes” (387, 1655, 2696).

He uses the senses again to express nostalgia through description. Here he provides a picture of David’s first home, through suitably tinted spectacles: “There is nothing half so green that

I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tombstones” (395).

Later, the environment is used again, but this time to demonstrate his unhappier state of mind:

How vividly I call to mind the damp about the house, the green cracked flagstones in the court, an old leaky water butt, and the discoloured trunks of some of the grim trees, which seemed to have dripped more in the rain than other trees, and to have blown less in the sun! (1692)

Our impression of the Murdstones is formed through metallic images, in which we sense the child’s notion of these unrelenting characters. Miss Murdstone’s initials are imprinted on black boxes in “hard brass nails”. Her purse is of “hard steel”, and kept within a jail of a bag, “which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite” (1047).

On occasion, the adult narrator does step aside to grant us direct access to the child’s world through the child’s eyes and consciousness. The conversation between Murdstone and his friends concerning “Brooks of Sheffield”, allows the reader a certain humorous understanding of the men – through the child’s lack of comprehension (560). And later, the child is affably taken advantage of by a waiter, while he remains supremely unaware of his exploitation (1420).

Still later, we are permitted an unmediated glimpse into David’s fevered adolescent consciousness through his description of Miss Larkins, on whom he “...feasted my eyes upon the goddess of my heart...” (5434).

For the most part, though, the adult David escorts us through his life’s journey. The tone is often humorous, although there are times when the narrator loses his arch tone – “...wakes me to plainer perception of him, with a red ridge across my back...” (1894) – and relates instead in a tone of deadly earnest: “I know him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held...” (1881).

At other times, the adult voice holds a bitterness that is absent from his more sardonic narration: “Mr Creakle cuts a joke before he beats him, and we laugh at it – miserable little dogs, we laugh, with our visages as white as ashes, and our hearts sinking into our boots” (1890).

Occasionally, this bitterness descends into what Locke refers to as “literary self-pity”, in phrases like “little labouring hind”, and in his reference to having been thrown away, which shows the boy as “a piece of refuse tossed down at the edge of the grimy river...” (2011, 30).

And that is the end of my story

Through the experiences of one child, *David Copperfield* exemplifies every one of the disparate models of childhood existing at the time in which it is set. Yet our vantage point grants us the perspective of a later time, when greater agreement existed over the nature of childhood.

The two contrasting philosophies which existed at the turn of the nineteenth century had already settled into a comfortable tolerance of each other by the time Dickens wrote the novel mid-century. And like the century as a whole, the novel shows that Dickens was not immune to the tempering influence of evangelicism.

The eponymous Romantic child has absorbed a necessary portion of evangelical discipline in order to preserve itself into adulthood. His attraction to Dora was an indiscipline of the heart, a quest for his lost childhood which led, paradoxically, to innocence betrayed.

An array of voices permits the reader direct access to his childhood pain and self-pity, to the overheated adolescent and the healed adult, with his humorous and satirical view of the world. Dickens segues between nostalgia for a lost ideal of childhood and a critical vision of its abhorrent counterpoint.

This parade of voices shows that something of the innocent child is preserved within the healed adult. It is that unmarred child who, in the end, turns out truly to be father to the man.

David Copperfield is a story of healing, in which the protagonist survives the Murdstones’ misapplied evangelicism to end up as a respected man of letters married to a real woman.

And yet, was there real healing? Certainly, we accept the worthiness of Agnes to be an authentic wife. But that very wifely quality appears dull and lifeless beside the brightness of golden hair and the glow of childlike faces.

The message of the novel is that, by retaining the best of the Romantic child, and tempering it with the more wholesome aspects of evangelicism, David was able to move beyond the limbo of his child-bride to safeguard Romanticism in the healed adult.

But David Copperfield's life, and perhaps that of Dickens himself, was not as resolved as he would have us believe. The inconsistency of the Victorians remains his confusion. He leaves us with a "happy ever after", but one that we nonetheless feel slightly dubious about.

Chapter Three – *The Go-Between* by L.P. Hartley

The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there. (Hartley 7)

The 1800s did not slip quietly into the new century. As Leo Colston puts it, the next fifty years would prove to be “the most changeful half a century in history” (269).

In 1895, L.P. Hartley was born at the end of a century that had itself brought far-reaching changes in every sphere of life. This small island of time, where anything seemed possible, marked the acme of society’s vision of childhood (Sommerville 174). The new epoch was set to be the Century of the Child, named after Ellen Key’s ground-breaking book on education, translated from the Swedish in 1909 (Gavin 2012a, 163). And it was in this period of glorious expectation that Hartley chose to set his novel of childhood blighted and destroyed.

Paradoxically, the seeds of this destruction lie firmly embedded in the conception of childhood Hartley inherited from the previous century. It is this notion of childhood, and its impact on Hartley’s literary children, that will form the focus of this chapter.

Not only is *The Go-Between* set at childhood’s zenith, but also at what is now recognised to be the greatest turning point in Western society’s conception of it (Heywood 2013, Cunningham). After the ambiguity of previous centuries, a specific meaning had been set and the experience of childhood in the West was on its way to being common to all (Heywood 2013, 811).

The language of childhood

What was it about the conception and treatment of children that changed in the West?

Philippe Ariès’ central view of childhood may have been discredited yet, according to David Archard, he was right in pointing out the features that distinguished the modern age.

Its most basic premise was that children merit separation from the world of adults. Children have “different needs, sensibilities, and habits of thinking” (Gavin 2012b, 165). The romantic belief that children should be happy prevailed. This meant that children and adults became opposites: if adults had responsibilities, children should be carefree. If adults worked, children should not, if adults had to live in towns, children were entitled to have contact with nature (Cunningham 160) – even if only in the form of a suburban garden (Cox 126).

Children were now “innocent, ignorant, dependent, vulnerable, generally incompetent and in need of protection and discipline” (Heywood 2013, 4252, citing Hendrick). The “wondrous innocent” had reached its height in the literary idealisation of the child (Stearns 2006, 79).

The greatest change to children’s lives, evident in the contrast between the fictional experiences of David Copperfield and Leo Colston, was that children had been saved from work in favour of the classroom. Gradually, it became accepted that even teenagers should not work.

This shift removed their productive role and gained them a new role as consumers. Britain had taken to Viviana Zelizer’s economically “worthless”, emotionally “priceless” child by the middle of the nineteenth century – in part due to writers like Dickens. And by the end of the century, labour legislation and compulsory education had destroyed “the class lag”. In America, the concept was universally accepted by the 1930s (Heywood 2013, 816).

This notion led to the limiting of family size, which in turn encouraged a focus on the reduction of infant death. In the past, 30 to 50% of all children had died before the age of two. In the nineteenth century, child deaths amounted to a hundred to two-hundred-and-fifty out of every thousand live births. By the 1950s, this figure had dropped to between twenty and fifty (Cunningham, Stearns 2006).

Their exalted position did not always work to the advantage of children. Faced with the vision of angelic children, parents tended to be less indulgent of their own. In fact, according to Sommerville, the conception of childhood was “so exalted and so narrow” (177) that real children couldn’t possibly meet it.

So finally, in the time of “stagnating pathos” in which Hartley takes up the story of Leo Colston, children needed to be saved from the very image that had developed to emancipate them – from the “widely accepted falsification of the myth of its ‘innocent’ nature” (Coveney 291, 292).

A man of influences

While its setting might be Edwardian, *The Go-Between* was not a product of the period. When it first appeared, in 1953, Hartley was a man of fifty-eight, having witnessed numerous changes in child-rearing practices.

As the new century took hold, a number of agencies and philosophers helped reconceptualise the condition of children. From the work of Archard, Cunningham, Hendrick, Hardymont, Coveney and Sommerville, I have attempted to summarise the influences Hartley might have been aware of.

First came the doctors, since compulsory schooling had thrown the effects of poverty into sharp relief. The emphasis shifted to hygiene and sanitation, followed by welfare reforms, which further consolidated the view of helpless children and a universal childhood. Sentimentality died hard, but managed to co-exist companionably with the apparently incompatible notions of science.

School provided the perfect opportunity for scientists to study children, which allowed them to assess their physical and mental development and create norms of height, weight and intelligence. This led to the child-study movement, with its aim of superseding heredity and building superior children.

Close on the heels of the doctors came the experts on the minds of children. The psychological and psycho-analytical disciplines informed the way children were viewed into the 1950s and beyond. Three areas were emphasised: the child's mind, the child in the family and managing children. Although parent-child relations still stressed the dependent and impressionable nature of children, the message was clear: childhood mattered, and should be taken seriously.

They were not the only actors on the child-care stage, though. While Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin pulled the discourse in one direction, the child-care manuals tugged in another. When it appeared in 1906, Freud's work on infant sexuality caused horror in a society still in thrall to innocent asexuality. For those who took them seriously, Freud and Darwin forever destroyed perceptions of original sin – and innocence as it had been conceived in the Victorian period.

In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud introduced the idea of an inherent sensual awareness in children, from infancy onward. "When the little boy shows the most open sexual curiosity about his mother...the erotic nature of this attachment to her is established without a doubt" (Quoted in Fass 2000, 103).

Freud remained under fire for decades – from both sides of the "original innocence" debate. "The religious idea of the child's 'fallen nature' (which, if taken seriously, is a much more

total denial of innocence than Freud's) never roused such popular hostility as the idea of the child's 'sexual' nature" (Coveney 301).

Psychologists wanted parents to soften the effects of society on children in order to produce well-adjusted adults. Child-care theorists, on the other hand, had no truck with these new-fangled views, building on the study of animals to fit babies to the world, rather than the other way round. They encouraged self-control, regular habits, obedience, respect for authority and self-reliance. Mothers took more easily to behaviourism, it seems, which provided the dominant thread in child care through the 1920s and into the '30s and even '40s.

The status of the child clearly took a backward step in the 1920s, having struggled up from child of nature to innocent babe, trailing clouds of glory, and finally to prodigious much-studied genius in the "century of the child" epoch, the baby now slid back to unpredictable, coarsely motivated savage (Hardyment 1984, 201).

The trend to behaviourism was dominated by Frederic Truby King and John B. Watson. Freud's theories did make themselves felt – but, according to Hardyment, in the academic and intellectual spheres rather than the nursery (165). The influence of psychology crept furtively into the manuals, but only on matters other than sex. Where sex was concerned, they did encourage parents to explain the facts of life – but largely in the hope that it would discourage children from being overly interested in their own bodies.

Although it was challenged along the way, behaviourism did not die convincingly until Benjamin Spock appeared on the scene in 1946, but probably too late to make any real impact on Hartley's views.

But Hartley could not help but be aware of the international controversy that followed Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, in 1948. Even had he not read the book, it was widely written about and influential in altering social values, and attitudes towards sex.

The literary child

The Go-Between exists *in* but is not *of* its Edwardian setting. While it toys with childhood as "a world apart and superior to adulthood" (Gavin 2012a, 11), Hartley allows this idealisation to lead to a devastating destruction of innocence, caused by the very conception of childhood which sought to protect it.

From the start of the century, literature showed unparalleled interest in the child, amounting to “a cult of childhood” (Gavin 2012a,11, Gavin 2012b 165, Wood 2012, 116). Beautifully illustrated gift books for children, children’s encyclopaedias, children’s poetry and Baden-Powell’s book on scouting were all focused on children, their entertainment and edification, including Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories* and Hillaire Belloc’s cautionary tales.

As society focused on children’s health and welfare, so literary adults move aside, allowing children to roam freely. Literary children often have immense independence. Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* wanders the streets of Lahore as a vagabond, before choosing to become the disciple of a holy man. Where Victorian children were vulnerable, Edwardian children are “idealized, lost, longed for, joyous and neo-Romantically linked with nature and the imagination” (Gavin 2012a, 12). They play in idyllic gardens or adventurous spaces without constraint – and without sign of growing up.

Edith Nesbitt follows this tradition in the early years of the twentieth century with *The Children and It*, and *The Railway Children*, as do C.S. Lewis’s Narnia stories and Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*. Thirty years later, Arthur Ransome continued this tradition with his *Swallows and Amazons* series, set in the Lake District.

More than likely brought up on this tradition of children’s literature, Hartley gives the nod to it at the start of the novel, where adults are remote and shadowy figures who don’t place much constraint on Marcus and Leo’s adventures.

Literary children between the two world wars show a greater concern with psychology and sexuality and the Modernist period sees ambivalent portrayals of children, says Gavin (2012a 11). Darker portrayals stress the “self-deceiving myth of childhood innocence” (13). The child and childhood are central to Modernist attempts to gain insight into the making of consciousness. Writers like Joyce and Woolf use the figure of the child as a means to self-awareness, exploring memory processes and language function, while others, like Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen, use childhood to show conflict in family relations and socialisation (Gavin 2012a 13, March-Russell, 2009). Faulkner uses childhood and youth to examine the dissolution of the Southern aristocracy in *The Sound and the Fury*. He gives voice to three brothers who recall the promiscuous youth of their sister, Addy, the consequences of which destroy the family.

Gavin (2012a) and Pinsent mention Hartley as part of the post-war trend in which literary childhood reflects nostalgia for a more secure, idealised Britain, often symbolised by large country houses, and portrayed through the perspective of an innocent child. Adults betray children's trust in narratives that stress issues such as the fragility of innocence and change in society. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, just two years after *The Go-Between*, perhaps falls into this category.

Writers like William Golding, on the other hand, show that all humans are capable of evil (Gavin 2012a, Pinsent). A year after Hartley's novel appeared, Golding produced his dystopian *Lord of the Flies*, in which a group of marooned children descend from innocent play into savagery and violence.

Unlike Dickens, Hartley received little commercial recognition until *The Go-Between* was published in 1953. Colm Tóibín writes that, before the publication of the first of his *Eustace and Hilda* trilogy in 1947, he was most well known as a literary reviewer.

He was a friend of Aldous Huxley and a contemporary of the Bloomsbury writers, although they were not friends. When Virginia Woolf first met him in 1923, Tóibín records, she called him a "dull, fat man" (vi). Reviews and writings generally mention Henry James as his strongest influence. When a collection of Hartley's short stories appeared in 1986, a *New York Times* reviewer, Jay Parini, wrote of James as "his most obvious literary forebear".

While they clearly share an attention to precise detail, *The Go-Between* seems to me more strongly imbued with the sensual and the sensuous particulars than James's more rational exploration of his characters' inner lives. But they both reveal a concern with what David Lodge refers to as the need to "create the sense of 'felt life'" (1205).

Leo Colston's childhood

The Go-Between presents us with a number of different worlds. The gulf between classes is here, as well as those between men and women, innocence and sexuality, between the boy that Leo was and the man he became, between thought and feeling, logic and the imagination. Those that inflict the greatest damage on the protagonist are those between adults and children, innocence and sexuality.

Tóibín's view confirms mine, that *The Go-Between* "turns out not to be a drama about class or about England or a lost world mourned by Hartley, instead it is a drama about Leo's

deeply sensuous nature moving blindly in a world of rich detail and beautiful sentences, towards a destruction that is impelled by his own intensity of feeling and, despite everything, his own innocence” (xiii).

The book is infused with a recognition of children’s inherent sexuality, which one would expect from a man who must have absorbed at least some of the precepts of Freud and other influences of his time. He places this sexuality in conflict with the Edwardian image of the innocent child, and the repressive silence described by Foucault. The casualty in this encounter is the damaged adult he becomes.

The most notable aspect of children’s lives, that which sets them apart so significantly from Dickens’s children, is the universal extension of their childhood. At going on thirteen, lower-middle-class Leo has not experienced things “foreign to [his] age” (Dickens 2010, 4613). Leo is still a child in every sense.

The decisive factor in this type of childhood is school. Leo and Marcus’s childhood is strictly divided between life as schoolboys and life at home. He and Marcus both recognise this demarcation, crossing between them with a firm understanding of their different traditions, languages, codes and modes of behaviour.

The lost boys²

The birth of the universal schoolchild created the possibility of “social and intellectual advancement undreamt of” (Hendrick 47). This opportunity is amplified for the lower-middle-class Leo, who attends a public school.

Hendrick tells us the classroom was crucial in creating a “national” childhood, which ignored differences like social class, at least in theory (46). It is certainly true that, even in this natural habitat of the upper classes, the cohesive nature of the world appears to supersede differences. Marcus might point out to Leo the niceties of upper class behaviour and dress in the country (Hartley 41), but no mention is made of these at school.

Schoolboys belong to a secluded order, its customs partly accompanying the boys to Brandham Hall, partly left at school. It is a beach of etiquette, for example, to wear items of

² I have drawn the headings in this section from *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie. In this Edwardian tale, which appeared in the first years of the twentieth century, the children literally fly beyond the reaches of Victorian domesticity. Their innocence is heartless and its loss, and that of carefree childhood, inevitable. Originally intended for adults, *Peter Pan*, like *The Go-Between*, expresses ambivalent nostalgia for a lost childhood.

school clothing away from school. However, the boys bring with them a rigid “code”, their own language and understanding of the world.

The code permits prayers, as long as they are perfunctory. Bullying is something brought on oneself and implies no flaw in the system. Speaking of it would be like “pointing out some physical defect”. Sneaking is not sanctioned under any circumstances, except in relation to stealing (13).

A significant attribute of a cohesive group is a language with which to express common interests. “I could say to him whatever was uppermost in my mind in a language that we shared; I did not have to translate what I said, or flounder in grown-up thoughts and ways of expression” (104).

Perhaps more importantly, it changes regularly, exposing the outsider. Maintaining the language (and the approbation of the group) demands the utmost attention and conformity (107).

Nearly every term it happened that certain words and phrases ran like wild-fire through the school and acquired a sort of fetishistic value. Everyone used them, but no one ever knew who started them. Conversely other words, which seemed intrinsically harmless were made taboo, and their use excited the utmost derision (186).

Secrecy is essential to cohesion, both in preventing interference in its rituals and ensuring the loyalty of its members (83, 89). The schoolboy code is bound by rules and injunctions, rather than any abstract concept of right and wrong (108). Behaviour is adjusted by punishment or threat of punishment, either by teachers or other members of the group, confirming Hendrick’s view that school demanded uniformity based on the bourgeois “domestic ideal”, with its emphasis on order, respect, love, and clearly defined age and gender distinctions (55, 56).

Modes of behaviour are set and accepted. Schoolboys, for example, regularly “snub each other” (Hartley 79), while Leo does not expect this in the adult world. “Private injustice was the lot of schoolboys...but grown-up people were exempt from it, for who was there to be unjust to them?” (156)

Faced by the prospect of sliding down Ted's straw-stack for the first time, he reflects: "...I didn't really want to, but there was no excuse whatever not to, if I was to retain my self-respect. I could not help acting as if the eyes of the whole school were on me" (79).

School, Hendrick tells us, did more than educate. It was influential in altering the "nature" of childhood, by throwing aside outside knowledge and imposing a state of ignorance, dependence and vulnerability (45–47). While girls had been considered either pure or "fallen" throughout the Victorian period, boys had not faced the same dichotomy. This meant that working-class boys, particularly those who would previously have entered the adult world of work, probably experienced this change more strongly than girls. And upper-class boys, sequestered in public schools for long periods, probably had these qualities imposed on them most keenly.

This is certainly confirmed by *The Go-Between*, since much of driving conflict stems from Leo's extreme innocence. Marcus, though two years younger, seems slightly more familiar – not with sex, but at least with terms like "fast". This is easily explained by his having two much older siblings. However, Leo's near-total ignorance must mean that Marcus does not share his superior knowledge at school. Issues of sex and sexuality are clearly not discussed.

In short, besides its compensations, school places these children "into the servitude of a repressive innocence and ignorance" (Hendrick 1990, 74).

Only the gay and innocent and heartless...can fly

The world of childhood at Brandham Hall confirms Archard's view of a complete separation from the adult world (29).

Children in *The Go-Between* are a breed apart: "They like to think of a little boy as a little boy, corresponding to their idea of what a little boy should be...They even had a special language designed for little boys..." (Hartley 245).

Despite the exalted position childhood held in the public imagination, it is interesting that the children live in the hind section of the house, not well lighted. Their bedroom was perhaps an old night nursery, the adult Leo speculates, with a window set high in the wall, allowing only a view of the sky.

Leo and Marcus perceive themselves to be different and are largely kept apart from adults and adult pursuits (135, 74).

I believe I had some schoolboy notion that the front of the house, where the ‘grown-up’ people lived, was the ‘private side’, and that I was trespassing when I went there (36).

Describing life at the big house to Ted, he explains that he isn’t spoken to much, since “they’re all grown up, and they have grown-up games like whist and lawn tennis, and talking you know, just for the sake of talking’ (this seemed a strange pursuit to me)” (84).

Behind his willingness to interpret aspects of adult life to Ted lies the implication that Ted is closer to his world of childhood than that of the young adults of Brandham Hall. Later, Leo describes Ted as “like a schoolboy, angry one moment, good humoured the next” (221).

The unapproachable nature of adulthood is amplified by class, since the upper classes are experienced by Leo to be the highest expression of adulthood; “super-adults, not bound by the same laws of life as little boys” (70).

Children move more easily between classes, with less comment, than adults. Leo’s constant trips to Ted Burgess’s farm elicit none of the raised eyebrows that would follow either of the young Maudsley adults socialising on this level. Leo is permitted to drive back from a picnic beside the footman and the coachman, where he finds the coachman’s “factual conversation” more satisfying than the unanchored “gossamer threads” of upper-class “star talk” (92).

The eyes a mother leaves behind her to guard her children

Parents are not a constant feature in the world of the book. Leo’s father has died and his mother is absent geographically and from Leo’s mind through much of the narrative. At Brandham Hall, Marcus’s parents are more distant from the boys’ daily lives than Leo’s. The children’s time is, for the most part, spent in each other’s company, although Leo becomes increasingly enmeshed in the lives of the adolescents.

As befitted their class, Marcus and his siblings were brought up by a nanny. Most upper-class children saw their parents only at specified times of the day. Despite this, though, the advice books urged upper-class mothers to take their children for walks and generally function as their children’s moral guardians – nurses were to be “auxiliaries, not stand-ins” (Hardyment 1984, 61, 62). In this, Mrs Maudsley is characteristic. She shows Marcus undoubted affection, spending special time with him each day, and she is the undisputed moral guide for

all her children. Her husband is vague, rather than harsh, but does not appear to spend a great deal of time with them.

Leo's father, on the other hand, was remote by nature, yet intimately involved in his son's life. He was a "crank", with unorthodox theories of education. Even as schooling was becoming universal, he preferred to educate Leo himself, with the help of a tutor (Hartley 23).

His mother nurtures hopes that Leo will make something of himself and sees school as the means to his advancement. Before Leo's father died, they were the model of what Hardyment refers to as the "conspicuously happy" middle-class family (1984, 35), demonstrative with each other and their son (Hartley 36).

Unlike their upper-class counterparts, middle-class children were not generally raised by nannies. Their mothers were encouraged to involve themselves in their children's education and upbringing. Leo's mother is the archetypal idealised mother, immersed in details of Leo's life, and reluctant to allow him to spend a holiday apart from her (30). She tries to be firm, but appears consistently loving.

The ticking crocodile

Although historians have pointed out early institutions which served some of the functions of "adolescence" – usually violence and mayhem, suggests Heywood (2013, 835) – the term first gained currency in the 1830s (Stearns 2006, 80). Childhood was extended while youths concentrated on personal growth. Age-graded schools kept young people out of adult life and they became increasingly segregated in the latter part of the century (Sommerville, Heywood 2013).

One reason adolescence developed as a cultural construct was the fear of sexuality among post-pubertal youngsters. School and, in some cases, university extended their dependency on parents and they could no longer marry young. They needed to be suitably herded into a demarcated group and kept at a greater distance from adults (Stearns 2006).

Leo's view of Marian and Denys's advanced age leads him to refer to them as adults (Hartley 35). Yet they and their friends form a group separate both from the children and the adults, in which they while away their time in games and frivolity.

Stearns argues that, while sex was frowned upon, some “sexually laden flirtation” was encouraged, as long as it was focused on a suitable partner (2006, 80). Marian, for example, exchanges notes and engages in sanctioned courtship rituals with Hugh. Her mother encourages Marian to invite him on the shopping trip to Norwich, despite having only Leo as inadequate chaperone (Hartley 45). On the other hand, any form of flirtation with Ted is beyond the pale. Marian hides the fact that she knows him at all when she is with others.

Stearns (2006) tells us that a rise in illegal births among working-class girls in the early nineteenth century led to increased vigilance among the middle classes. It was not unheard of for a young man of good birth to engage in sex with someone from the lower classes or a prostitute, but in a society that idealised the purity of girls, any form of sex was anathema for someone like Marian. Sex with a man from the working classes invited real horror.

Denys’s relationship with his parents highlights Sommerville’s belief that adolescence brought losses as well as gains. As their dependence was extended, so the role of young people was trivialised. Denys draws little respect, particularly from his mother, who clearly does not regard him as an adult with opinions she need take seriously. Her disregard leaves him increasingly humiliated and leads him to attempt an inadequate power-play, but only with his social inferior, Ted (Hartley 54, 55).

Where dreams are born, and time is never planned

At thirteen, Leo is not yet an adolescent. Both Stearns (2006) and Sommerville tell us that puberty occurred somewhat later than it does today. From sixteen in eighteenth-century America, it dropped to fourteen by the 1860s. Although clearly close to puberty, Leo is more “child” than any thirteen-year-old today.

“‘Playing’?” asks Marian when he tries to explain that he is part of the cricket team, “‘Aren’t you always playing’?” (Hartley 122) This chimes with the Edwardian ideal of happiness, peddled by nineteenth-century advice manuals as the best way to prepare for adult life (Hardyment 1984).

Leo concedes a change in the behaviour of boys from 1900 to the 1950s when he declares: “Perhaps schoolboys no longer dance around each other” (Hartley 190). At twelve, going on thirteen, he has only “of late” lost the faculty to pretend to be an animal (10). He and Marcus run constantly, explore rubbish dumps and view farmyards as mythical playgrounds (78).

His sense of agency over the world demonstrates a level of emotional immaturity that would be hard to find in a contemporary thirteen-year-old. And he is clearly not unusual in this, nor in his magical beliefs. The other boys at school willingly enter into them.

His sense of agency contributes significantly to the psychic damage caused by that summer's events. He takes responsibility for events that are beyond his control, notwithstanding all his spells and sorcery.

In Never Neverland

The children in *The Go-Between* occupy a strange no-man's land – either left to their devices or expected to pay attendance at adult rituals. At formal dinner and church, they must dress appropriately, converse when spoken to and sit quietly through hours of worship.

It is clear that children are not automatically paid attention (65). They are not given the freedom to take part in general conversation and, even when they are noticed, it is a condescension and not to be taken for granted (49).

In a picture taken at the time, Leo is dressed much like a small adult, in “an Eton collar and a bow tie; a Norfolk jacket cut very high”. Despite the extreme heat, it is unthinkable, even for a child, to remove his jacket (42).

Rituals like mealtimes and church provide no concession to the interests and attention span of children (39, 67). After dinner, the children withdraw with the ladies, but in their case, to bed. No special allowance is made, as it would be now, for the children's entertainment.

While Marcus is ill, Leo accompanies the adults on outings until Marian suggests that, as the only child among them, he must surely be bored. It becomes clear that she has her own motive for this suggestion, but it is significant that this has not occurred to Mrs Maudsley before.

Stearns tells us that manufacturers began selling directly to children in the late nineteenth century (2010). The toy industry was in full swing, producing wooden and metal toys, rocking horses, soldiers, forts and mechanical toys as well as card and board games. Parents were encouraged to view toys as important for a happy childhood – the right of every child. (Heywood 2013, Sommerville).

Not much evidence of this trend, nor of children's new role as consumers, can be found in *The Go-Between*. Instead, Leo and Marcus entertain themselves by visiting the rubbish dump, the derelict outbuildings and the deadly nightshade, which elicits both horror and fascination. Leo makes much of sliding the straw-stack – a symbol of the child he is at the start of the book. Later, when he is making his untimely transition into adulthood, he cannot imagine why he found it fascinating.

As gifts, Leo receives the diary – enormously important symbolically and as motivation for events at school and at Brandham Hall – new suits, ties from his mother and aunt, and the longed-for bicycle.

Only the bicycle approaches the kind of gift that might titillate a contemporary child, but even this is utilitarian and, it turns out, part of Marian's expedient plans to provide him with greater mobility in delivering messages.

On the other hand, there are times when Leo, or perhaps the childhood he represents, is placed on a "pedestal". When he and Marian return from Norwich with Leo's new suit, he is encouraged to stand on a chair to be admired – "My appearance was greeted with cries of acclaim, as if the whole party had been living for this moment" (Hartley 48, 49).

His performance after the cricket match becomes elevated as a symbol of childlike purity (148, 149). As he sings, he transmogrifies from slightly grubby boy into angelic being.

If you cannot teach me to fly, teach me to sing

In the nineteenth century, it was the task of children "to symbolize the innocence which a severely repressed society felt it had lost" (Sommerville 177).

Foucault tells us that sex was conquered by controlling the language – quenching the authorised vocabulary that made it too visible. What remained was what Foucault describes as "illicit" discourses – "discourses of infraction that crudely named sex by way of insult or mockery" (21).

Leo lacks the language to ask about sex and Ted is reluctant to explain because Leo's purity has been so manifestly idealised: "...But I dunno, I didn't feel like it – not after hearing you sing..." (Hartley 216).

Yet much of the conflict of the book flows from the confusion and jealousy Leo feels around Marian. In contravention of the norms, she blurs the boundaries between child and adult by flirting and encouraging his adulation: "...she had endowed me with the importance of a grown-up; she had made me feel that she depended on me" (245).

Leo begins to move beyond the world of the child – "...it was as a man, and not by any means the least of men, that I joined the group who were making their way back to the pavilion" (139) – but with an extremely narrow understanding of what this entails, and without the experience to limit the damage caused by so abrupt a crossing.

Marian toys with Leo for her own purposes, but the prevalent understanding of childhood also precludes the slightest consideration that Leo might harbour adult emotions towards her. The disillusion he feels when he discovers Marian's expediency is an adult emotion (168). It is the disappointment that maturity brings.

Leo is not only unsure, but ambivalent about what it means to be an adult and at times he veers back into the safety of childhood and the approval this brings. "'Three lumps or four, Leo?' and I said four because small boys are supposed to like a lot of sugar. It raised a laugh, as I had hoped it would" (181).

Just as the man he becomes is dislocated from the child he was, Leo's childhood confusion manifests in a disruption of his unified vision of himself. As he reluctantly walks to the farm one last time, he sees a part of himself, bent over like a beetle, stationed far away (170).

Despite this ambivalence, moments of adulthood increase until his brutal initiation into a kind of maturity, from which there is no going back.

For the second time I was called upon to exchange the immunities of childhood for the responsibilities of the grown-up world. It was like a death but with a resurrection in prospect: the third time it happened, there was none (146).

All children, except one, grow up

The constant flow of information that characterises life in the twenty-first century would make it impossible to keep children in complete ignorance of sex and sexuality. Any time after the 1960s, it would have been impossible to deny children at least a degree of information (or misinformation).

Even in his imagination, Leo can think of no possible reason for Marian and Ted to exchange messages. He can only come up with the thought that perhaps Ted has committed a murder (Hartley 104).

On his first visit to the farm, Leo fails to catch the joke in a horse named “Wild Oats”. (82) On a later visit, he indicates unfamiliarity with the term “in the family way”. When Ted explains that the mare is pregnant, he shows complete ignorance of her condition and how it came about (115).

Leo’s propensity for literal interpretation provides the book with a degree of humour. But his innocence is so extreme that it is a poignant, almost painful humour:

‘Are bloomers safer than tights?’ I asked.

‘Safer, good heavens no, but they’re not so fast.’

‘But shouldn’t they be fast, for bicycling, I mean?’ (210)

Despite his ignorance of passion, he has a sensuous nature, expressed through his experience of the heat (49) and his desire for nakedness: “Which garment would be the last I should retain, before the final release into nakedness?” (50)

Leo is torn between two versions of masculinity, confused in his mind with class, and represented by the Archer and the Water Carrier. He leans toward the Archer, represented in life by Hugh. Also drawn to the Water Carrier, personified as Ted, he “could not help conceiving of him as a farm-labourer or at best a gardener, neither of which I wanted to be” (9).

The lofty masculinity he perceives in Hugh draws him particularly since he views his life in the new century with “rapture”, as a kind of “expansion and ascension”. Yet he is attracted by the passion he senses in Ted (118).

This tug-of-war represents perfectly the masculine dichotomy that existed in the late nineteenth century. While our literature-inspired model of the Victorian male child tends to be drawn from texts like Rudyard Kipling’s *Stalky an Co.* – not overly intellectual, but plucky – another existed alongside it, that of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s beautiful and sensitive *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Cox 137) .

The virgin-whore schism dominated the concept of women. Cox tells us that chaste women were believed to have less sexual feeling than men and to share a “common nature” with children, in their “unawakened sexuality” (138).

The Virgin in Leo’s zodiac is a powerful image. “She was, to me, the key to the whole pattern, the climax, the coping-stone, the goddess ...” Hartley (9). Words like “key”, “climax” and “coping-stone” are all sexual images, but innocently used.

This imagery would have made an enormous impression on a boy attracted by tales of gallantry and knights-errant. The Virgin is desirable yet unattainable. The image of her “coils of hair”, both an attraction and a covering for the Virgin’s nakedness, dominate the swimming scene. Marian’s hair comes loose and Leo is able to provide his dry swimming costume to protect her dress – an act of pure chivalry for the ultimate Virgin (Hartley 57, 58).

Leo had no concept of “spooning” – the only word he knows for anything to do with sex – but associates it with vulgarity. In short, sex is for the lower orders:

Silliness, silliness, a kind of clowning that made people absurd, soft, soppy...Pitiful at best, but who wanted pity? It was a way of looking down on people and I wanted to look up (113).

Colm Tóibín remarks on the “sodden” sexual charge between Ted and Leo (xiii). Novelist Ali Smith takes the suggestion further by calling *The Go-Between* a “gentle gay novel of immense sophistication” (Smith 2011).

I find this a rather literal interpretation and believe the child’s sexuality to be far more complex than either homo- or heterosexual. The fact that Hartley himself was gay is insufficient to make this assumption. The child’s experience of Ted is certainly sexual:

...he moved his arms about and hunched his shoulders, as if to give himself more freedom, though he was wearing nothing that could have cramped him: for a moment I thought that he was naked... (Hartley 53).

Leo notices the forearm hairs that “glinted in the sun and were paler than his arms...” (57) Later, he is excited to come upon Ted standing with his gun. He is “the colour of corn, between red and gold” (101). The next time he meets Ted, this time cleaning the gun, he notes that the muscles of his forearms “moved in ridges and hollows from a knot above his elbow, like pistons working from a cylinder” (172).

The attraction may be clear, but to what exactly is the child attracted? To my mind, Ted represents the very idea of earthiness and passion, rather than being merely the object of it. He personifies something Leo aspires to – maturity “in its most undeniable form”.

...and I wondered, what must it feel like to be him, master of those limbs which have passed beyond the need of gym and playing field, and exist for their own strength and beauty? (57)

When Ted leaves a smear of blood on Marian’s letter, Leo is horrified at this besmirching of her. Yet he notes, “part of me accepted the blood and even rejoiced in it as part of a man’s life into which I should one day be initiated” (101).

Leo is attracted to what Cox refers to as the image of the “natural boy” which arose in the closing years of the century: a boy, “at home rather than at odds with his physicality, unencumbered by spirituality and anxious, above all, to avoid the charge of effeminacy” (141).

Leo finds it “disappointing” to see the swimming women so fully clad. Their clumsy dresses “began to cling to them and take on the soft outlines of their bodies” (56). This more gently expressed attraction accords with society’s view of women. While his attraction to Marian is to the unspoilt, she nonetheless inspires jealousy, longing and a still greater hurt (222)

Unlike E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*, Leo does not feel repelled by the idea of marriage to a woman as a goal to aspire to. Neither does he have a sense of himself as different or “other”.

This is a child electrified by the idea of nakedness and sex, but with only the barest sense of it. The grown-up bathing party evokes “...a tingling on my skin and a faint loosening of my bowels” (51, 52).

I am left with the impression that, were he to discover sex at his own pace, Leo might well have turned out to be gay or straight, or challenged the labels that we insist on affixing to different forms of sexuality. My sense of Leo is of a true innocent, with no idea of what his own sexuality will consist of, but with the potential for great passion.

Its laugh broke...and that was the beginning of fairies

The Go-Between is saturated with the sensibility of the child. The voice of the man is there, but more often mediating, interpreting and aiding in the expression of the child’s

consciousness. Hartley uses first person to allow the reader full access to the inner life of his protagonist. In this concern, he follows in the footsteps of James, who allowed their characters to “perceive, process, and respond at the most private levels to the stimuli of their surroundings” (Foster 15).

Like the child in Emma Donoghue’s contemporary novel *Room*, Leo is witnessing events, particularly sexual events, which he cannot understand. Donoghue took the decision to remain strictly within the consciousness of the child, forcing the reader to form the child’s observations into an understandable picture. Hartley, on the other hand, makes similar use of first person to Dickens, who allows an adult version of characters like Pip and David Copperfield to be present too.

The voice of the adult shows a dull, bitter view of the world, with its “drab, flowerless room” and “cold rain beating on the windows”. But before long we feel the presence of the child hovering at his shoulder: “...I should be sitting in another room, rainbow-hued...” (Hartley 8).

There is a sentimentality to this “rainbow-hued” picture of another reality, but in this we sense the child reaching past the dry old man. In contrast to his dreary surroundings, the reader develops the picture of a lush imaginative life and a love for romantic tales of chivalric quests (9).

It is a childhood imbued with magic and longings – both sexual and exalted – which are lost to his adult self. Words like “glory”, “plenitude”, and “fruition” (9) could seem grandiose for their banal context – an old man paging through his childhood diary. Yet their use is not ill-considered. The narrator is channelling the inner life of the child. In showing us what he has lost, he creates the sense that the stakes are incredibly high (12). He has lost all potential to passion, or to be a mature and sexual being.

Hartley evokes a sub-conscious nostalgia for a lost childhood by drawing the reader into the child’s experience (26, 37, 46). He conveys the whimsy of a child who is sensual, yet innocent. Alone with Marian for the first time, his reactions are expressed in the most fleeting and delicate images. There is romance, but no suggestion of passion or earthiness in words like “wings and flashes”, “swooping and soaring” and “iridescence” (47, 48).

Once he has more appropriate clothing and is able to embrace the heat, Leo responds to it sensually. While the child fails to understand the emotions inherent in his reaction, they are implicit:

I liked to touch it with my hand, and feel it on my throat and round my knees, which now were bare to its embrace. I yearned to travel far, ever further into it...if it would only get hotter and hotter there was a heart of heat I should attain to (49, 50).

Here is a child who perceives himself to have enormous agency. His voice expresses a confident sense of himself at the centre of a magical universe (30). This sense of power contrasts poignantly with the man, who has no agency.

The Go-Between is filled with symbolism to which I responded emotionally when I first read this book as a teenager. On re-reading it, I initially found some of its imagery a touch heavy-handed, particularly the Chekhovian images of Ted with his gun.

Smith writes: “The novel signals itself and its seeming concerns almost too clearly – the beautiful doomed farmer cleaning his gun so assiduously” (Smith 2011).

But it occurs to me that these symbols are part and parcel of the child’s response to the world. He has a natural affinity with metaphor in his impressionable tendency to imbue sensory experiences with emotional associations.

He quite naturally first connects heat with illness, but later experiences it as part of something he doesn’t understand. The heat is shown to us through the child’s tactile sense of it, and its association with passion is there for the reader to infer.

Like the grandiose language, the slightly overblown imagery makes psychological sense when heard in the child’s voice. This is borne out by the symbolism implicit in the colour green – it is the child’s associations with the colour that give it meaning.

At first, Leo associates his new green suit with Robin Hood, and chivalrous acts for the sake of a lady. In his later disillusion, he sees it as “unready” and takes it as a gibe. The two meanings he never mentions nor recognises are ripeness and jealousy. These are left for the reader to discern.

The voice of the child is most obvious in dialogue and in Leo's letters, but Hartley sometimes allows us to slip almost entirely into the child's consciousness, even in reflection (Hartley, 210, 16).

At other times there is a kind of sharing. Referring to Henry James's use of a limited third-person point of view in *What Maisie Knew*, James Wood wrote of the narration moving constantly between the author-narrator and the child, Maisie: "The sentence pulsates, moves in and out, towards the character and away from her" (2009, 16).

Similarly, we sense that Hartley is giving us a view of the child's inner life, while lending the child his adult narrator's ability to express it (Hartley 51, 76, 77). The adult voice is also able to interpret arcane aspects of unfamiliar worlds, like the language of boarding school (186).

In the following extract, we move from an observation that is entirely childlike: "...one could press one's knuckles into one's eyes to make the colours come" into an overtly adult interpretation of the child's experience: "...and one could observe intensely over a very restricted field of vision" (60).

Impressions of the environment are skilfully used to show the child's state of mind. The first time he sees the river, it is "Green, bronze, and golden". Gravel "glinted" and fishes darted", with not a weed to mar the surface (54).

But by page 112, his mood and attitude have changed. Now, "boggy pools" have almost dried up and stalks show a "band of dirty yellow where the sun had scorched them". The water is "almost lost to view beneath the trailing weeds..."

The book is filled with this sharing of voices, yet the adult voice does not over-ride the child's. In the images, the impressions, the unrestrained view of the setting, the adult may assist in expression, but the world view and consciousness are that of the child.

The moment you doubt whether you can fly

Hartley could not have written this depiction of a 1900 childhood without the influences of the first fifty years of the twentieth century. While he is faithful to the image of an Edwardian childhood, the insights he provides draw on subsequent philosophies and models.

The Go-Between expresses both an acknowledgment of the destructive impact of the myth of innocence, and a longing for a simpler, more innocent time. His recognition of Leo's nascent

sexuality makes it clear that he was aware of the psychological authorities of his time. In his mention of the “breakdown” (Hartley 263) that follows the events at Brandham Hall, he also shows himself to be conscious of mental health.

Yet, the lyricism with which he describes the world of the child, and its images of nature, show him also to be a descendant of the Romantics – but perhaps a disillusioned Romantic might describe him best.

Unlike the Romantic poets, the adult Leo has retained nothing of the child. The drab life of the “cindery” man (Hartley 20) provides a stark contrast to the lush sensual life of the child. Hartley has made immoderate use of nostalgia in order to show the depths of the narrator’s loss. The stakes are high; the danger graver than any physical jeopardy. Hanging in the balance is the fate of a man’s spirit – a man who exists, not without comfort, but without joy.

Hartley amplifies the stakes still further by allowing the reader to infer that the danger speaks of a similar danger for society as a whole, contrasting the child’s “glorious destiny of the twentieth century” (12) with the adult’s view of a hideous century “... which has denatured humanity and planted death and hate where love and living were.”

Tóibín writes that Hartley “never ceased to long for a Platonic England that he was sure had existed in his childhood and early youth... a time of certainty, a world waiting to be broken, uncertainty made flesh” (vi).

Yet the book is not without hope. Only on the final page do we have some intimation that perhaps Leo, in his sixties and through his final role as go-between, might be capable of reaching across the gap between his ruinous view of events over the summer of 1900, and Marian’s:

“...Do you remember what that summer was like? – how much more beautiful than any since? Well, what was the most beautiful thing in it? Wasn’t it us, and our feeling for each other?...” (279).

Chapter Four – *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

On the final page of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout Finch describes a dream to her father:

“An’ they chased him ‘n’ never could catch him, ‘cause they didn’t know what he looked like, an’ Atticus, when they finally saw him, why he hadn’t done any of those things...Atticus, he was real nice...”

His hands were under my chin, pulling up the cover, tucking it around me.

“Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them” (Lee 287).

Like *David Copperfield* and *The Go-Between*, this is a coming-of-age novel. But unlike both, its protagonist’s loss of innocence does not cause lasting harm. It leaves Scout not with a blighted life or psychic damage to overcome, but with a mature balance of disillusion and hope, gentle cynicism and belief in humankind.

Set in 1930s Alabama, Harper Lee’s lone novel, which won her the Pulitzer Prize, appeared in 1960, only seven years after L.P. Hartley’s most famous work.

By the time Scout Finch begins her growth to maturity, childhood had been recognised as a separate state for several decades, both in Europe and America. In the wake of British idealisation, American reformers nurtured a similar “sacralization” of children, to encourage the movement from work to school.

To profit from the work of children, said a reformer in 1905, was to “touch profanely a sacred thing”. A great increase in the sentimental value of children followed this movement, in both working- and middle-class families (Heywood 2013, 816).

The principle may well have been clear, but ideals struggled to withstand the US stock market crash of 1929, which caused shock waves around the world. It was perhaps more keenly felt in the US, which had been experiencing a decade of optimism and prosperity, than in a United Kingdom still recovering from World War I. In the United States, banks closed, while businesses and industries cut back on hours and wages. In certain areas, farmers were struck by severe drought and decades of over-grazing led to dust storms, which devastated the land and led to rural poverty.

While images of the Depression are often those of “haggard men standing in bread lines”, children were most vulnerable to its socio-economic effects. It was during the 1930s that a teacher suggested a pupil go home and eat, to which the child replied: “I can’t. This is my sister’s day to eat” (Mintz 2004, 234).

During the worst years, one in five children in New York city suffered from malnutrition, while in areas like Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, the number was closer to nine in ten. Children were forced to take on wage-earning jobs, if they could find them, or work at home or on the farm. Thousands of schools closed and adolescents could not find work. At one stage, over half of all sixteen and seventeen-year-olds were both out of school and jobless, causing quarter of a million children to become drifters in search of jobs (Mintz 2004).

Private charities, local and even federal government initiated aid programmes, marking the first time federal government had intervened significantly in the lives of American children.

While one or two, clearly middle-class, Americans believed the Depression provided a “salutary” (236) experience for families, most observers agree that it had a devastating effect on family life, particularly for the working class. Fathers lost their jobs and their self-esteem, while other family members lost their self-respect. Divorces may well have declined, but only because few people could afford them. A 50% increase in the placement of children in custodial institutions during the first two years of the Depression was indication enough that family life was disintegrating.

For the first time in American history, the “birthrate dropped below the replacement level” (237). Three million fewer babies were born during the 1930s than in the previous decade. Some families lived in caves and sewer pipes and subsisted on dandelions and blackberries. Even those with jobs suffered pay cuts and reductions in hours. Only one in ten companies did not reduce their wages and, by 1932, three-quarters of the country’s workers had only part-time jobs. Average incomes were halved. By the end of the Depression, 14% unemployment was common, while in some areas, it reached 50%.

This situation probably had more impact on the position of children and on child-rearing practices than all the advice books and manuals in the world.

For many children, the Depression meant a declining standard of living, heightened family tension, inconsistent parental discipline, and an unemployed father. Many

children experienced psychological stress, insecurity, deprivation and intense feelings of shame (237).

The language of childhood

Nonetheless, the child-care industry did not stop rolling through the 1930s, '40s and '50s. As set out in the previous chapter, the doctors of the early century begat the psychologists and the psychologists begat the Child Study Movement who begat the behaviourists. Through the 1930s, the psycho-analysts held sway in the parlour, while the behaviourists still ruled the nursery until Dr Benjamin Spock evicted them after 1946.

Mothers were tired of the Child Study Movement's tiresome documenting of milestones and psychological development. Now it was time for the adults. Children should know their place. The aim of child-rearing practices through the 1920s and 1930s was to produce "well-behaved, polite children, with regular habits" (Hardyment 1984, 229).

Maria Montessori's educational ideas, between the world wars, "suited the mood" by urging children to "grow up while bothering adults as little as possible". She encouraged the growth of independence and believed toddlers could learn order much earlier than had been thought possible (Hardyment 2007, 195).

The post-World War II atmosphere in the UK and America was very different, as several actors took the stage. The "diluted Freudianism" of Eric Erikson placed children back in the centre of the family with his view that, just as vaccinations had eliminated smallpox, careful management in childhood could do the same for mental illness (Hardyment 1984, 229).

But by the late 1940s, parents became less interested in the psychoanalysts' focus on breast-feeding, weaning and toilet training and focused instead on intellectual growth. Jean Piaget had been around since the 1920s, but it was not until cognitive development was simplified by the child-care manuals that he became generally known. Where Freudian-style prescription had obsessed over secret sexual yearnings, parents were now fully responsible, night and day, for their intellect (Hardyment 1984).

These two thinkers formed the basis for "two modern touchstones – 'emotional depth and keen intelligence'". (224) And both were clearly developed in the century's most sought-after child-care manual.

With his *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, Spock introduced a radical new approach to child care which encouraged “daily stimulation from loving parents” (Hardyment 1984, 223, citing Spock). From the time his book appeared in the late 1940s, it was a worldwide bestseller, outsold only by the Bible. Translated into thirty-nine languages, its effects were global (Columbia250).

A decade earlier, just as behaviourism had begun to sound a little too close to fascism, two forerunners had paved the way for his swing to a child-centred world. C. Anderson and Mary M. Aldrich’s *Babies are Human Beings* had not made much of an impact on a British public preparing for war, but their injunctions caused a flurry of “interest and relief” among United States parents (Cunningham, Hardyment 1984).

They were not told to build better babies for a brighter world or to mould citizens for the empire. They were not warned that they and their husbands were probably providing a dangerously contaminated environment for their child. Instead they were encouraged to enjoy their babies – albeit “in an intelligent way” (Hardyment 1984, 214).

In their wake, Spock encouraged mothers to treat their infants in an instinctive, “natural” way. Instead of being “self-controlled, emotionless...hygienic in mind and body”, the 1950s baby was to be “warmly affectionate, impulsive, dependent and (preferably) scintillatingly intelligent” (Hardyment 1984, 223).

Spock believed a child should be understood rather than managed. ““He isn’t a schemer. He needs love,” he wrote. ‘Your baby is born to be a reasonable, friendly human being’” (Mintz 2004, 279).

Spock’s talent lay in translating theories like Freud’s into language that any parent could understand (Mintz 2004). But Sommerville suggests he differed from Freud in simply expecting the child to turn out well. In the end, though, he argues that Spock simply swapped one form of authority for another. Since they should not be made to feel different, children were often freed from parental demands in order to meet the demands of their peers (225).

Spock was himself later disillusioned by child-centred aspects of American culture which he had helped created. In later editions of his book, he back-tracked slightly to recommend that children be taught to serve others rather than purely themselves (Hardyment 1984).

A significant element of this construction of childhood involved producing happy children. This imperative, however, developed independently of Spock and was, paradoxically, already very much part of the American culture through the Depression, according to Stearns, to whom I owe this history of happiness (2006, 2010).

References to happiness first appeared with the decline of original sin, as mentioned previously. But after 1910, manuals concentrated on happiness as an essential responsibility. Though the behaviourists “hardly oozed happiness” (Stearns 2010), even they couldn’t resist this particular bandwagon, suggesting their approach would produce happier, better adjusted children in the end.

The Depression years were hardly a bundle of laughs, yet even then, the happy child was personified in the ever-smiling Shirley Temple. Despite shrinking incomes, children were overwhelmed by a surge in consumerism as manufacturers struggled to find new markets and parents wrestled with the responsibility to bring up happy children in a harsh climate (Mintz 2004, Stearns 2010).

By the 1940s, happiness was “bidding to take the place of morality as the quality most associated with a desirable childhood, though in some formulations of course there was a certain linkage between happiness and good character” (2010). Spock reiterated the theme when he associated love with the sharing of happiness – perhaps not all day long, but certainly every day.

During the baby boom, this parental obligation was partially responsible for increased suburbanisation, in order to create “happy spaces for kids”. Not only were parents obliged to work hard enough to buy these happy spaces, but they were required to be cheerful while they did it.

A woman of influences

So, which of these influences would have informed Lee’s writing? Lee was born in 1926 and grew up during the Depression and the war years. While most people would have been aware of the flurry around the “Spock-marked” children of the 1950s, it is unlikely the precise details of post-war child care would have made much impression on a childless young woman. More likely influences were the general morality and sensibilities that arose in the lead-up to the 1960s, attitudes to authority, and perhaps also the trend to a more child-centred world.

In his seminal work on American childhood, Steven Mintz (2004) sets out the circumstances that would have affected children and young people through these decades. The deprivations of the Depression would have had their effect, though possibly less so for the comfortable middle class. What is less known is that these years prepared the ground for the youth revolts of the 1960s by sowing the seeds of the youth movements and altering young people's attitudes to authority.

Unemployment and international tensions set off a wave of student activism, different from the 1960s in that these young people dressed in suits or skirts. They didn't show their antipathy to older generations, but nonetheless changed campus culture forever.

Families were altered in other ways too. While World War I brought with it a decline in marriages and births, World War II brought a burst of marriages – and divorces. The 1930s birth rate more than doubled in the next decade – signalling the start of a baby boom that was to continue into the 1950s.

All US children were required to contribute to the war effort, either by collecting scrap metal, tin cans, rubber or old newspapers. They sold War Bonds and handed out civil defence pamphlets. Work gave them the autonomy to buy their own magazines, listen to their own music and wear youth-targeted clothing. This encouraged them to demand adult rights and see themselves as a common, and distinct, generation.

The war's other effect was to make many young Americans aware of "life's sorrows", which led directly to the 1950s emphasis on family life. Many baby boomers think of the 1950s as a time of suburban homes, ice-cream trucks, amusement parks and shopping malls. Yet, a third of post-war children in America grew up near or below the poverty line.

The years between World War II and the turbulence of the 1960s are often regarded as a sterile period of quiescence and conformity, but beneath warmth of the era were intense currents of anxiety (Mintz 2004, 276).

Cold War hysteria and the desire for security created a society that demanded the obedience of black people and women, children to parents, and respect for the authority of family, government, the law and religion. Anxious adults created organisations to fill the leisure time of school-going children and inculcate respect. But despite all this, the 1950s and '60s generations challenged the civil authority that demanded their subordination.

Rock and roll provided a channel for the expression of youth culture. And prominent in the new music scene were African Americans, who had until now been largely absent from TV and other forms of popular culture.

But for many, it was the death of Emmett Till “Bobo”, a disabled black adolescent with a speech impediment, which brought civil rights into sharp focus. While he was visiting relatives in the Mississippi Delta in 1955, a store clerk told her husband the boy had called her “Baby” and treated her with disrespect. Her husband and brother later abducted and tortured him before murdering him. In 1957, Till’s great uncle identified the men in court, yet an hour after they began deliberating, the jurors declared them not guilty.

Coming months after the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional, the murder set the stage for the signal Montgomery bus boycott three months later...Emmett Till’s murder underscored blacks’ vulnerability, victimization, and powerlessness, which could no longer be tolerated by younger African Americans (ibid, 303).

The “profound cultural shifts” post-war, such as the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, the women’s movement, Vietnam protests and the Watergate hearings did not come out of the blue, but grew out of the shift in children’s attitudes to authority.

These had been bubbling beneath the surface since 1800s reformers placed children centre-stage and sent them to school. The 1930s and ‘40s had amplified them and even John Dewey had played his part with progressive schooling, which eliminated rote learning (Lassonde).

But when Spock spoke, society listened. The changes he prompted in attitudes to authority finally entered mainstream culture during the 1950s.

The specifics of Spock’s child-rearing advice may well have passed Lee by but, by the time she reached her twenties, changes to the way children viewed authority coincided also with a “more profound” swing towards children and youth in the culture generally (Lassonde).

Literary and popular children

Twentieth-century literature went through many changes from its Edwardian, idealised youth. Passing through Modernism’s ambivalence, it finally matured into an image of children as taking responsibility from weaker adults, or as “threateningly disruptive” beings.

Gavin (2012a) suggests that, through the century, the child underwent alterations in emphasis and perspective, but also showed some unchanging qualities. The greatest change can be seen in the power balance between adults and children, which is understandable if one considers the changes in society.

Only in post-war literature does the power shift meaningfully to children – but not without cost. Either adults become a burden or the child is shown as “violent, incomprehensible, disruptive, ‘Gothicized’” (15).

To Kill a Mockingbird is typical of its period. While the adults close to Scout are not particularly burdensome, others create danger for the town and the children. Scout and her brother, on the other hand, are instrumental in restoring peace, as is Boo Radley. While not exactly a child, Boo is certainly a regressive, child-like figure who has been prevented from assuming a full adult life.

Mark Twain was one of the greatest literary influences for children growing up in twentieth-century America. Before him came a group of American writers who took family as their subject matter. “Louisa May Alcott’s account of family life, in 1868, is so real that readers feel they know each member of the March family intimately” (Norton 61).

Alcott was ahead of her time in many ways. Like Scout’s father, her own father (who formed the inspiration for the March patriarch) believed in educating his daughters, even sending her to the district school.

As education became more child-centred, thanks to Dewey, and religious training concentrated more on morality than on sinfulness, children’s literature mirrored these changes.

American books for children from the 1930s to the 1960s show happy, secure children with fathers who go to work, mothers who stay at home and older generations who are wise and worthy of respect. Children attend Sunday School or prepare for the Sabbath, and patriotism is strong.

Books were not the only forms of popular culture to influence and depict children, though. Because of the Depression’s joint preoccupations with childhood happiness and marketing to the young, society became concerned with entertaining them.

Caped comic book superheroes addressed society's "fears, hopes and fantasies", as did Hollywood's new brand of kids' movie, embodied by *Dead End Kids*, "incipient criminals" who emulated a neighbourhood gangster and the rambunctiously preadolescent *Little Rascals* (Mintz 2004, 249).

Depression-era movies brought innocence, optimism and cuteness to the screen, without the "mystery and otherness of childhood" depicted in post-war films. Only in the 1950s would audiences see "depraved" children, as in *The Bad Seed* in 1956. By the end of the 1930s, Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland and Lana Turner helped create the "Kleen Teen" stereotype against which the "troubled, misunderstood and alienated" characters of the 1950s rebelled, in teen pics like *Young and Wild*, *The Cool and the Crazy*, and *High School Confidential* (251).

The violence and mayhem in post-war comics alarmed the establishment, particularly since they sold a hundred-million copies a month. Like the decade's teen-pics, they targeted a newly identified category, known as "teenagers". This group also provided fascinating subjects for fiction, like Carson McCullers's 1946 coming of age novel, *The Member of the Wedding* and James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, in 1953, about an African-American boy suffering doubts about race, religion and sex. And then, of course, there was Holden Caulfield, the "embodiment of the sullen, self-absorbed adolescent, angst-ridden and alienated" who "rails against the phoniness of the adult world" (297).

As Gail Schmunk Murray puts it, the "altered construction of childhood that would permeate American culture" by the end of the 1960s was already obvious in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Salinger's vision of adolescence "opened the way for a more frank discussion of teenage feelings and problems than had ever existed before". A proliferation of "problem novels" contributed to the notion that children could not always be protected. And if they were not held apart from the adult world so vociferously, they might be better prepared for life (185).

Perhaps more alarming than any of the sullen teenagers and troubled children of the 1960s "problem novels", was the spectre of television, which created a universal children's culture reaching across all social classes and regions. In 1945, only 5000 American households owned a TV, but by 1960, seven out of every eight families had one.

Scout Finch's childhood

Like *The Go-Between*, this book exposes a society riven by divisions. But unlike Hartley's world, crossing these boundaries presages danger, but not disaster. Both Scout and Leo become mixed up in adult business but, unlike Leo, Scout does not end up its helpless victim.

Scout's meddling is potentially far more dangerous, in physical terms, than Leo's role as sexual agent. Considerably younger than the twelve-, going on thirteen-year-old Leo, Scout retrospectively recognises the danger, but her life is not blighted by it (Lee 161).

Far from it. She is drawn into an acute awareness of racial divisions in her small Alabama town. Yet the events surrounding Tom Robinson's rape conviction, and the children's "relationship" with their reclusive neighbour Boo Radley, carry the message that, beyond all divisions of race and class, there lies an innate goodness in all men.

Thematically, it is clear that good men can and should counter their communities' attitudes by crossing racial, as well as class boundaries. This is signified by the image of Atticus and the children standing quite literally against the lynch mob.

He allowed we was white folks and knowed better than him³

Scout's coming of age brings with it the realisation that her father is different from most of their community, as Dolphus Raymond confirms outside the courthouse: "Miss Jean Louise, you don't know your pa's not a run-of-the-mill man...you haven't seen enough of the world yet" (Lee 207, 208).

She grows up in a time and place in which black people are referred to as "niggers" (108, 246) and treated as lesser beings. As Dolphus Raymond laments: "Cry about the hell white people give coloured folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too" (207).

Racial assumptions are common (162, 163, 211, 246, 247) and, as in South Africa, then and a generation later, blacks and whites live and socialise apart – except for the enforced intimacy of domestic service.

³ I have drawn the headings in this chapter from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, an iconic story of American childhood which, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, encompasses what Steven Mintz (2004) refers to as our cherished myth of a "bucolic time of freedom, untainted innocence, and self-discovery", alongside "grim and unsettling details about childhood's underside" and society as a whole (1).

At the age of eight, Scout has naturally absorbed many of her community's attitudes and, when Dill is upset by Tom Robinson's cross-examination, she tellingly comforts him with: "Well, Dill, after all he's just a Negro" (205).

She first denies to her schoolmates that her father "defended niggers" and tells Atticus that his accusers made it sound as though he were "running a still". With this first mention of the book's driving conflict, her slow transformation begins. Her father tells her, that despite what "everybody" says, she is not to use the word "nigger" (80, 81)

Tom's trial gives her a true understanding of injustice. She demonstrates this when she points out her teacher's hypocrisy: "Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an' then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home—" (253).

Despite her growing racial consciousness, their relationship with people of colour is complex, perhaps best summed up by Scout's narration: "We lived on the main residential street in town – Atticus, Jem and I, plus Calpurnia our cook" (11).

Calpurnia is part of the family unit...but not quite. She is the "plus". Any child who grew up in the '60s and '70s in South Africa will recognise this relationship. In many ways, she stands in place of a mother, particularly since the children have lost theirs. She disciplines them (12, 30), treats them (25, 109), and brings them lemonade on hot summer days (44). When Atticus goes away for two weeks, he leaves them in her care (122).

While not overly sentimental with the children (109), and certainly not lenient, she clearly loves (34, 35) and is protective of them (101). They tell on each other to Calpurnia (39) and, when they sense danger, she is their first port of call (99).

She brings them up and wipes their tears, yet retains the ambivalent position of an employee. She waits on them at table (30) and, while Atticus makes it clear that he will never dismiss her, this is due to his individual character. As much as she loves Calpurnia, the eight-year-old Scout can still suggest "packing her off" when reprimanded (34, 35).

Staying over with the children, Calpurnia sleeps on a folding cot in the kitchen. She sits in the back seat of their car and enters white people's houses by the back door (123, 245, 100). As Jem turns twelve, he becomes "Mister Jem" (121). This signals a shift in their relationship – when Jem transforms from the child she has control over to quasi-employer.

Scout cannot conceive of Calpurnia having her own life outside of their family unit (131). When she later develops a curiosity to see how Calpurnia lives, in her aunt's eyes, she "...might as well have wanted to see the other side of the moon" (230).

Calpurnia shows pride in the children which is, of course, equally a pride in her work. "I don't want anyone sayin' I don't look after my children," she muttered" (123).

Society's racial and class divisions place the children in a privileged position, of which they are well aware. Even as young children, their status commands respect, purely because of their colour.

When they saw Jem and me with Calpurnia, the men stepped back and took off their hats; the women crossed their arms at their waists, weekday gestures of respectful attention. They parted and made a small pathway to the church door for us (124).

Lee does not show us what life was like for black children of the period, but Mintz lets us know, in no uncertain terms. While African Americans took the full force of the Depression, it was particularly hard in the south, where three-quarters of the black population lived. Alabama was one of the worst hit states.

In Macon County, Alabama, the lives of children were little more than a step removed from slavery. Their diet consisted almost entirely of salt pork, hominy grits, cornbread, and molasses, with red meat, fresh vegetables, fruit, and even milk almost unknown luxuries. Their homes had dirt floors and no windows or screens; three-quarters had no sewage disposal (2004, 239).

If you are with quality...you will itch in upwards of a thousand places

"There is no doubt in my mind that they're good folks," Aunt Alexandra tells Scout. "But they're not our kind of folks."

Scout wants to play with Walter Cunningham and this her aunt will resist with all her might. "The thing is," she tells Scout, "you can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, you can put him in shoes and a new suit, but he'll never be like Jem." Walter is "trash" – and children like Scout don't play with "trash" (Lee 230, 231).

Old money tells: grand old families still live on the plantations (166), while middle-class respectability holds sway in towns. Backwoods families live a hand-to-mouth existence in

cabins. They and the middle class might attend the town school together, but they don't mix socially. They come together only professionally or on town business (23–29).

Jem's lunch invitation to Walter Cunningham is unusual. The boy has hookworm and is reluctant to accept an invitation he suspects is charity (29). Yet these "poor white" cabin people are not the lowest on society's ladder, and this is a perception most will cling to, in a society in which they have little else.

All the little man on the witness stand had that made him any better than his nearest neighbours was, that if scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water, his skin was white (177).

Bitterly, he complains that, for fifteen years, he has asked the state "...to clean out that nest down yonder". The use of the word "nest" is significant in its implication that blacks are less than human, but then, the narrator's use of the term "little man" is equally telling in its class assumptions (181).

An aspect of Scout's coming of age involves a growing empathy for Tom Robinson's accuser, Mayella Ewell, when she realises that "...white people wouldn't have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn't have anything to do with her because she was white..." (198).

Mayella is nineteen and, the eldest of eight, attended school for only two or three years before she was needed at home. And since two members of the family could read and write, there was no need for the rest to learn. Where schooling has prolonged Scout and Jem's childhood, Mayella's has been abruptly curtailed.

The working-class children with whom Scout attends school vividly demonstrate Cunningham's point that compulsory schooling was not achieved without a struggle.

They show contempt for teachers and learning (Lee 32, 33) and are unable to pass their grades – either because they are taken out of school for seasonal farmwork, or because they attend only the first day to please the authorities (23–34).

For these ill-fed hosts to "cooties" and hookworms (25, 32), childhood is short-lived or non-existent. Atticus recognises this by speaking to Walter Cunningham as a man. Walter tells him he has been unable to pass first grade since he has to help with chopping, "but there's another'n at the house now that's field size'" (30).

Scout notes that most of the “ragged, denim-shirted and floursack-skirted first grade” have “chopped cotton and fed hogs from the time they were able to walk” (22, 23). Unlike Scout and Jem, whose leisure time allows them a wealth of reading and play, these children are immune to imaginative literature (22, 23). Oblivious of this, their teacher “mystified the first grade with a long narrative about a toadfrog that lived in a hall” (34).

Despite the fact that the “trend was clear” (Stearns 2006, 77), and the battle over in most Western nations before the 1920s, child labour continued to vie with schooling in parts of the United States, especially amongst working-class and rural children (Cunningham).

Efforts to save children from work were not without opposition, particularly in the American south, where even some Catholic priests defended seasonal child labour on the basis that it provided income for poor farmers, and was “positively healthful”. Working people resented government interference in the way they ran their farms and families, and fierce protection of state rights meant laws were introduced only piecemeal and the slow attrition of child labour continued well into the twentieth century (Cunningham 173).

The first federal law limiting child labour in America was introduced in 1916, but struck down by the Supreme Court because it attempted to regulate intrastate commerce. Only in the 1930s did the Fair Labor Standards Act finally restrict child labour across America.

Traditionally, small family farms on both sides of the Atlantic had required the help of quite young children to “help out”. They would look after younger siblings, fetch water and firewood, gather fruit and herbs, pick stones, scare birds, spread manure and mind the pigs and sheep. This work was partly seasonal, reaching a peak at harvest time. During their early teens, gender differences became more pronounced. Daughters helped in the house, the garden and the dairy, while sons worked more intensively in the fields (Heywood 2013, 3829–3833).

This is the fate of Mayella, whose life follows a pattern similar to children on subsistence farms from the middle ages onwards. Like Scout, she is motherless. But Mayella has no mother substitute, and is expected to be housekeeper and mother to a house full of siblings.

Paradoxically, one area in which America moved faster than many European countries was in promoting school enrolment, or at least in its northern states. By the 1830s, law required children at least to enrol in school, although many attended only infrequently. Between the

1860s and '80s, attendance requirements became common in the West, but the American south introduced these only after 1900.

By the 1890s, most children in the western world were literate and many middle- and even lower-middle-class parents began sending their children for at least a year or two of secondary school. American high schools appeared in the 1840s, which led to further refinement of the concept of youth and childhood, primarily of course for the middle classes (Stearns 2006, 77–78).

This process was rudely interrupted by the Depression, which forced many families to rely on children's income. For the most part, girls were responsible for work within the home while boys brought in actual income. Most children recognised this as a necessity, says Cunningham. Family and community pressure outweighed the desire for more education and some even resorted to failing an exam deliberately to bring an end to their education (178).

But by the end of the 1930s, the Depression had brought about a complete about-turn. School enrolment had reached its highest ever level. Hand-in-hand with increasing adult unemployment had come the realisation that children should leave the work to adults. The minimum leaving age was raised to sixteen and by 1939, three-quarters of fourteen to seventeen-year-olds were high school students (Mintz 2004, 238, 239).

We caught fish, and talked, and we took a swim now and then

When Scout and Jem are five and nine their summertime boundaries reach as far as Calpurnia can call (Lee 12) and stretch further as they grow. They are never in the house unless it rains, but have the security of knowing that at least one of them is always within calling distance of Calpurnia (34).

There is a childhood which recalls the Edwardian children's literature of endless adventure and minimal adult interference. Their autonomy is probably only partly typical of life in a small town, and less so for Scout than Jem. The narrator acknowledges this through boring cousin Francis and the unpleasant Mrs Dubose, who both comment on the degree to which Atticus allows his children to "run with stray dogs" and "run wild" (87, 106).

But Lee lends to her children another quality that would have been extremely unlikely in the 1930s.

As a menacing mob advances on Atticus, the smell of “stale whiskey and pig-pen” about them, Atticus stands firm, guarding the jail where Tom Robinson is being held. The men have lynching on their mind. Things look bad...until the situation is defused by an eight-year-old, who unwittingly appeals to the men’s humanity and reminds them of their history as a community (158–160).

Lee grants her literary children great agency in the world of men. Yet the 1930s were infused with a know-your-place ethic. The behaviourist child was shaped to suit the convenience of its elders. And certainly, a dose of Victorian romanticism left over from their own backgrounds would have led most adults to protect “innocent” children from the ugliness of adult life. Aunt Alexandra’s exhortation that Scout be a “ray of sunshine” (87) in her father’s lonely life, is testament to this spirit of idealisation.

But the sensibility of the Spock era was different. It was a child-centred world in which children no longer knew their place and increasingly spoke their minds – and were listened to. The decades after the 1930s, with their escalation of youth culture and their radically changing attitudes to authority, provide a more credible backdrop to the creation of these children.

To my mind, Scout and Jem are far more the product of this post-war sensibility. The Finch children’s growing awareness of civil rights resonates with the spirit of the 1950s when these issues were gaining currency.

Hain’t we got all the fools in town on our side?

At any time in history, small-town children would know everyone, and probably know their business too. But unlike Leo, who was held at a distinct remove from the sphere of adults, Scout and Jem experience no such breach. They are part of the community, spoken to like sentient beings, and listened to in return – even if Scout doesn’t understand every allusion, or the reasons behind every action (18, 26, 51, 66).

Far from being barred from adult company, the children choose one or two grownups as companions and relate to them on a fairly equal footing. Miss Maudie’s habit of using her tongue to thrust out her bridgework makes her acceptable to Scout as “a friend” (48, 50).

It is this inclusion which allows Scout the agency to affect events in the adult world. Unlike Leo, whose views are neither sought nor taken into account and who is consequently swept

along by events he cannot control, Scout and Jem are encouraged to develop opinions and to take part in the world as moral beings.

It's lovely to live on a raft

Play is certainly the “business” of Scout and Jem’s childhood: “Early one morning, as we were beginning our day’s play in the backyard...” (12) Yet their activities do not involve much material play equipment, despite the decade’s focus on entertaining children.

A host of new toys and board games appeared at this time, including Monopoly, Shirley Temple dolls and Mickey Mouse watches (Mintz 2004). Disney Brothers’ Cartoon Studio, founded by Walt and his brother Roy and later renamed Walt Disney Studio, had produced animated films through the silent era in the 1920s. Mickey Mouse was born in the early 1930s and his success allowed Disney to embark on the first feature-length animated movie. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* premiered 1937 and became the highest grossing film of the time.

Nonetheless, not much material concession is made to Scout and Jem’s entertainment. They spend time in a tree house (Lee 14, 38) and play with an old tyre (43). The only toys mentioned are a miniature steam-engine and twirling baton, bought the day after Jem’s twelfth birthday (106), a two-power telescope (22) and for Christmas, the children receive air rifles and a chemistry set (87).

Many of their games consist of play-acting, using a list of dramas “based on the works of Oliver Optic, Victor Appleton, and Edgar Rice Burroughs” (14). As the children grow increasingly fascinated by their reclusive neighbour Boo Radley, they add his story – or as much of it as they’ve learnt from community gossip – to their repertoire (44–46).

After Christmas there is mention of “Jem plugging away at a tin can” while Scout builds “a complicated breastworks at the side of the porch, consisting of a tyre, an orange crate, the laundry hamper, the porch chairs, and a small US flag Jem gave me from a popcorn box” (97).

Everybody...has got to take an oath, and write his name in blood

Bets are sacred in this world of childhood and any show of fear is deeply frowned upon. As a matter of honour, Jem never declines a dare (19). Contracts are sealed by spitting in each other’s hands (27, 37, 58) and “finders were keepers unless title was proven”. Plucking

camellias and helping themselves to hot milk from Miss Maudie's cow is part of their "ethical culture", but money is different (41).

The children's systems of self-regulation, codes and rules of honour are well-defined and different from those of adults, emphasizing the fact that childhood had developed as a separate stage of life.

The children are naturally secretive, keeping their pursuits from the eyes and ears of their elders. When they find a collection of small treasures in a tree, they assume them to have been left by a "little kid", hiding his things from "the bigger folk" (65), since "grown folks" don't have hiding places (40).

They maintain conventions to warn each other of what is secret, from camel-kicks (66) to silence in the face of adult questioning: "Jem's evasion told me our game was a secret, so I kept quiet" (46).

Only when Jem is finally growing up does he break "the remaining code of our childhood", by telling Atticus that Dill has run away from home (146).

Jim said that bees won't sting idiots

As it does in *The Go-Between*, superstition plays an important role in the narrative. The children perceive Boo Radley to be the neighbourhood bogeyman - a "malevolent phantom", who peeps in windows and is suspected of mutilating chickens and household pets.

A Negro would not pass the Radley Place at night...Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked (14, 15).

As a bogeyman, he thrills as much as he terrifies. When old Mrs Radley dies, "Jem and I decided that Boo had got her at last, but when Atticus returned from the Radley house he said she died of natural causes, to our disappointment" (70).

The children believe and, as they grow older, half-believe in the use of incantations, secret signs and in supernatural phenomena like "haints and hot steams" (261) which Scout is "immune to in the daytime" (45), and which Calpurnia dismisses as "nigger talk" (43).

They are easy prey to superstition, so when Mr Avery tells them the seasons will change if they disobey their parents or smoke cigarettes, she and Jem are "burdened with the guilt of contributing to the aberrations of nature" (69).

It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river

Jem was twelve. He was difficult to live with, inconsistent, moody. His appetite was appalling, and he told me so many times to stop pestering him I consulted Atticus.

‘Reckon he’s got a tapeworm?’ Atticus said no, Jem was growing. I must be patient with him and disturb him as little as possible (121).

Jem has become an adolescent – though not a teenager. Teenagers would only be invented a decade later. Nonetheless, the onset of puberty marks a boundary although, in contrast to Leo, he changes gradually, both physically and emotionally.

Referred to as “youngsters” before the war, adolescents were largely expected to share the same world view as their parents and fulfil their parents’ desires rather than their own.

As Mintz (2004) tells us, everything changed during the 1940s. While the seeds of the teen were planted during the late 1930s, it was only in the war and post-war years that he flowered (251). The term “teenager” was first used in *Popular Science Monthly*, in 1941, in the same week that America entered the war.

But if the teenager made his appearance then, it was in the post-war period that he came into his own, developing a distinct culture with its own language, styles and music. The first “teenager” was not that far removed from his parents – even to the point of enjoying the same big band sounds. But within just a few years, he would strike out on his own, as manufacturers gleefully discovered his buying power.

Within a decade and a half, Andy Hardy, the apple-cheeked small-town boy sipping sodas at the corner candy store, gave way to a new cultural stereotype: the bored restless, volatile teenager who combined a child’s emotions with an adult’s passions and was estranged from parents and other authority figures (253).

Jem shows more in common with the adolescents of the early part of the century – for him it was a state of hormonal transition, rather than a distinct cultural stage.

Even before he turns twelve, Jem and Scout begin to part company (Lee 63) and he gravitates more to male company (47, 52). At Christmas, Jem “felt his age and gravitated to the adults...” (86) When he cries, he does so silently and in secret (69).

His relationship with Atticus begins to change. His greater maturity leads to his telling Atticus what would previously have been the secrets of childhood (146):

Jem seemed to have lost his mind. He began pouring out our secrets right and left in total disregard for my safety if not for his own, omitting nothing, knot-hole, pants and all (78).

He outgrows their childhood haunts, like the treehouse, and takes on a quasi-parental role, telling Scout how to behave (121) and not to antagonise Aunt Alexandra (143), to the point that he threatens to spank her (143).

Besides a “maddening air of wisdom” (122), he develops a “maddening superiority” (143), and in his greater caring, even for harmless insects, Jem becomes “more like a girl every day” (244, 245).

A “girl” is not the only being he resembles. As the book progresses, Jem begins to look more like his father and takes on certain of his mannerisms – a decisive demonstration that his form of adolescence does not carry with it the inter-generational hostility of later teen cultures.

She took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me

As a parent, Atticus is “satisfactory”. He plays with his children, reads to them and treats them “with courteous detachment” (11).

The children show an unconventional attitude to their father’s authority. While Jem sometimes addresses Atticus as “Sir”, usually when he is in trouble or in more formal situations (109, 146), they more commonly call him by his first name. This is a detail more likely to bring to mind the post-war year of diminishing distance between parents and their children.

Atticus is a vague father, who forgets the exact ages of his children (278) and doesn’t bother with some of his parental duties (21, 22). Yet he is always there when needed (35, 36, 37) and shows his love, even if in less than conventional ways. He reads to Scout every night – not children’s stories, but “...news of the day, Bills To Be Enacted into Laws...anything Atticus happened to be reading when I crawled into his lap every night” (24).

Atticus is not a remote Victorian father, nor a behaviourist. He reasons and negotiates (37), does not train his children into routines nor shy away from touching them. But then, neither

does he seem to share the Spock generation's focus on child and cognitive development. He is neither the guard of a stiff schedule, nor does he "shower" his children with love. He does not in the least care if they are made to feel different, since he views a strong moral position to be more important. Yet he is a progressive, and in many ways an idealised father, who listens fairly to their concerns and expects them to come to him when in trouble (36, 146, 95).

He addresses his children without condescension (147). He explains the word "compromise" to Scout as an "agreement reached by mutual concessions". While respect is palpable in the children's attitude, it is a respect that is earned. Atticus has taught them to level the same questioning gaze on everyone, not simply to accord respect to authority figures. In this, he is a couple of decades in advance of his times.

His tone is most often that of "the lawyer" rather than "the father", and he encourages equality in their interactions. "We'll consider it sealed without the usual formality," he says when Scout is about spit on her hand. He also warns her not to tell the school, saying: "I'm afraid our activities would be received with considerable disapprobation by the more learned authorities" (37).

He shares with his children the arcane world of his profession, so that Scout is able to explain the actions of the trial counsel to Dill (205) – and to express the fear that Atticus has "gone frog-sticking without a light": "Never, never, never on cross-examination ask a witness a question you don't already know the answer to, was a tenet I absorbed with my baby-food" (183).

He does not accede to the still-prevalent view that children are to be protected from life's unpleasantness. He reads them the news of the day (24), and takes them to see the local prison farm. He readily explains that, in the Depression, "professional people were poor because the farmers were poor" and, during the trial, the full "subtlety of Tom's predicament" (201).

He tells his brother: "Jack! When a child asks you something, answer him, for goodness' sake. But don't make a production of it. Children are children, but they can spot an evasion quicker than adults, and evasion simply muddles 'em..." (93).

His disciplinary methods are progressive. Although observers have noted a shift from corporal punishment, first in the 1840s, and again in the early years of the twentieth century (Cunningham, Hardymont 1984), Robertson argues that beating continued unabated well into

the twentieth century (415). The principles of behaviourism were also not inconsistent with the physical correction of troubling habits.

Scout tells us that Calpurnia's "hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard..." (Lee 12) and the children appear largely unperturbed by it. Scout notes that "A lickin' hurts but it doesn't last." (62) When Uncle Jack beats her (91), she finds herself "suddenly looking at a tiny ant struggling with a bread-crumbs in the grass". She doesn't cry, and seems more concerned with the injustice of it.

On the first day of school, she is "patted" on the palm of her hand with a ruler, then made to stand in the corner (22). This the class finds hilarious – that, with her ineffectual pats, Miss Caroline has, in her mind, "whipped" Scout (28).

Scout's complete unconcern over beatings, however, stretches credibility in a first-grade child whose father has never "laid a hand" (94) on his children, besides the odd unfulfilled threat to "wear us out" (18). This is her first day of school and she has been in the care of only Atticus and Calpurnia, who has done no worse than administer the odd flat-hand smack.

Like the proponents of progressive parenting who would come after him, Atticus appeals to his children's good-sense and loyalty, leaving them unwilling to let him down (83). On occasion, he uses "the oldest lawyer's trick on record", provoking Jem into yelling after him (but only when he is out of earshot): "I thought I wanted to be a lawyer but I ain't so sure now!" (56)

When Jem destroys the flowerbeds of cantankerous Mrs Dubose, Atticus insists that Jem first apologise and then accede to her request that he read to her every day for a month (110, 111).

Unlike the Spock generation, Atticus does not emphasise the importance of happiness, particularly not in the provision of material gifts and toys. More important is that his children live moral lives. Both through his lessons and by example, he teaches self-sacrifice, about caring for others and doing the "right thing".

Oddly though, Atticus stands up for Tom Robinson, but not the child of his next-door-neighbour. The modern concept of child abuse had already been in general usage since 1914 or so, and yet nowhere is Boo Radley's treatment acknowledged as abuse. Old Mr Radley is an old-style Puritan, so upright "he took the word of God as his only law". Boo's iniquities were no more serious than those of any rambunctious adolescent yet, while his companions

were given an excellent secondary education in Industrial School, Mr Radley removed his son from school and from life. Nobody knows exactly what form of intimidation he uses and Atticus acknowledges the man turned his son into “a ghost”. Yet still, he tells Jem to mind his own business, as Mr Radley has the right to mind his (17, 18).

As the narrator grows more aware of the world outside the family, the reader notices a disparity between Atticus’s version of parenthood and that expected by society, until Atticus himself expresses the fear that he’s been “a total failure as a parent”, but adds: “I’ve tried to live so I can look squarely back at him...” (279).

Yet Scout notes with a measure of irony:

There was one odd thing, though, that I never understood: in spite of Atticus’s shortcomings as a parent, people were content to re-elect him to the state legislature that year, as usual, without opposition (249).

I had been to school most all the time...and could write just a little

As school attendance grew, so educationalists turned their attention to the education on offer, and focused more on the needs of the child (Sommerville, Norton, Lassonde).

It was at the turn of the twentieth century that John Dewey recognised the need for practical training for life in a more open and democratic society. He declared that it would be social and co-operative, rather than intensely individualistic and competitive. His form of “progressive education” brought with it slogans like “the child-centered school” and “educating the whole child”. Its impact on the American school “can hardly be imagined by those who have grown up on this side of these changes” (Sommerville 223).

This may well be so, but Miss Caroline’s methods don’t impress young Scout. A precocious learner, she finds herself at loggerheads with her first grade teacher, who is straight out of college – and introducing a new teaching system, which Jem refers to as the “Dewey Decimal System”.

‘It’ll be in all the grades soon. You don’t have to learn much out of books that way – it’s like if you wanta learn about cows, you go milk one, see?’ (Lee 24)

A generation before, the children's father and uncle were schooled at home, but Miss Caroline believes children should be taught at school, at a set rate (24, 38). Scout warms to her eventually, though, and takes particularly to the social aspects of school life.

All that kind of rot, the way women always do...

Under her father's benevolent parental neglect, Scout has been permitted her tomboy ways, dressing each day in overalls, having fistfights and beating up boys (28, 47, 80, 249), with very little sense of being "different" – besides trying *not* to act "like a girl" (58) and a passing admission to being "untalented" in pissing contests (57).

The uncommon nature of her upbringing is only brought home when the family visits relatives at Christmas and her aunt is "fanatical" about her dress:

I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea-sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born... (87).

Gender roles had not materially relaxed through the century, with each successive child-rearing method maintaining a strict separation of practices and assumptions around girls and boys. While Atticus may let the matter slide, the rest of the community does not regard Scout's dress and conduct with the same equanimity.

Old Mrs Dubose tells her she should be in a dress and camisole or she will "grow up waiting on tables". Her comment carries the implicit assumption that, for a child of her class, gender conformity is particularly important: "...a Finch waiting on tables at the O.K. Café – hah!" (107)

Aunt Alexandra further emphasises the point when she says that, as products of "several generations of gentle breeding", they should behave like a "little lady and gentleman" (139).

Scout feels the "starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary closing in" (142), yet even her allies end up betraying her. In the face of her vehement denials, Uncle Jack insists that she does want to grow up to be a lady (85), while even her beloved Jem develops an "alien set of values" and brings her to tears by admonishing her to start "...bein' a girl and acting right!" (121).

Interestingly, even the “permissive” upbringing offered by Spock and the post-war theorists stress gender distinctions.

...childrearing experts urged parents to respond promptly to signs of “sissiness” in boys and masculine behavior in girls. Sissylike behavior not only led to harassment from other boys, but might ‘make him an indecisive and ineffectual person, and at worst may even lead to homosexuality or impotence’, while tomboyish behavior might lead girls to ‘give up their femininity’ (Mintz 2004, 281).

But Spock was part of the establishment and the generation that came of age in the 1950s had already started to challenge a civil authority that demanded “the reassertion of traditional gender roles” (Lassonde).

Even Scout seems to accept these roles, but simply prefers not to abide by them. She giggles at the thought of boys cooking or Jem in an apron (Lee 88), and remarks that she is “more at home in my father’s world”, where men might cuss, drink and chew, but don’t “trap you with innocent questions to make fun of you” (240).

Part of her coming of age, however, brings the realisation that she can make a difficult time less trying by accommodating herself more to the role expected of her in society: “After all, if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I” (244).

Scout and Jem are sexually innocent, yet are part of a world in which they hear terms they may not at first know the meaning of, such as “slut” (33) and “whore-lady” (93).

Despite the fact that child-care manuals through the twentieth century urged parents to explain the facts of life – if only to discourage masturbation – Atticus and Aunt Alexandra do not seem to have taken these admonitions to heart.

Atticus, the unusual father, explains the meaning of “rape”, but in a way that ensures its meaning remains distinctly hazy (141). And in a discussion with Dill, Scout is the bearer of Aunt Alexandra’s misinformation that babies are dropped down the chimney – “At least that’s what I think she said. For once Aunty’s diction had not been too clear” (149).

Despite the fact that Dill prefers his imaginative version of a foggy island where babies are on order, he is aware that you “get babies from each other”.

The children learn the facts of life almost by osmosis, rather than ever having them properly explained. And when Atticus tries with the adolescent Jem, he replies with disgust: “I know all that stuff” (139).

And we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing

The voice of adulthood in *The Go-Between* is markedly different from that of the lyrical child, while *To Kill a Mockingbird* contains much more of a merging of the two.

We sense that the adult retains some of the child’s mischief, while the child is intellectually (but not emotionally) precocious. Scout has a mature ability with words and a familiarity with legal terms – “Finders were keepers unless title was proven” (41) and “Under Atticus’s interdict” (109). This makes it difficult to see where the adult ends and the child begins.

In her initial descriptions of the town and Finch’s landing, we are introduced to the delightfully ironic voice of the adult (9, 10), before she turns her gentle humour on the idealised father (10). Her cynicism is not a child’s humour, yet it is never presented without empathy. Sometimes the voice segues into a lyrical nostalgia, whose lush detail carries with it a thread of longing (11).

As an adult looking back, the narrator retains the voice of the outsider, “making strange” out of the familiar, in order to grant us a sense of a particular time and place: the Great Depression, when Roosevelt sat in the White House.

There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself (11).

The child’s sensual impressions may be there, but often delivered with a very grownup literary expressiveness, as in “sundry sunless country cubby-holes” (168) and: “Ladies bathed before noon, after their three o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum” (11).

But then we are treated to the child’s view of the world – Jem and she find their father “satisfactory” – yet still sometimes assisted by an adult facility with vocabulary: Atticus treated the children with “courteous detachment” (11).

The seriousness of children's business is there: "The fact that I had a permanent fiancé was no compensation for his absence...", while the child's consciousness and understanding of time are evident in "After ten forever..." (270).

At times, adult irony is allowed to overlay the child's observations: "...a whole package of chewing-gum, which we enjoyed, the fact that everything on the Radley Place was poison having slipped Jem's memory" (66). And in others, the adult interprets the child's perception: "In Maycomb, grown men stood outside in the front yard for only two reasons: death and politics. I wondered who had died" (150).

The child's tone is precocious, with a sense of mischief the adult narrator appears to share, in her generous and unmediated transmission of it: "Besides, Jem had his little sister to think of. When he said that, I knew he was afraid. Jem had his little sister to think of the time I dared him to jump off the top of the house" (20).

Lee's skilled manipulation of these voices is a great source of the book's humour. There are times when Scout's understanding is literal: "'Not in money,' Atticus said, 'but before the year's out, I'll have been paid. You watch.' We watched" (26).

And at others, she shows a downright lack of understanding of adult humour: "We saw Uncle Jack every Christmas, and every Christmas he Jack yelled across the street for Miss Maudie to come marry him...Jem and I thought this a strange way to ask for a lady's hand in marriage..." (49).

Some use is made of the three-way voice, when the words of other characters are passed on verbatim and the reader is invited to interpret what the child cannot. The adult narrator becomes subordinate and the voice of the child, with its literal understanding, takes over.

We hear Atticus's ironic voice through the child's dead-pan transmission – "...Atticus had said Jem would be delighted to show me where my room was" (21) – and that of Calpurnia, in which we can sense the edge of displeasure: "It was then that Calpurnia requested my presence in the kitchen" (30).

There are times when the adult voice subsides altogether and we are permitted an unadulterated view into childhood, which provides us with gentle amusement at the child's expense: "I'd fix her: one of these days when she wasn't looking I'd go off and drown myself in Barker's Eddy and then she'd be sorry" (30).

While we sense Scout's despair in the following, we are also amused by the childish intensity of her experience: "The Lord sent me more than I could bear, and I went to the front porch" (35).

But, of course, this is a coming-of-age story. The child, and her voice, develop as the narrative progresses. Part of its charm lies in the self-deprecating tone and the child's burgeoning self-awareness: "Before I remembered that there was no such thing as hoo-dooing, I shrieked and threw them down" (65).

The world may go on just as its always done

The mockingbird is killed, and an innocent destroyed. Yet not innocence itself. Scout takes from the events of the story the idea that humans may do evil to others, but that an innate goodness exists in all men, which makes them susceptible to reason. Good men can make a difference in their time.

The narrator has taken her lessons from the past and moved forward into maturity, carrying with her the best of the child she once was. This integration of child and adult is palpable in Lee's use of the first person, which creates a very different experience from that of the two novels previously discussed. The voice of the child is precocious, while the adult voice has not completely lost the innocence and mischief of childhood. This presents perhaps the perfect life balance, one that was endorsed by the Romantics: the retention in adulthood of the child within us.

The gentle irony of the adult voice and the child's literal view of the world raise a gentle laugh at human folly. But it is the child's lack of cynicism which allows the reader to experience her anguish and disbelief at Tom Robinson's fate. We view these events through the child's "new eyes" and share in her outrage.

Lee's children are of their time, and of the future, carrying the principles that would come to be associated with young people in the generations to come. In this, they show the best aspects of twentieth-century American childhood. And in the end, this will lead them, we understand, to live the best adult lives they are capable of. Again, as in Dickens, the child is father to the man.

Neighbours bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between. Boo was our neighbour. He gave us two soap dolls, a broken watch and

chain, a pair of good-luck pennies, and our lives. But neighbours give in return. We never put back into the tree what we took out of it: we had given him nothing, and it made me sad...Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough (284–285).

Chapter Five: *The Children's Day* by Michiel Heyns

The Century of the Child ended, says Mintz, with a “bang rather than a whimper” (2004, 373). As observers mournfully discussed an end to childhood, (Stearns 2006, Cunningham) two heavily armed American teens from affluent, two-parent homes tried to prove them right. In April 1999, they walked into Columbine High School in Colorado and murdered large numbers of their class-mates.

Yet twentieth-century Western society went a long way to fulfilling Ellen Key's vision (Mintz 2004, Stearns 2006). The late 1960s and early '70s marked its culmination as “legal rights – to due process, freedom of expression, gender and racial equity, and contraception and abortion – were established” (Mintz 2004, 372).

The next two decades proceeded to extend these principles beyond the ideal originally foreseen, to the point that late twentieth-century children faced a number of contradictions. They were psychologically freer than ever before. They knew more about sex, drugs and issues once regarded as adult realities, yet in many ways, their lives were “more regimented and constrained” than ever before (Mintz 2004, ix, x).

It was at this point, in 2002, that Michiel Heyns produced his first novel about a 1960s Free State childhood – characterised by the kind of geographical freedom late twentieth-century children only dreamt of, yet psychologically regimented in ways they would have found hard to conceive of. As Simon, narrator of *The Children's Day*, puts it:

Having had the protected childhood that was the only kind possible in Verkeerdespruit, I was used to piecing together my understanding of the great world from literature in the broadest sense, that is, almost anything that I could find to read in an unliterary community (508).

While the youth of America embarked on a decade of social and political activism, white South African children like Simon were intentionally cut off from the global influences that were sweeping previous ideas about childhood off the board. As Europe and America experienced an unprecedented break-down of authority (Mintz 2004, Lassonde), Simon's society is in thrall to the authoritarian dominance of apartheid leaders and their representatives in the community.

Like the novels described in the previous three chapters, *The Children's Day* describes a coming of age – not of Dickens's healing variety, nor one that culminates in an optimistic belief in man's essential goodness. Like Leo in *The Go-Between*, Simon is not protected by his sheltered childhood. In direct contradiction to its supposed intentions, the irrevocable damage he suffers flows directly from the pattern of childhood imposed upon the children of Verkeerdespruit.

The language of childhood

While an isolated pocket of adults on the southern tip of Africa imposed their idiosyncratic child-rearing variant, Europe, America and certain other countries, like Japan, were extending the principles of a “modern” childhood (Stearns 2006, Mintz 2004, Cunningham).

Post-Spock, no major thinker dominates the field, with most child-care advice from the 1980s following the “humanistic psychology” proposed by American psychotherapist Carl Rogers in the 1950s. His followers saw human nature as “benevolent” and focused on choice, creativity and self-actualisation. But, as Hardyment (2007) points out, this value system was “oddly careless” of community in its focus on self rather than society and rights rather than duties.

At its best this is a script for tolerance...At its worst, the search for self-fulfilment leads to selfishness and anarchy, a justification for never conforming to authority if self-interest demands otherwise (287).

The decades between 1963 and 2002, when *The Children's Day* appeared, challenged all our assumptions about authority, family life, gender, race relations, sexuality and “proper behaviour”. Even in America, many of these new values were only accepted wholesale in the 1970s. In South Africa, where television was introduced in 1976 and the restrictive apartheid culture abolished only in the 1990s, the process took even longer.

At the start of the 1960s, half of all American women married between sixteen and nineteen and had between three and four children. Almost all remained at home, at least until their children went to school. For a male breadwinner, finding a wife and having children were his primary goals.

In the space of one decade, the divorce rate doubled, showing a new inclination to seek individual fulfilment over security. In the 1970s, people were marrying six years later than in

1960 and men started work five or even ten years later. Over half of married women with children under five were working, and a growing number of adolescents were having sex by their mid-teens.

As Mintz puts it, a “sea change” had taken place in behaviour (2004, 312, 313). Attitudes to families and children, which developed in the 1960s and 1970s, continued to evolve in the twenty years that followed, and have profoundly affected the way we view the kind of upbringing described in Heyns’s book.

Perhaps the biggest change to children arose from progressively being seen as consumers in their own right. And as government intervention came to be viewed as a necessity, children’s rights became entrenched, further eroding the authority of adults.

...in the United States and in Britain for example, children have the right to bring proceedings against their own parents, an indication that the shift in the balance of power between parents and children extends beyond the economic and emotional spheres (Cunningham 185).

Stearns does not subscribe to the view that the West entered a post-industrial or post-modern period of child rearing. Most of the world, he points out, is just entering the industrial age, while even for the “industrial pioneers”, many defining elements of the modern childhood simply increased.

Even the more distinct innovations can be seen as responses to it. The emphasis on happiness and on cherishing (fewer) children, for example, resulted in the growth of children’s consumerism. So, while these new elements were important, they “operated within ongoing adjustments to the earlier, more basic changes” (Stearns 2006, 115).

The fear that we reached the “end of childhood” in the last years of the century has about as much basis as Ariès’s original view that childhood did not exist in the middle ages. Any theorist who predicts its end has a particular definition in mind: probably a state of innocence. Childhood innocence, of course, is a relatively recent innovation and, according to some historians, may well have reached the end of its useful life.

Nonetheless, anxiety around children has increased. Adults worry that children are growing up too quickly and face pressures in school, families, and over drugs, alcohol, sex and sexually transmitted diseases. There is the impression that children increasingly show

emotional and behavioural problems, and at younger ages (Cunningham, Stearns 2006, Mintz 2004, 2012).

American children have more autonomy in their leisure, grooming and spending than ever. As both Mintz and Stearns point out, they face adult choices and advertisers bombard them with levels of persuasion and sexual innuendo that used to be levelled only at adults. Yet, despite this, America continues to romanticise childhood as a carefree time of irresponsibility, leaving them marginalised and juvenilised. Instead of providing the opportunity for young people to take part in socially valued activities, they receive mixed messages: grow up fast, but you don't really need to grow up until you reach your late twenties or early thirties (Mintz 2004, 2012).

The peculiarity of the late twentieth century...is that a public discourse which argues that children are persons with rights to a degree of autonomy is at odds with the remnants of the romantic view that the right of a child is to be a child (Cunningham 190).

Literary children

Since the 1970s, literary children have been back in the centre of things: no longer because they are God-given or on a path back to him, but in their own right (Gavin 2012a, Sands-O'Connor, Dodou). The power balance swings significantly back to children, while the ineptitude of adults is responsible for their damage and difficulties.

In children's books, young people are growing into their power with the emphasis on parental helplessness. The seat of authority has moved, with children taking decisions which their parents have failed to make (Sands O'Connor).

The happy, stable family disappeared from the 1970s in favour of more realistic images of family diversity. Families face inner turmoil or struggle to adjust to new cultures, while death and divorce also make their appearance (Norton).

Murray tells us that, by the 1970s, the so-called problem novel dominated writing for young people twelve and up, "and no topic lay outside the bounds" (188). Moral standards were not stated, even implicitly, and language taboos were broken "with the liberal use of slang and formerly censored four-letter words" (189–190).

Heyns's depiction of childhood is representative of a time in which literary childhood is an important theme, but with the sentiment excised. Innocence is still a common trope, but interrogated; "fissured by darker psychological and sexualized portrayals of the child" (Gavin 2012a, 15).

Novelists explore both the idea that children are inherently innocent and that this innocence should be protected. "More profoundly, however, contemporary fiction seeks to problematize the image of the innocent child as a symbol of vulnerability, guiltlessness, and lack of knowledge" (Dodou 240). Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* springs instantly to mind as an example of this.

In recent fiction, home becomes not a refuge, but a place to break away from in order to grow, and adults not a source of security, but responsible for imposing premature adulthood on children.

Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* is narrated by a street child whose life is filled with uncertainty and desperation. The imposition of premature adulthood finds extreme examples in African tales of child soldiers, such as Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* and Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog*. These books challenge the idea of childhood as a state of "not knowing" and as a natural condition, rather than an adult construction.

Even in Western literature, children are at the receiving end of adult neglect or violence (Dodou), examples of which are found in the writing of Ian McEwan (*Atonement*), Shena Mackay (*The Orchard on Fire*), Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*) and Anne Enright (*The Gathering*). Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, John Updike's *Terrorist* and Don De Lillo, in *Falling Man* are all examples of the trend which shows children to be the primary victims of the Age of Terror (Dodou).

From the mid-1990s, a new publishing phenomenon emerged, first in the United States and the United Kingdom, but soon spreading to other parts of the globe. Autobiographies of childhood have been published in their thousands, placing the family under "intense scrutiny" (Douglas 8).

Andrea Ashworth, Constance Briscoe, Augusten Burroughs and Dave Pelzer have explored issues around child abuse, showing the idea of the innocent child to be erroneous.

The plethora of autobiographies that hit the bookshops over the next fifteen years have centred on themes that trouble us as a society: childhood trauma, children's rights, violence (against and by children), socialisation, the state of education and the children's sexuality.

Simon's childhood

Simon's coming of age occurs, like that of Scout's, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, at a time when class and, more particularly, race were of paramount importance in predicting the experience of childhood.

Simon is a white child in a small town in which the apartheid regime enforces a complete social separation between blacks and whites. While nominally one of the privileged, Simon's position is not without cost.

His experiences validate the necessity to break from a home town in which a child's psyche must inevitably be warped by the overweening authority of adults. Excessive innocence is problematised as a state imposed on the child. Innocence becomes the source of damage, both because adults impinge on it prematurely and because of the child's innate sexuality.

This is a child who knows and yet does not know. He is simultaneously powerless, and the bearer of destructive power over others.

Grootmense verstaan mos nie⁴

Children ruled, ok? They knew more, demanded more and bought more than ever before (Stearns 2006, 3005, 3006). All except the white children of Verkeerdespruit. Without television, largely cut off from the world of "communism", foreigners and "bad influences", these children are the direct descendants of the Puritan children of the seventeenth century, with a slight detour through Victorian evangelicism.

God's authority is unassailable. Prayer and scripture precede every occasion, from "cattle auctions to baby shows" (Heyns 850). And it is the South African government which represents him on earth. The Dominee's wife acknowledges God's "part in the passing of the Ninety-day Detention Act". And on behalf of the local women's organisation, she accepts the

⁴ I have drawn the headings in this chapter from *Trompie* by Topsy Smith, one of the most popular series for youth in Afrikaans from 1950. *Trompie* exemplifies and idealises a small-town Afrikaner childhood – a mischievous, barefoot period of bucolic freedom, yet ultimately conforming to adult authority, represented by parents, teachers and the village dominee.

obligation to deal with “new onslaught from the heathen and the beast dwelling in our midst”, rather than leave it to God’s “unaided efforts” (850–856).

The might of God and government is extended to their representatives in the community. The dominee, the police, schools and petty government officials derive their authority from God (1657). In their turn, parents hold uncontested sway over their children, in a manner reminiscent of Banerjee’s nineteenth-century father-figure (1996, 51).

Parents don’t ask the opinion of their children (Heyns 783). “‘I don’t know about you,’ the local policeman says, ‘but I don’t ask my children’s permission to do things, they ask mine’” (3718).

Men are masters in their own homes (906), and children face a world of duty and obedience they are incapable of defying (560). Black people are equally infantilised, subjected to a life of obedience to their white masters.

Corporal punishment plays an integral role in the maintenance of this order. Parents give “hidings” (1022, 3785), while teachers are impervious to complaint or query. “Nobody thought of complaining to some figure of authority, the principal, a parent, about his treatment: to us, Ssscorpion *was* authority, or its representative in our midst” (1657).

Even when discipline strays into what other societies would already have seen as child abuse, the children accept their schoolmaster’s authority to express his “hatred” of them (1643). Mr De Wet receives only a slap on the wrist for breaking Simon’s jaw. Explaining the judgment of the school committee, Simon’s father shows the evangelicals’ horror of any encroachment on innocence, alongside an acceptance of physical punishment:

My father looked at my mother and sighed. “Not quite. Let’s just say for an adult to...be too fond of children is not...natural.”

“Is it natural for an adult to hit children?”

“Well not *natural*, perhaps, but it may be necessary if the adult is in a position of authority” (1965).

We are told that even the Victorian evangelicals toned down their physical rebukes in favour of mildness and reasoning, yet the authority figures of Verkeerdespruit, like the early

Puritans, beat, slap and punch with impunity, but only through a “concern” for “moral welfare” (1662, 3785).

But unlike the original Puritans, the Verkeerdespruit evangelicals do not believe in original sin. They believe in “bad influences” from the outside world (611, 614, 633, 946, 948, 990, 2444, 2447, 2605), which have the capacity to corrupt.

Verkeerdespruit children are held separate from the affairs of adults (3068, 1293, 4387, 4067). “Adults got dressed in one another’s company, as they drank tea and played bridge in one another’s company, because it was ‘not something for children’” (4057).

Adults find it unnecessary to discuss anything of importance with a child, even a matter as close to Simon’s heart as their intention to shoot his beloved dog (3830).

While the rest of the Western world enters its sexual revolution, Simon’s sexual ignorance matches that of Leo, in *The Go-Between* (177, 601, 824, 3201, 3403). Simon receives no response to his constant requests for explanation and the facts of life are a no-go zone. When Fanie is returned to school after his adventure to Bloemfontein with Steve, the children sniff the air and gauge an atmosphere, but without the knowledge on which to base it (1043).

Ariès wrote that, in the seventeenth century, the family ceased to be simply an institution for the “transmission of a name and an estate – it assumed a moral and spiritual function, it moulded bodies and souls”. Together, the family and school enclosed the child in an increasingly severe disciplinary system. “Church, moralists and administrators deprived the child of the freedom he had hitherto enjoyed among adults. It inflicted on him the birch, the prison cell...” (396, 397).

He could have been speaking of Verkeerdespruit, dominated by a Calvinist *dominee* and Christian National Education in its schools.

Only twice is the seclusion of this religious order invaded by outsiders. Steve “the ducktail” becomes a pied piper for the boys of the town, while Trevor, the hair stylist, is a corrupting influence only on Klasie, the postmaster. The community closes ranks to rid the town of Steve, with his motorbike and his unconventional attitudes to nudity. Trevor is dispatched by God and the Dutch Reformed Church: Klasie is first made a church deacon, and then blackmailed by the dominee because of it.

The only films that find their way into town are those shown every Saturday night in the town hall – old-style musicals (1142), wholesome movies starring Doris Day, ten years after their time (2514), and Esther Williams, whose heyday was in the 1940s and early 1950s (687).

Like Dickens, Heyns treats the evangelicism of this Dutch Reformed community as hypocritical. Mr de Wet, the schoolmaster, expresses sadistic impulses rather than a serious belief in the spiritual well-being of his charges. “For Mr de Wet’s delight in inflicting torment was coupled, and I now believe intimately connected, with a simpering and yet bullying sentimentality” (1667).

Simon is taught to believe in self-sacrifice – the kind shown by “Jesus getting crucified or little Racheltjie de Beer freezing to death trying to keep her younger brother warm in the anthill” (1710). Yet, when an incursion is made on his closely guarded innocence, the sexually abusive adult turns out to be God’s representative in the community, the Dominee.

Simon is not a bad child. He is deeply affected by the death of his dog and he does attempt to right at least one wrong inflicted by apartheid (2371, 2407). However, the do-as-I-say attitude of church, state and family – their authoritarian willingness to rule and be ruled – warps Simon’s psyche far more deeply than the invasions on his innocence.

He learns that “the one who loves is weak and the one who doesn’t love is strong” (4275), and that the strong use their power over the weak (5500). Worst of all, the lesson he takes from Verkeerdespruit is that men exercise power for evil, simply because they have control over others (5192–5228).

“I don’t think you are an evil boy,” his high school principal tells him in Bloemfontein. “But you have grown up in an evil society and you must be taught that it is evil” (5228).

Soos ‘n martelaar staan hy voor sy pa

We accepted Mr de Wet as our doom...and it is likely that this is what our parents would have advised us to do in any case if we had complained to them; my mother, though suspicious of authority and scornful of our teachers, did not believe in parents’ intervening on their children’s behalf, on the grounds that this simply caused the children to be victimised (1657).

This just about sums up the attitudes of Simon’s parents. More enlightened politically than most (3975, 3611, 4547), they are the benevolent face of Verkeerdespruit child rearing, yet

do not reject it outright. Despite his mother's lack of respect for officers of the Dutch Reformed Church – “believing as she did that they all belonged to the Broederbond” – (4403, 4410), Simon is sent to Sunday School every week and to church, even on summer holidays.

His father has never beaten him before he receives his one hiding – and that in an attempt to keep him safe. In fact, despite being the town magistrate, he has severe doubts about the efficacy of punishment altogether (3783).

They do subscribe to the value of maintaining children's innocence. They address his questions in a serious way, but still contrive to keep him in the dark (1168). The town's one unusual adult, Betty the Exchange, causes them singular concern by crossing the strict boundary between adults and children (1350). But this concern pales beside his mother's anxiety over Steve's relationship with Simon and she falls back on a tradition of silence: “I don't ask my son's opinion on such matters and you know very well why,” snapped my mother and got into the car” (793).

His father is protective but, in the end, incapable of standing up to the greater authority of the school committee, who decide that Mr de Wet's abuse is no crime. More seriously for Simon's belief in human nature, he is unable to stand up to the policeman who insists Simon's dog must be shot – breaking his promise to Simon in the process (3917). His conformity exemplifies a culture which gave rise to a political system dependent on this form of control.

Met [Dominee se bobbejaan] speel

As the century reached its halfway mark, Western parents gave themselves a further responsibility, one that required increasing numbers of toys. A relatively modern idea, boredom had previously been seen as a character issue. Children, particularly girls, should never bore others. By the 1960s, it had become someone else's responsibility to alleviate (Stearns 2006, 128).

Not in Verkeerdespruit though. Here, children must get on with things. Barefoot, dusty children, dressed in khaki shorts (Heyns 157, 680), they play traditional games like kennetjie and bok-bok, which don't require equipment. Kennetjie involves playing “bat and ball” with two sticks (165), while bok-bok is a rather basic game in which children leap on to the backs of others. They fry ants under magnifying glasses, collect silkworms, and one of them, at least, reads (958, 3541, 507, 550, 1340).

With little in the local library but *Trompie* and *Saartjie*, Enid Blyton and *The Hardy Boys*, Simon resorts to reading all the magazines in Steyl's café, while he drinks a cream soda float with Betty (1365). Saturday night is movie night in the town hall, attended by most of the white townsfolk. This is where nascent relationships can first be spotted and their progress noted.

The only bought toys mentioned are a Meccano set, which Simon receives for Christmas, and pick-up-sticks, which he takes to boarding school (4006, 4675).

Verkeerdespruit seems more concerned with morality and politeness than bringing up happy children. The only mother who mentions happiness is Mrs van den Bergh, who will not forbid Fanie's relationship with Steve if it "makes the boy happy" – and is reported to the local women's organisation for her trouble (831). Self-sacrifice is the dominating ethic, rather than self-fulfilment (1710).

These children are geographically free to explore the town and beyond, but they are not indulged in any way. They have very little in the way of novelty or material gratification:

For all the drabness of our clothes and moroseness of our expressions, on that one day of all others our lives seemed exciting, full of the promise of glamour and pleasure that we knew only from the old musicals we gawked at in the town hall on Saturday evenings (2987).

Sy ousus is nes sy pa en ma

The Paris youth revolts of 1968 very nearly have an isolated repercussion in Bloemfontein. Cheated of a celebrated nude scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, the high school boys of Wesley College threaten to boycott their movie evening in the name of "'cultural freedom' – a phrase supplied by my well-read roommate, Cavalla, from his following of the disturbances in France and elsewhere."

But when it is announced that *The Sound of Music* will be shown instead, it seems "blasphemous and perhaps even unpatriotic to boycott that" (2648). Which pretty much sums up the extent of youth rebellion in the Free State of *The Children's Day*.

Growing up in Verkeerdespruit, Simon comes into contact with only two manifestations of 1960s youth culture – both young adults who blow into town briefly, and are as quickly ejected.

Steve the “ducktail” wears blue jeans and a tight T-shirt and rides a motorbike. Nobody in town wears blue jeans and tight T-shirts (461) except the “tsotsis” from Bloemfontein who occasionally visit the black location. And nobody would try, since “that was all the explanation that was needed or given to justify parental extinction of any subversive sartorial ambitions amongst the children of Verkeerdespruit” (463).

Steve brings with him the language of youth in terms like “goof” (663) and “old lady” (742), and his political views are just different enough to be thrilling.

Though I was by no means so emancipated from my class and time as to feel anything but horror for *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, Steve’s cavalier indifference to their dire plots paradoxically struck me as very fine. To the glamour of his general demeanour was now added the thrill of recklessness, even lawlessness (577).

Simon later realises that Steve’s image is as out of date as everything else that finally reaches Verkeerdespruit. “But to us he seemed as modern as the passenger planes that flew high over our town, and as dangerous as the hidden blade of the flick knife he once displayed to us” (552).

The second newcomer brings strange ideas of a different sort. With his pink shirt, bleached hair and alternative sexuality, he is indifferent to disapproval – and nonchalant about being beaten up on account of his shirt (2173). But finally, even he is defeated by the village fathers.

Rebellion of any form, political, social or sexual, is not countenanced. Miss Jordaan, the young school teacher, refuses to be seen on Steve’s motorbike for fear of earning “a reputation” (601). Only Betty the Exchange goes against prevailing culture by sleeping with Steve, shockingly out of wedlock, but she is careful not to draw attention to her actions.

The boys who enter boarding school are adolescents, rather than teenagers. They are excited by rare film nights with their sister school, where they smell of sweat and deodorant in equal proportions and “pretend to a much greater degree of intimacy with their prospective partners than the restricted opportunities for contact afforded” (2625).

Not much youthful rebellion makes itself felt. There is no evidence of a culture distinct from that of adults, nor of inter-generational conflict. Their knowledge of popular culture extends

to artists like the singing cowboy, Gene Autry, who began his career in the 1930s (550, 977) and Elvis Presley (1217).

Simon is fascinated by, but unable to follow, Hicks's mildly mutinous behaviour, the extent of which appears to be dropping a ping-pong ball during assembly (4835, 4839). Proud of their school's traditions (3490, 3018), they have simply transferred their ingrained awe of authority to a new source.

Ou Jafta in die tuin help

Verkeerdespruit is a "white" town. Black people live in the "location" and scarcely enter the consciousness of white children. There is Jim the gardener, Mary his wife (884), a man who wipes dust from Mr Brand's shoes at the bank (1281), another who sells Simon a puppy (3519) and passing references to out-of-town tsotsis.

The children are not immune to prevailing attitudes, which lead the townsfolk to refer to black people as Bantus at best, kaffirs at worst (566). Trading anecdotes over Steve's "bad influence", one of Simon's classmates reports seeing Steve actually talking to "two Bantus" (992).

Besides his one attempt to save Mary from removal, Simon has not yet learnt the full iniquity of apartheid. He has more pressing and urgent concerns to face: "To me, Juliana's voluntary departure was far more real than the forced removal of any number of people" (2930).

Class distinctions are clear, but Verkeerdespruit is too small for meaningful divisions. Children attend the same school, and the white community is thrown together at church and in town. Simon's mother – forced to mix with people she would seldom meet in a larger town – draws her own personal lines in the sand. Certain people, behaviour and items are "common": from curlers in public (754) to glacé cherries on cakes (3171). In this way, she passes her attitudes on to her son (677, 754, 1056, 998).

Nonetheless, like the British philanthropists of the early twentieth century, the local women's organisation, the OVV, sees its charitable duty in "looking after poor white people" (211). They provide second-hand clothing (3037) and (often patronising) health and hygiene advice to people like the Van den Berghs. "I mean, *vetkoek*..." declares Simon's mother. "...the stuff is pure starch and fat, it's exactly the kind of thing we're trying to get these people to stop eating" (255).

At high school, the children's snobbery finds expression in their scorn of the "clutch plates" (61, 76), boys from the local industrial school. But it is at this English-speaking private school that Simon finds himself on the wrong side of a different snobbery: that against Afrikaners. He has come across English-Afrikaans antipathy before, but until he met Trevor, he had "no very strong sense of English and Afrikaans as two distinct groups defined in opposition to each other" (2149).

From Trevor, he learns a number of epithets for Afrikaans speakers. But as the child of an Afrikaans mother and an English father, he earns the nickname Half-ball-bearing at high school, or occasionally Son-of-a-Bus, a bus being the term for a female Afrikaner (4641).

Vreeslose Rooie het...twee keer 'n draai in die hoof se kantoor to maak

Class might not create strong divisions, but it is from Standard eight that childhood ends for working-class members of the town. A repository for "failed teachers" (3082), the local high school goes only that far and anyone with their sights set on further education must attend boarding school in Bloemfontein.

Fights are a spectator sport at school (371), but it is rugby that is prized above all else. Simon, who doesn't play, is "set apart from most the other boys by a subtle but absolute mechanism that invalidated whatever I achieved in any other field" (2728).

While most children attend the local school barefoot, the high school has several uniforms for different occasions. Less formal wear may be permitted for sports functions or holidays, but white uniforms are specified for Cadets and, at any other time, boys must wear regulation uniform on school grounds (3987, 4894, 4966).

"Floggings are few and lynching is discouraged" (4713), but the hierarchy and routine are rigid. The boys attend chapel four days a week and their lives are ruled by prefects, floor prefects and an unspoken ranking system (4705).

Like boys in an enclosed order anywhere, nicknames are an integral part of the schoolboy code, and toilet wall graffiti an accepted system of passing on scurrilous information or punishing peers. And predictably, the food is stodgy and limp.

But here, the expression of manliness is not as staunch, and the school's prized attributes are slightly more subtle than those at the Verkeerdespruit Primary. While rugby prowess is still

venerated, it is not valued enough to tolerate dirty play – and even cricket and tennis are acceptable pursuits.

Despite the symbolic name of Wesley College, Simon's high school does not carry the harsh taint of his evangelical primary school. His principal is kindly, but vague, and is ultimately responsible for delivering one of Simon's most important life lessons: that boys taught to respect only harsh authority will use their power for evil when they finally have it.

Gedagte aan sy manskappe gee hom nuwe moed en krag

This is the world of strong men and respectable women. Women should not wear red shoes, particularly if they have fallen from grace (3151). A good woman should never ride pillion (601), and one who has borne a baby out of wedlock had rather kill the child than appear disgraced in society (3201).

Activities for men represent a minefield of "sissiness". In Verkeerdespruit, tennis is "sissy". Only rugby constitutes a proper initiation into manhood – "and indeed, played as it was on the stony, dusty patch of winter-parched veld that constituted the rugby field, it required that fine indifference to bruises and scabs that is the boy's first claim to manliness" (3243).

Juliana Swanepoel, their teacher's daughter, has not acquired the same air of the dusty commonplace as the other little girls and comes to them on a "luminous cloud", from exotic Rustenburg (2694, 2707).

Simon's crush on Juliana brings to mind David Copperfield's early infatuations. With her curls and a nose that turns up prettily, she is the epitome of angelic idealisation, the girl whose schoolbag the boys compete to carry, and who takes it as her due. Looking back, the narrator views her from the perspective of a different image of girlhood:

She now seems merely a fat little girl with a quizzically lifted eyebrow and rather affected curls, but at the time she was the brilliant, dimpled, rosy-cheeked, ringleted object of my devotions (2983).

Simon undertakes a rite of passage during the course of this book, to discover the nature of sex, his own sexuality, and the man he will become. He begins his journey in a state of innocence as painful and complete as that of Leo in *The Go-Between* and, like Leo's, its loss occurs at the hands of the society which imposed it on him.

His first sensuous inklings, on Steve's motorbike and (like Leo) during a swimming scene, are gentle and without shame. More traumatic is the town's response, which he barely understands.

All he knows is that his body tingles and the sun warms his skin (690). "I could feel the rhythmical contracting and relaxing of his back and shoulder muscles under me, and my belly rubbed against the skin of his back" (688).

Swimming together, Steve and he move "as a single unit of force escaping from the pull of the earth" (690). The child equates the physicality with the whiff of rebellion this stranger brings. Steve cares nothing for the notions that the town holds dear. He is the reverse of respectability. He doesn't even wear underpants (676).

With Steve he experiences both the thrill of the wild and the safety of a greater strength (646). Like Ted in *The Go-Between*, Steve is not only the source of a little-understood attraction, but also the image of the man Simon aspires to be – a strong man with hair on his body, unlike the men he has only ever seen clothed in rigid respectability.

It is the town's reaction which places a retrospective veneer of the "pervert" and "molestation" over the experience. Though they have no meaning for the terms, the children are conscious of "an enormity", formed from the "cryptic mutterings" of the adults (1043).

Simon's adoration for Juliana matches that of Leo's for the virgin. His worship before her pedestal grants her the power to reject him cruelly, in favour of Tjaart Bothma, the uncaring personification of boyish masculinity. She entrenches the lessons he takes from the town: those with power will use it, and those who love make themselves weak.

By the time Simon turns thirteen, he has only unformed sensations and yearnings: daydreams of faceless strangers who will take a minute interest in him. In a world where boys are never sissies and the dominee rails against "sodomites" (2516), the slightest taint of homosexuality engenders horror equivalent to that of heterosexual sex at the turn of the twentieth century.

His clumsy initiation at the hands of a visiting dominee does cause him damage. It inflicts the guilty sense of a sin so great that he has no name for it. More damaging still is his ambivalent reaction to it. From a state of nebulous yearnings, he is yanked into an awareness of his own response to something he perceives as wrong.

Again, the man responsible represents more than a sexual initiation – he appears to grant admission to the charmed adult circle Simon has been barred from. In the end, though, their encounter fails to give him equality, and he finds himself uttering the supplicating: “I’m sorry, Oom” (4344).

Perhaps Simon’s most damaging lesson stems from the misuse of power exercised by this hypocritical guardian of respectability. The encounter inflicts on him a sense of loss: “perhaps the greatest of all, though it was impossible to say exactly what I had lost” (3990).

The final piece of the “sex” puzzle falls into place when his tennis coach, Mr van der Walt, urges him to enter the principal’s office in time to see Mr Viljoen doing “push-ups” on Miss Rheeder. This last unwilling initiation is imposed by a man Simon admires and who again misuses his power – to confirm his own suspicions about Miss Rheeder, and perhaps to exact revenge (3421).

At boarding school he learns the terms for the mysteries of sex, and is suspected of sexual experimentation with Hicks, an older boy. Filled with horror, due largely to the guilt he still feels over his experience with the dominee, he withdraws from the friendship. When he discovers Hicks indulging in mutual masturbation with another boy, he experiences a muddle of shame, excitement, anger and resentment. These lead him to commit his own misuse of power – his ability to have Hicks expelled.

Simon’s final revelation about the nature of the feelings he has harboured for Fanie, poor resented and despised Fanie, unleashes his greatest act of cruelty and power against a defenceless being. He has the power to hurt, and he uses it relentlessly.

Al geselsende en laggende stap hulle deur die veld

The Children’s Day is the story of a childhood lost to a cultural system too brutal to nurture a sensitive child.

Kate Douglas sees nostalgic writing as working intertextually with its traumatic counterpart. The relating of lost or stolen childhoods is the other side of the nostalgic coin. And while nostalgia can express a longing for a past that is no longer with us, as well as a past that “may not have existed” (94), a lack of nostalgia can equally bend so far the other way as to touch upon what Coveney calls the sentimentality of the squalid, which makes things, “by sentimentalizing selection, squalid, and ‘worse than they are’” (158):

In our near unanimous scowl at the camera and our grey faces, in our motley clothes and rough bare feet, I now read a terrible deprivation, not so much of material things as of spiritual sustenance: the flat Free State summer light blanching out all nuance and shade seems the proper medium for the hopelessness of our common presence in that particular spot of nothingness, that featureless instant randomly salvaged from the maw of eternity (Heyns 2012, 2978).

David Medalie argues that nostalgic backward glances are “suspect because there is a possibility that they may be deemed a reactionary response to change. This is of course, even more so, when the past which provides the source of nostalgia is apartheid South Africa” (Medalie).

If, as both he and Ross Truscott says, showing nostalgia “for apartheid in post-apartheid South Africa is frequently equated with being politically insane and morally questionable” (Truscott), then the narrator of *The Children’s Day* can be accused of being neither.

Simon’s adult perspective on a backwater childhood of “gormless maladroitness”, of “skinny elbows and scabrous knees, the chilblains and runny noses and ringworm and horny heels and cheesy foreskins” is not the nostalgic plaint for a lost paradise (1584).

I have attempted, in earlier chapters, to explore how a reader’s understanding is affected by the fellowship between adult and child in the narration, and a degree of nostalgia. In a context in which literary nostalgia is suspect, a lack of nostalgia is necessarily seen as preferable. And yet I believe that both nostalgia and its deliberate absence have losses and gains in terms of the readers’ relationship to the characters and their experience of the time in which the work is set.

All three texts discussed so far have shown a marked dialogic shifting between the “I” of the adult narrator looking back and the simultaneous recreation of the naïve “I” of the child (Holquist).

If the “I” that remains after a reading of *The Go-Between* is that of the child, the opposite is true of this novel. From the start, the adult narrator holds the power, allowing the child very little space to express a view from within. We are outsiders looking in on this world of 1960s village life. The vision and voice are that of the adult (Heyns 2012, 78, 87), who interprets with the benefit of hindsight (104, 133) and comments on the children who live within in it (151), often with a cynicism that a young child would not have access to (851).

This gives the novel its dry humour. We are invited to share the adult narrator's sardonic amusement at the ludicrous views, both political and social, held in this Free State community (906, 992, 2217, 170). And one cannot help but feel that these absurdities are sometimes stretched for the laugh:

Mrs Vermaak believed that Klasie was going to prove that the Boers had in fact won the Boer War, by showing conclusively that all accounts of the war had been falsified by English historians, it being a well-known fact that the English had invented reading and writing and could therefore clothe the truth in their image, as it were (2115).

The dialogue of secondary characters is used to recount village anecdotes and we sense in these, not the voice of individual characters nor the mimetic tone of real speech, but the narrator's ironic humour (903).

The tale of Trevor and Klasie the postmaster is a case in point. In two lengthy monologues, Trevor takes on the role of Bosmanesque raconteur to recount the tale of his ill-fated love affair with Klasie. In his mouth, the story is less tragic than soap-opera, while Klasie and "Moeder" are reduced to caricatures:

'...Moeder is *furious* and says that God will destroy Ebenezer with fire and *sulphur* if she harbours Klasie and me in her house. The funny thing is that she seems to think it will be all right with God if Klasie moves out and I stay...' (2527–2579).

It was surely the author's intention, in showing us Verkeerdespruit from this perspective, to present its characters and their world view as ridiculous. A consequence of this, though, is to limit the reader's empathy. It is difficult to change gear sufficiently from Klasie the caricature to care that he slits his wrists with his father's cut-throat razor (4090).

Similarly, Simon's revelation about his own willingness to use power, simply because he has it, is received through the person of Mr Robinson, principal of his high school. The profound effect of Mr Robinson's speech is diminished by the use of his habitual aphorism, "Things Being as They Are" (4634, 4636, 4714, 5216, 5234), which makes him less a "good man" than a caricature.

The distance the adult maintains from the damaged child indicates the deep pain inflicted by this conception of childhood. And yet, while we understand this, we don't feel it with him. In some of the major beats of Simon's life, we lose a sense of the child's felt emotion and

therefore the empathy to experience it too. He remembers his drab surroundings as being “transfigured by her presence”, but from the distance of time, he describes Juliana as a “fat little girl” whose countenance came not from an angelic nature, but complacency. What we are left with is not the feelings of a child, but the adult’s bitter amusement at them (2979–2982).

Only in brief instances are we invited to share something of the child’s consciousness, usually at moments of significance or deep emotion, such as his sensuous reaction to Steve and his first real sexual encounter with the dominee. He notices the “hairs in his nostrils, and saw there were fine hairs even on the tip of his nose. I tried to pull away my head, but he held fast; and then I felt his tongue forcing open my mouth and sliding between my teeth, and I closed my eyes” (4332).

We are briefly mindful of the child’s emotion when his dog is shot. Even then, however, we sense the presence of the observing adult, lending literary expression and the benefit of hindsight:

Incongruously, I became aware of the heavy smell of the roses in the airless heat. I took my hand from his slack jaws. There was blood on it. I felt tears and my cheek and wiped them away, leaving, I later discovered, grotesque smears of blood and soil and tears on my face (3939).

Later begin Trompie moeg word vir die gedoente

Stearns tells us that an interesting corollary to the psychology-soaked construction of childhood that arose in the second-half of the twentieth century is the increasing tendency for adults to question the way they were raised, and blame their upbringings for the people they became (2006). This may well have influenced many of us, as novelists, to explore the ways in which different forms of childhood have affected the adults who survived them and, ultimately, the society they form part of.

A particular conception of childhood says something quite profound about the society that gave rise to it. Heyns gives a remorseless picture of a 1960s version of a particular South African childhood in order to provide insight into the individual damage caused by a childhood of spiritual deprivation, excessive power and thoughtless cruelty. *The Children’s Day* also uses the state of childhood to magnify the kind of society that apartheid gave rise to.

While it borrows not at all from subsequent versions of childhood, it is viewed through the prism of an opposing conception of childhood with very different styles of parenting, and which problematises the idea of inherent innocence and asexuality.

Like Dickens, Heyns makes some use of satire in his depiction of this version of childhood. But unlike him, he shows little variation between the adult and the child, the cynical and the lyrical. This lack of integration demonstrates the depth of damage inflicted by the narrator's childhood. In his dislocation from the child that he was, Simon is reminiscent of Leo, of *The Go-Between*, rather than *David Copperfield* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Scout.

The detached tone of the narration does not provide us with a register of healing, either personal or at a societal level. Heyns clearly intended to leave us with the sense that those harmed will in turn harm others. With the heavy smell of roses about him, Simon is unable to prevent the death of his beloved pet. Again in the presence of roses, he commits his final annihilation of the simple, but trusting Fanie, using methods he learnt from his most sadistic teacher.

It is evidently not part of Heyns's purpose to provide this sense of healing, nor a deep sense of redemption. However, we are left with just the possibility of recovery for Simon, but only when he accepts his own culpability and complicity in the injustices of his society – through the pain of Fanie's unknowing retaliation.

I put my hand over his mouth, wet with spittle and blood and rain, and I searched for the separation of his clenched lips, forced open the contracting mouth, felt for a moment the mutely writhing tongue, and waited for the agony of the jaws closing possessively around my fingers in dumb absolution (5521).

Chapter Six – Through the child, our adult selves

When I was thirty I gave birth to my first child. Before she was born, I had images of a cooing baby who smiled, slept and fed.

The reality was not at all as I had imagined. The real baby didn't thrive and screamed continually. I became depressed. I was riven by resentment at this alien creature who appeared to have destroyed the person I thought I was. But I was equally torn by an intense need to protect and nurture her.

When she was a year old, she was diagnosed with a genetic disorder. My child had great difficulties to overcome through childhood, but has turned out to be a bright and able young woman, with a post-graduate degree and the guts to explore the world.

After a period of post-diagnosis grief, I joined a support group and eventually became its national chair. I organised an international conference and attended others in Toronto, Warwick, Chicago and Sydney. I became national chair of the umbrella organisation, the South African Inherited Disorders Association, and was invited to give papers on our work at conferences in France, India and Poland.

I was privileged to meet parents of children with every kind of birth defect. I discovered that parents of children with genetic conditions all undergo a similar process of grief. They lost, not the child itself, but their imagined child. They had to learn to forgive – life or fate, God or themselves. They lost a version of themselves and were forced to reshape their personalities.

At the 6th International Turner Syndrome Conference in Sydney (July 2003), the audience was asked to indicate who among them had retained their partners. Close to 80% of people in that six-hundred-strong hall were divorced. It seemed the process of change was too radical to allow any but the most exceptional relationships to survive. In addition, parents of children with genetic conditions invariably report a burden of excoriating guilt and blame – towards themselves and each other.

These extraordinary parents were more willing than “normal” parents to share these feelings, often in the emotionally charged atmosphere of conferences. Over time, it became apparent

that my situation also allowed the parents of so-called “normal” children to reveal their disappointments and difficult feelings towards their children.

These experiences began a creative process which has been growing for much of the twenty-some intervening years and finally found expression in my latest novel, *The Imagined Child*. It became apparent that the unalloyed joy expressed by mothers at the school gate, which alienated those of us struggling with motherhood, was deceptive.

One of the human traits that has always fascinated me as a novelist is our propensity to lie – in order to maintain a perceived place in society and an image of self. I became interested in finding ways to portray this, and to explore a largely taboo area. In our increasingly child-centred world, in which children are granted a rarefied, almost sanctified space (Hardyment 2007), society disapproves of ambivalence. There is silence around the difficult feelings that most, possibly all, parents feel; the fact that love is not inconsistent with experiencing the loved one as a burden, and sometimes wishing that burden gone.

Parental responsibility, in the contemporary view of childhood, covers every aspect of the child. Instead of merely striving to create moral, or happy children, parents must now create smart, successful, emotionally and intellectually balanced beings (Hardyment 1984).

In *The Imagined Child*, I chose to use a mother-child relationship affected by a genetic condition, since this exacerbates these ambivalent feelings. Yet I have chosen a “manageable” condition – one that creates difficulties, while tantalising the mother with the possibility that her child could live a “normal” life. This complicates their relationship and society’s view of the child. While there is automatic sympathy for those with obvious disabilities, society is less forgiving of those who appear normal, yet struggle with certain aspects of life, like social skills and learning difficulties.

I grappled with which genetic condition to use. The one I know best is Turner Syndrome, but I had no wish to write autobiography. While the initial idea may have been sparked by my experiences, it was equally inspired by the many parents I met over the years. For personal reasons, I also wished to keep this story as far from my own as possible.

A genetic counsellor suggested I choose a condition on the foetal alcohol spectrum. I was struck by the advantages of using this condition. Firstly, I could choose the extent of my child character’s impairment, since its features exist on a continuum. Secondly, it allowed me to explore the idea of blame and guilt more fully.

I am fascinated by the idea that every one of us is damaged in some way. We inherit bad eyes, bad back, a propensity to heart attacks or to depression. We are affected by a controlling parent or one who is too weak, by one who punishes too viciously or who fails to discipline at all. How we come to terms with that damage, and whether we are able to forgive, determines the kind of adults, and ultimately the kind of parents we become.

As Philip Larkin writes:

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.

They may not mean to, but they do.

They fill you with the faults they had

And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn

By fools in old-style hats and coats,

Who half the time were sappy-stern

And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.

It deepens like a coastal shelf.

Get out as early as you can,

And don't have any kids yourself. (1971)

Parental guilt and blame are irrational in the case of most inherited disorders. But with alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder, I could play with the idea that my protagonist is truly to blame. I could make her a normal, flawed mother who tries to do her best – except for that one unforgiveable thing.

But then...is she truly to blame? Or should we blame her mother, an alcoholic, who left her with the innate sense that *in extremis*, the one thing that would always be there for her would be a bottle?

The spectrum of foetal alcohol effects is extremely relevant in South Africa. According to a study by the Department of Human Genetics at the University of the Witwatersrand into a high prevalence area (Wellington), the rate of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome found was the highest yet recorded anywhere in the world, thirty-three to a hundred and forty-eight times higher than US estimates, and higher than a previous cohort study in the same area (Viljoen et al).

Interviewed on July 31, 2012, Professor Denis Viljoen, who runs the FAS programme in South Africa, said there was also a common misconception that this condition affects only alcoholics in poverty-stricken communities, and not middle-class mothers who drink “moderately”.

My creative impetus to write this book was further stimulated when I read Lionel Shriver’s *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. I was impressed by her courage in approaching the unpopular issue of a mother who cannot feel love for a thoroughly unlikeable child. But this was, I believe, a literary decision rather than one based on verisimilitude. It enabled her to mark a major turning point: only when her protagonist’s child shows a hint of vulnerability at being transferred from a juvenile facility does she realise that she loves him (395–397).

Their early relationship did not ring true for me. What was plain from my interactions with parents was that, no matter how flawed, how burdensome or unpleasant the child, parents tend to experience more of a push-pull reaction. They might sometimes wish, in the extreme, for a child’s death, but they will defend that child to the end of their lives. In *The Imagined Child*, I set myself the task of exploring this relationship, as complex and difficult to portray as it is.

Nearly two decades earlier, I began my career as a writer with the coming of age of quite another child. *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* described Katie's abrupt and violent awakening to what lay beneath her idyllic early years and, in fact, made her experience of childhood possible.

"It's better to write about things you feel than about things you know about," is a quote attributed to L.P Hartley (Glossophilia.org). Perhaps it contains some of what drove him as a writer and, partly through his influence, became some of the driving force behind my own writing: to capture large issues through their emotional and "felt" expression in individuals.

I didn't set out to do so, but five books into a writing life, I find that I have used childhood, parenthood and individual children in four of my books, each to achieve a different purpose.

I have used versions of South African childhood, both to examine deeply human concerns and, on a larger scale, to grapple with and critique aspects of my society.

Children of Africa

The childhoods depicted in my own works and that of Michiel Heyns are certainly versions of African childhoods. Yet they can hardly be deemed representative, considering the differences that exist and have existed for children: culturally, geographically, and in their socio-economic circumstances, all of which combine to affect every aspect of a child's life, from housing, nutrition and education to health and family structure.

Could it be said, though, that commonalities exist, either in the way childhood is or has been conceived or expressed? Is it possible to write or portray a truly African childhood? In order to answer this, I must explore at least some of the versions of childhood on the continent, both traditional and contemporary.

Evans tells us that interest was shown in "African childhoods" from as early as 1906 and continued through subsequent decades, but all early research was conducted by Western writers, many of whom were later criticised for their generalisations, their "condescending tone and value judgments" (Evans 1970, 36) and for the Western terms of their analysis. All wrote of "the African child" as a generic entity without reference to geography or culture. As late as the 1950s, writers were criticised for making "generalizations about the total African culture" (37). The first writing on the subject by Africans themselves appeared only in 1967.

Nonetheless, this range of anthropological and psychological writing appears to throw up differences as well as some notable similarities, one of which is the way in which infancy was experienced across the continent. Different writers, observing different traditional societies through East, West and Central Africa, including Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Nigeria, all note that infancy was marked by its indulgence and closeness to the mother, followed by an abrupt and sometimes harsh weaning process and contrasting alienation from the mother (Evans 1970, Nsamenang, Harkness & Super, Wenger).

In 1963 Robert and Barbara Le Vine conducted one of the most extensive descriptions of what Evans also refers to generically as “an African childhood”, without enlightening us as to the scope of their research. The Le Vines found that children were weaned by having their cries either ignored or punished. Between eighteen months and ten years, the child was “severely punished for his infantile dependence behavior, and begins to learn new patterns of behavior which are part of the adult society”. Parents prized obedience, and enforced it through corporal punishment or through fear: of animals, darkness, spirits and the unknown (Evans 1970, 38, 39).

In her earlier work on the Yoruba in 1962, Barbara LeVine also reveals an emphasis on obedience, while Margaret Read notes that Nyasaland children were brought up to show:

- (1) respect; (2) honor; (3) physical strength – closely associated with moral courage;
- (4) persistence and thoroughness in all tasks; (5) wisdom – contrasted with cleverness – which includes knowledge, good judgment, ability to control people and to keep at peace, and skill in using speech; (6) dignity (Evans 1970, 38).

Traditional societies shared another characteristic in their dependence on older siblings or relatives for child care after infancy – some carers being as young as eight or ten. This custom persisted in more contemporary and urban settings, with the distinction that mothers were often less available to provide advice or help, due to their greater economic responsibilities. The growth of pre-schools in some areas also moved child-care duties outside the family.

Commentators note that children in traditional societies through West, East and Central Africa tended to band together in groups, growing increasingly independent as they matured. While nuclear family was important, children were the responsibility of the community at large. Contemporary societies have seen the disintegration of these family units, mainly for

economic reasons, and a greater percentage of unmarried mothers. (Ohuche & Otaala, Wenger, Nsameng, Harkness & Super).

Children in these families are even more vitally necessary as helpers, and may be pressed into service that is developmentally inappropriate by mothers who have no alternative (Harkness et al 455).

The experience of children in traditional societies has also proven to be a rich vein for novelists, which not only gains us entry into their felt lives, but gives us a sense of how a traditional upbringing is perceived within a society. Childhood, as represented in Francophone fiction, starts at birth and ends with circumcision and initiation into adulthood, according to Uche A. Ogike. Perhaps significantly, however, Ogike mentions no literature that covers the childhood experience of girls.

While these novels do articulate the revered position of children – as a measure of wealth and position – the literary history of the African child is nonetheless “one of survival through physical and mental suffering and torment” (124).

This suffering is meted out by nature, as well as the rigours of traditional society, the “severities” of their upbringing, the mental and physical abuse of the colonial masters and, in the last years of the twentieth century, less physical suffering, but other “abuses and depravities” (124).

The rigours of the initiation period are severe. “Like all divine calling, only those who survive the ordeals of initiation are chosen, the weak are eliminated” (112). And formal education – Muslim and animistic – is exposed as a system characterised by “mental and physical torture, brutality and intimidation”, leaving children ill-prepared for life in a changing world (117).

Literature has treated colonialism no less harshly, enumerating the cruelties and acts of humiliation and hypocrisy meted out by missionaries and colonialists. In the latter part of twentieth century, fictional children begin school early, but are still subject to discrimination – prey to the good and bad of a global world.

Yet Ogike is at pains to point out that, besides the peculiarities of their circumstances, literary African children are like those all over the world:

They play, help their parents at home and in the farms, fetch water, hunt and chase away birds and other animals that destroy their farms. They are naïve, innocent, curious, shy and lovable like any children of the world and African authors often portray them as such (109).

Moving beyond a traditional way of life has not transformed the post-colonial child into a replica of his Northern counterpart. Childhood in African societies shows some similarities, but retains significant differences from the Western conception of childhood. The initial resistance to child labour legislation seen in industrialised nations was reflected in Africa throughout the twentieth century, with accusations of cultural imperialism and trade protectionism levelled at those set on saving African children for a universally recognised idea of childhood (Hashim & Thorsen).

In 1989 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child became the most widely ratified blueprint for childhood. But the model it attempted to universalise was “one that not only is not the reality in many contexts, both in the developing world and the industrialized world, but is also frequently one that is contested” (4, 5).

In response, the African Union produced its own Charter in 1990. While “almost identical” in many respects, it stressed not only children’s rights, but their responsibilities: subject to age and ability, the child in this model is expected to “work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need” (6).

It allows for children to play a productive role in their community and to participate in socialising activities which would be seen as work in terms of the global model. “The fact that African leaders felt the need to formulate an African model for children’s rights illustrates the diversity of understandings of childhood...” (6).

A more reciprocal relationship exists between parents and children in both West and East Africa (Hashim & Thorsen, Harkness et al) and, instead of parents being producers and children consumers, children are “frequently responsible for covering the costs of some aspects of personal consumption, such as clothing and schooling costs” (Hashim & Thorsen 9). In fact, “very few” African children are taken care of until the age of eighteen. Instead, they are expected to assume social responsibilities, taking an active part in productive tasks, paid labour, household tasks and child care (Honwana & De Boeck 2005a, 4).

Children who do not attend school must walk long distances to sell farm products or other goods. Many of those who do attend school also must help their parents or close relatives in the market or shop when the school day is over (Ohuche & Otaala 12).

This participation in productive labour begins early. In East African communities, children begin contributing to the household from the third year of life (Harkness et al). Describing life among the Giriama people of Kenya, Martha Wenger found the percentage of time observed working increased dramatically between two and eleven years old, (from 1 to 38%) – typical for East African children and “not unusual for other non-industrialized societies” (294), but significantly higher than would be observed in the United States or Europe. Children carried out age and gender specific tasks, with girls responsible for a greater range and number.

Childhood, according to the Western ideal, is synonymous with formal schooling. “For a number of [African] children, however, going to school is not a normal part of childhood, while work is” (Hashim and Thorsen 10). In fact, some theorists have argued that work does constitute a form of education or socialisation, whether they work at home, with people outside their home or within apprenticeships. Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck and concur, noting that children “learn by participating in social and economic processes” (2005a, 4).

The African model also differs in the relationship of the child to his parents. In the West, the concept of parenthood is still linked primarily to birth parents, while in Africa many more “parents” are involved in a child’s upbringing (Hashim & Thorsen).

Both these distinctions have led to a further difference. Rather than living sedentary lives with birth parents, many West African children move independently of their birth parents – to live with other “parents” within the kinship system, to help out in the house or on the farm of another adult, to learn a trade, or to find paid work.

Iman Hashim and Dorte Thorsen are at pains to point out that this migration of children should be approached without the preconceptions based on inappropriate models of childhood, which would inevitably see these children as “victims”. They emphasise that these moves are not necessarily due to parental neglect, but are often seen as beneficial to the child’s welfare.

However, a very different view of fostering can be found in literature. A consistent theme in Nigerian writing, from traditional folktales to more contemporary novels, fostering is based on the idea that it is character-building to send the child from home to avoid spoiling (Odejide). Children are sent to live with relatives or non-kin “to fulfil kinship obligations or enable the child to obtain an education” (150). Children can also be fostered after the death of a parent, in cases of extreme poverty, or to carry out domestic chores in return for learning city ways.

Folktales spoke of the sufferings of fostered children, articulating the view that, despite being a formalised institution, fostering was open to abuse. Realistic and more contemporary children’s fiction has continued this theme. These writers, according to Odejide, are reformers, yet appear only to advocate gradual change, stopping short of denouncing child labour altogether. “The solution, they argue, lies not in structural changes in the society, but in the individual’s inner resources and will power...” (156, 157).

Much post-colonial research has focused on children and violence, particularly children caught up in armed conflict in areas like Sierra Leone, Uganda, Congo, Angola, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia and Mozambique. And not surprisingly. According to the Quaker United Nations Offices Geneva and Save the Children Sweden, three hundred-thousand children were thought to participate in armed conflict globally. In the past few years, this number is thought to have declined, but a number of African conflicts continue to use over a hundred-thousand child soldiers (Harvard Educational Review).

Much of this research gives attention to issues such as the re-integration, disarming and demobilisation of child soldiers and to the impact of conflict. Others have concentrated on the role of children’s rights in conflict situations and on issues of juvenile justice, innocence and guilt (see for example Amann, D.M., Amnesty International, International Rescue Committee, McConnan, I. & Uppard, S., Shepler S.).

Alcinda Honwana examines the phenomenon more closely by exploring how the behaviour of these children impacts our concept of children and childhood. She argues that the images of child soldiers shock us because we associate childhood with vulnerability, innocence and dependence, while we see soldiers as strong, aggressive and responsible. This creates a paradox “as these children of war find themselves in an interstitial space between these two conditions. They are still children, but they are no longer innocent; they perform adult tasks, but they are not yet adults” (2005b, 32).

She examines the way in which the child-soldier cuts across the demarcations between child and adult. “They find themselves in a liminal position which breaks down established dichotomies between civilian and soldier, victim and perpetrator, initiate and initiated, protected and protector, maker and breaker” (2005b, 32).

Having begun as victims, many become perpetrators of the “most violent and atrocious” deeds. They exercise what Honwana refers to as “tactical agency” – the agency of the weak, which allows them to cope with their constrained situation. “Despite being deprived of a locus of power, they are able to navigate within a multiplicity of spaces and states of being: being simultaneously children and adults, victims and perpetrators, civilians and soldiers...” (2005b, 50, 51).

The trope of war has increasingly entered the literature of Africa from the last decades of the twentieth century. Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps* (1986) tells the story of a Somali child, born in Ethiopia, who is caught up in the war between the two countries. A coming of age story, it follows the boy’s association with the Somali cause and the choices he is forced to face as he struggles with issues of identity, ethnicity and loyalty.

The early years of this century also saw a number of writers engaging with the extreme effects of war on children more actively drawn into conflict. Emmanuel Dongala’s *Johnny Mad Dog* is one of “a cluster of novels” to explore the issues of child soldiers in 2005, among them: *Beasts of No Nation* by Uzodinma Iweala and Delia Jarrett-Macauley’s *Moses, Citizen & Me* (H.E.R).

These were followed, in 2007, by a non-fiction account of a thirteen-year-old soldier from Sierra Leone, in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah. And in the same year, Ahmadou Kourouma produced the English translation of *Allah is Not Obligated*, which follows a ten-year-old soldier through Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

All deal with the ambiguities inherent in the association of children with violence. The two narrators of Dongala’s novel, for example, one a young girl who longs to be an engineer, the other a sixteen-year-old soldier, express their different perspectives on war in an unnamed West African country. The eponymous Johnny Mad Dog has been inured to violence during his brutal initiation. “Gator turned his flamethrower on the panicked men – transformed them into human torches shrieking with pain and writhing on the ground. It was pretty funny. They squealed like stuck pigs” (20).

At times, he and his dual narrator Laokolé appear to represent opposing moral poles, yet there are initial similarities between them – they both revere education – and still more that are wrought by war. Laokolé despises him (313), and yet, she shows herself also to be capable of extreme violence, when pushed to the edge by despair and the instinct for self-preservation.

From the sound of the impact, I thought his neck might be broken...When I saw him reaching for his gun, I smashed his fingers with a large bottle full of whiskey. Then I began stomping, crushing, kicking with all my might, aiming my blows at those genitals that had humiliated so many women...I trampled, pounded, pulverized his groin. I struck him like a mad fury. By the time I calmed down, his body was still (319, 320).

Violence and abuse, though, is not confined to war, nor is it far from home. Much research (see for example UN Habitat, Berry & Guthrie) has focused on the rights of vulnerable children and strategies to deal with children at risk due to poverty, crime, sexual exploitation, HIV, child labour and crime. And this is a theme that runs through contemporary literature.

The children in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, Darling and her friends, Chipo, Bastard, Godknows and Sbho, have no support structure and run wild. Conditioned to violence and abuse – Chipo is impregnated by her own grandfather – the children invade a white-owned house and commit their own brutal and humiliating acts. Yet despite this, Bulawayo's children maintain a sense, if not of innocence, at least of resilient humanity.

It is significant that so many of these stories portray childhoods overwhelmed by violence, abuse and want. In contrast to the prolonged childhood of the Western world, vast numbers of children are coming of age at an increasingly young age, and being forced to deal with the adult realities of war, death, violence and pure survival.

These versions of childhoods bear little relationship to the fictional lives of Heyns's Simon, or of the children in my own works, all of whom have inherited their models of childhood from Europe and are affected by their African setting only by the degree to which they have been isolated from global developments.

What the variety of studies does show is that, beyond a few similarities across traditional societies, there is no typical African childhood. Little agreement seems to exist on the extent and conditions which should characterise childhood. And, even where a conception of childhood has been agreed upon, circumstances often force children beyond these boundaries

into roles incompatible with either Western or African views of childhood – those of warriors, parents or parental figures, sole breadwinners or simply those forced to struggle for survival on the fringes of society.

A great South African childhood

While the optimism of a “new South Africa” brought with it the hope of forging a national literature, not only has society, and its literature, remained as divided as ever, but the last years of the twentieth century saw also the “flowering and demise” of the idea due to globalisation and the growing homogeneity of international consumer culture (Cornwell, Klopper & Mackenzie 6).

Childhood itself has followed a similar path. While a narrow band of middle class parents has begun to overcome racial discrepancies in child-rearing styles, an increasingly globalised mass media has brought with it more international attitudes towards children and the state of childhood. And just as different versions of childhood still proliferate across Africa, the experience of children closer to home is similarly fragmented. There is no Great South African novel, nor can there be said to be one South African childhood.

As a new society was ushered through the nineties with “marvelling exclamation” and “astonished and thankful hyperbole” (Pechey 58), literary pundits argued among themselves. “Throughout the 1990s, there were calls for new directions and initiatives in South African literature commensurate with the changes in society at large (Cornwell et al 31)”.

These called variously for the release of realism to “[re]imagine the real” (Cornwell et al 31), and a return to story-telling that scrutinised individuals and communities; for endings that allowed for new beginnings, and narratives that embraced choice. Ultimately, it was hoped that a new transitional literature would let go of “smiling multiculturalism” (Attridge & Jolly 11) and its ugly mirror image, apartheid, in order to recognise the inequalities of power slicing across sites of identity (Ndebele, Boehmer, Pechey, Abrahams, Attridge & Jolly, Cornwell et al).

Twenty years on, I will not be dealing with the “should haves”. I will make no attempt to engage with what observers hoped for in a literature of transition, and whether these came to fruition. In this chapter, I will focus on the different versions of literary childhood which did appear, and whether these can be said to enhance our understanding of society. I will investigate whether the varied uses and treatments of childhood could be said to reveal something of the *zeitgeist* in different segments of the population between 1990 and the present moment. In other words, can childhood be used as a barometer to read the state of my nation, psychologically and politically, at various points of our post-liberation history?

To do so, I will make mention of four of my five novels, but will concentrate on the two whose children might be said to characterise the state of mind of a segment of society at the birth of democracy and now, two decades into democracy. Since I cannot claim to have encapsulated “South African childhood” nor even “white South African childhood”, but merely to have grappled with versions of it, I will also evoke the childhoods created or recalled by other writers who might be said to represent different segments of society.

The birth of a nation

At the start of the 1990s, publishers anticipated and hoped for a burst of new black writers (A. Natrass [Publisher Pan MacMillan] pers. comm., 27 June 2015). What emerged on the wave of liberation was a phalanx of white writers, referred to by some commentators as the “new” writers, either with or without the further appellation “white” (Roberts 1996).

Perhaps it should not have come as a surprise. The 1980s heard repeated arguments for artistic considerations to be secondary to the political in literature. In 1987 JM Coetzee went so far as to call it a literature in bondage, “unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them” (Cornwell et al 7–8).

Much writing focused on recording political oppression and exhorting readers into action against it (Cornwell et al). In the 1980s, Njabulo Ndebele drew attention to how little attempt there was to grapple with the minutiae of motive or social process. “People and situations are either very good or very bad (Ndebele 43).”

This prescriptive style, which encouraged the use of culture as a “weapon in the struggle” (Attridge & Jolly 2), became a major constraint, perhaps most keenly felt by white writers like myself, who experienced the pressure to “show where we stood” in relation to apartheid.

The “new writers”, who included writers like Damon Galgut, Mark Behr, Peter Godwin, Pamela Jooste and myself, might not have moved very far from preoccupations with “power” and the “torsions of power”, but they certainly shifted from prescriptive representations to an attempt to describe flawed human lives.

Perhaps it was this attempt which drew a response from readers, many of whom had previously dismissed South African literature as “boring” (Boehmer 53). Katie’s abrupt loss of innocence in *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* attracted the most public attention of all my books. The degree of public interest in this novel – it sold twenty-seven thousand copies – took me completely by surprise. In many ways it was my least accomplished novel. I received no outside advice and drew on little more than the instincts of a loving reader.

Yet, somehow, *Innocence* managed to hook into the mood of the times. It is clear that people identified with Katie’s nostalgia and sense of loss. And perhaps her emphasis on an unsullied childhood struck a chord with a generation of white adults who had been unable to indulge in pure reminiscence without guilt over a system which granted them their privilege. But certainly, readers repeatedly expressed to me their weariness with “struggle writing” and said they were drawn to books without apparent didactic intent.

While the new writers did not leave apartheid behind, we perhaps felt a greater freedom to explore more fully what lay beneath the forms of childhood we had experienced, and the toll these had exacted on the human spirit. Beyond racism alone, writers were free to reject the “determinisms of those systems which...were implicated in and supported the ideological machinery of apartheid: patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, class and language bias, ethnic nationalism, and so on (Attridge & Jolly 2).”

Eleven-year-old Marnus preceded Katie, in Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, and he exemplifies the writing around childhood during South Africa’s transitional years. Apparent in it is not only racism and violence, but the misuse of power which places hyper-masculinity alongside pederasty.

The lure of nostalgia

Citing a description of Behr's book as the dissection of apartheid's moldy corpse, Rita Barnard still cannot resist an emotional response to its nostalgic markers:

But for a reader like me, who grew up as a child of the Afrikaner elite...it is more like a haunting, an uncanny encounter with nearly forgotten, yet instantly recognizable shades and echoes (Barnard).

Perhaps that's why criticisms of post-apartheid writing so often focus on nostalgia (Medalie, Truscott). David Medalie refers to a "literature of nostalgia" in post-apartheid writing – of which he claims my first novel to be an "archetypal" example.

He sketches the "typical trajectory" as an idyllic white childhood, which "the child eventually comes to realize, is a false idyll since, unbeknown to him or her, it has been tainted all the while by apartheid".

This revelation is painful enough to cause a "scarred, even spiritually paralyzed adulthood", while the appeal of the lost childhood remains. He claims the idyll is the true meat of the novel.

This criticism seems to rely on a definition of nostalgia which assumes, in Douglas's words, that the present is "less ideal and less desirable". She argues that the success of nostalgic narratives lies in the "ongoing pleasure for many readers of encountering...familiar, repeated, cultural patterns" (84, 85).

However, in my view, many of the transitional works, such as Behr's and my own, attempt to lull the reader with the innocence of childhood and the sense of a shared cultural nostalgia in order to shock them with the brutality of the system that bolstered such childhoods as our own.

While they employ nostalgia, they cannot be termed "nostalgic novels" since nostalgic narratives of childhood contain "affirmations of the golden age and rarely take a conflict view of history" (99).

Nostalgia need not be "regressive" in establishing an ideal relationship between past, present and future, writes Douglas. It can also be "empowering and productive if critically tempered and historically informed" (xi).

As an example, Douglas points out that Robert Drewe's nostalgic memories of Australian beaches, school, home and backyard in *The Shark Net* invite his readers to share in a dominant culture of childhood. But he uses this nostalgia as a mechanism to explore the narrator's personal conflicts and the serial killings that darkened his otherwise sunny 1950s Perth childhood.

On the one hand, Drewe's autobiography is filled with notions of the 1950s as a golden age... On the other hand, these memories are explicitly referenced to juxtapose the innocent times of the past with the traumatic times that followed (102–104).

Dodou tells us the moral nature of children recurs in much recent fiction and unites around conceptions of innocence. In global terms, many works make use of a sentimental view of childhood or, indeed, show innocence under threat as a means to an end. In *The Child in Time* and *Atonement*, McEwan used the innocent child "in sentimental terms as a means of critiquing the political state of affairs or the cultural climate" (239).

It is true that employing a Western literary trope like the *bildungsroman* – in which the child experiences a sudden moment of realisation – into an apartheid situation is highly charged, largely due to the inherent complicity of the child. This sensitivity perhaps heightens the sense of nostalgia. But what is clear is that it led some critics to read this use of nostalgia as an attempt to absolve or simply deny that complicity (Roberts 1996).

South Africa has continued to struggle with any connection between apartheid and the concept of nostalgia. A decade later, Jacob Dlamini tackled it head on in *Native Nostalgia*. Referring specifically to the memories of black South Africans, he makes explicit the possibility of having lived through apartheid, and recognised its evils, while nonetheless experiencing a happy childhood. It does not make of them "sell-outs" or "self-hating blacks" (155). Nostalgia need not, he writes, be a reactionary "hankering after the past and a rejection of the present and the future" (203).

Citing Boym, he argues that there are two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflective, which Boym defined in this way: "Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance (207–209)."

Restorative nostalgics did not see themselves as nostalgic. They believed they were seeking truth. Reflective nostalgics, on the other hand, lingered “on ruins” and “in the dreams of another place and another time” (214).

The “white writing” of the ‘90s certainly contains a longing, which perhaps corresponds to the longing of white South African readers at the time. But it was of the reflective, rather than the restorative variety. It was a longing for what did not exist: for normality; a childhood untainted, for which they could express a commonplace nostalgia, without guilt or pain.

White childhood comes of age

Earlier than both Behr and Heyns came a novel redolent with many of the same preoccupations. Not a coming of age, nor essentially a novel of childhood, Damon Galgut’s *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* remained untouched by criticisms of nostalgia. But it nevertheless speaks of a childhood oppressed by patriarchy and the aggressive masculinity prized under apartheid.

While strongly tied to South Africa and apartheid, all of these early novels demonstrate links to the global trope which arose out of the late twentieth-century, Western construction of a childhood damaged by the ineptitude or corruption of adults (Sands-O’Connor, Dodou, Norton).

Coming-of-age novels by white writers continued to appear through the decades that followed, forming a “notable subgenre”, which “probes the roots of individual white complicity in the evils of the apartheid years” (Cornwell et al 32), among them Troy Blacklaws’ *Karoo Boy and Blood Orange* in 2004 and 2006, and Rachel Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* in 2005.

Cornwell et al see the origins of this trend in the restoration of hope and promise to South Africans’ sense of the future, prompting writers “to turn to the past – to retrieve memories buried, feelings suppressed, voices silenced, by the hitherto authorized or dominant discourses of history” (32).

All of these novels deal, to a greater or lesser extent, with a child’s growing perception of the violence and injustice that underlay apartheid, finding an identity for the future and with loss and death. Afrikaans-English friction, as well as divisions – and the possibility of friendship – across colour lines, are also to be found, along with common-or-garden, more individual

issues associated with growing up. For the most part, these coming of age novels end with a sense of hope for the characters, and the country.

As I did, Blacklaws wrote in the spirit of optimism. “I wrote *Karoo Boy*,” he says, “partly as a reply to *Disgrace*, as I found J.M. Coetzee’s South Africa relentlessly bleak. I have not shied away from violence and cruelty, but have focused on a sensuous, filmic evocation of South Africa, ending on a note of hope. Coetzee writes of Africa with a scalpel. I write [of it] with a stubby, chewed pencil (Blacklaws n.d.).”

The innocence of a lost childhood

This childhood, for me at least, is the one that started it all.

Everyone should have a farm like that in their childhood– too idyllic to be real outside the tangible world of a child’s imagining (Richards 1996, 1).

I first read *The Go-Between* in a setting and time as far removed from Norwich in 1900 as they could be – the Eastern Cape in 1974. But something in the force of the voice formed a seed that lay in my subconscious until 1992 when I began writing my first novel, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*.

On rereading *The Go-Between* now, in 2013, I realise how much I owe Hartley, particularly in the intensity of the emotional and sensual experience he invokes.

As he does, I attempted to express the yearning for a childhood untainted by a system that was beyond the control of the child characters, and yet who were complicit merely through having lived through and benefited from it.

Children of the wild

Katie’s childhood plays out in a similar time to that described in *The Children’s Day* but lacks its Puritan extremes. Like Simon, Katie is English-speaking, with one English and one Afrikaans parent. Her limits are geographically as wide as his, and her feet as bare. But she is brought up in a city and spends only Christmas holidays on the farm of her Afrikaans Ouma.

While God forms a central presence on the farm, he is not as wrathful a manifestation as the God of Verkeerdespruit:

Clearing her throat, Ouma took Oom Frans's place, her large black Bible held open in her two square hands. But with a glance at Michael and me, she smiled and moved to one side of the window, where our longing gazes instantly swooped (Richards 1996, 70).

The harsh authoritarianism of Verkeerdespruit makes brief visits to the farm in the person of Oom Frans, with his deference to the twin authorities of God and government. Like Simon's, their childhood contains elements of Leo's Edwardian innocence.

The children carry from the city a greater propensity to question and discuss current events than would be preferred on the farm (151, 152), but in the last resort, adults attempt to hold the children apart from the cares and unpleasantness of adulthood, particularly when sex and violence rear their heads (303, 304).

Their lives are without economic responsibility. They follow children's pursuits and are treated differently from adults. However the farm, at least, is not a child-centred environment. The children are not ignored, but they must defer to adults. Like Leo, they must show up and shut up for scripture readings, be polite to their elders and sit at the table for meals.

Apart from that, theirs is a charmed life, allowed the freedom of the wild, with the security of home and hearth never far away (3). In significant respects, this is a childhood Scout Finch would recognise: the tomboy sister trying to out-tough her brothers, with a maid to provide additional mothering. Katie has three maternal figures. Ouma follows the firm, but loving model of the nineteenth-century idealised mother. Elaine has absorbed a modicum of 1960s sensibility with her impractical heels, painted nails and too-short miniskirts. Dora is the uncomplicated mother-figure, always in the kitchen with biscuits and a smile (3).

In contrast to that of Jem Finch, Neil's adolescence has also absorbed from the city a patina of 1960s youth culture:

Bending forward to twang at an imaginary guitar, he continued: "I'd like to go to California to see the Beach Boys. And I hear there's some real groovy surfing over there" (81, 82).

Perhaps more importantly, he shows the rudiments of generational antipathy entirely lacking in either Jem or Simon. But authority runs deep in families like this. When trouble threatens, Neil shakes off his last rebellious vestiges and is absorbed into the company of men. Leaving

him to look after the children, his father still shows a desire to protect him from events which may turn ugly. But it is clear not only that Neil now identifies with his father, but that his father has accepted him as an equal (303).

Ariès tells us that, throughout Western society, the Christmas festival enjoyed “extraordinary success”, due to its “family character”, which fed into the modern feeling for childhood within the family (347). Katie’s preoccupations with a perfect Christmas feed into this conception. Christmas takes on greater symbolic significance in the face of building family tension: “All the unchanging family ways, held to year after year in the preparation for Christmas, guarded the safety of my world” (45).

Katie and Michael lack the consumerism described, particularly in America, after the century’s midpoint, but there is more focus on their happiness than in either Scout or Simon’s versions of childhood. Evidence is found even in Ouma’s ham-handed attempt to connect with her English grand-daughter by inviting Katie to choose her own chicken. Her good intentions go awry when Kate, the city-child, believes she is being given a pet – which Ouma serves her for Christmas dinner (294).

In their desires for a floppy doll and a bicycle, they do show an awareness of toy fashions and the beginnings of a consumerism which would only truly match the Western world when television was introduced a decade later.

The children are expected to enjoy themselves, but are nonetheless required to act with morality. It is here that two versions of parenting come into conflict, emblematising the Afrikaans-English divide which lies at its core – a divide which Simon also experiences at his Bloemfontein high school. For Ouma, a parent’s primary responsibility is to create moral adults, who have absorbed the values passed on from their forebears. Elaine, who could not fail to have been influenced by Spock’s more benign methods, sees her task in terms of emotional development; of creating happy children.

Descendant of the Victorian evangelicals, Ouma sees bad behaviour as evidence of corruption from the outside world, just as the Verkeerdespruit town fathers did. Elaine sees it as nothing but mischief, requiring no more than mild punishment (171–173).

Elaine has been educated English, married English and given birth to English children. To make matters worse, she lives in a city, albeit a small city, and has absorbed ideas from the outside world. Elaine believes that childhood is a carefree time and that mothers should enjoy

their children (173). This puts her at odds with her own mother, who believes children should respect their heritage and that a mother's duty is to lead her children on the right path through her dress and behaviour.

The greater divide in Kate's world lies between black and white. Both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Children's Day* play out in an environment in which there is little social contact between black and white families. Scout has Calpurnia and Simon has Jim. Scout meets other black people when she accompanies Calpurnia to church but, apart from Jim, black people are shadowy figures in Simon's life. Katie has Margaret in the city, Dora on the farm and a host of "farm boys" who treat her with unfailing kindness. None of these characters, however, meets any of the children on an equal footing.

The purpose of innocence

As in *The Go-Between*, the separation between adults and children is directly responsible for Katie's destructive coming of age.

Where society decrees that children are innocent and adults knowing, Leo is at risk from the sexual meddling of adults. Because children take no part in the adult world of law and politics, Katie faces ruin when she comes face to face with life's ugly political truths (Archard 37).

Both she and Leo imagine for themselves great supernatural agency – and both are, in effect, powerless. In contrast, the children in *To Kill a Mockingbird* have a degree of real agency since they possess sufficient equality to have their opinions listened to.

Just as it does Leo, her abrupt maturation causes Kate to become a blighted human being, unable to believe in hope and the goodness of man. But for her there is hope – in finally showing the willingness to face her past, she will be able to forge a new future.

I intended *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* to resonate with a South African condition I have observed – the swing in public sentiment between euphoria and despair. The child Kate's excess of hope contrasts with the adult's lack of it until, eventually, she is forced to face the events which damaged her. This is my attempt at a plea for balance; the recognition that both extremes are unsustainable and only a degree of equilibrium allows one to live, ultimately, without despair.

I realise now how significantly I was influenced by the style of *The Go-Between*. I used nostalgia for a lost childhood and the sentiment of late Victorian Romanticism – an idealised childhood close to Nature – to contrast with the corruption that lay beneath such childhoods as Katie's. I needed intense beauty and innocence in order adequately to demonstrate a shocking degeneracy.

While Leo came face to face with the realities of sex, Katie came to a realisation of the inequality, violence and abuse of power inherent in maintaining apartheid.

The Go-Between, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and my first novel all initially show a model of childhood found in the Edwardian children's fiction, probably a staple literary influence for us all: natural children running free without much need of adults. But in all three, real life impinges and the magic is broken.

Like Heyns and Behr, my writing falls within a contemporary literary tradition that challenges the sentimentalisation of childhood (Dodou). The Romantic child, the embodiment of playfulness, creativity and happiness, is actively destroyed. The psychic damage that apartheid causes Katie and Simon – and by extension, society – is equally severe. The device used to demonstrate it is different.

The voice of a child

If I had to point out one area in which *Innocence* demonstrates its lack of accomplishment it would be in its language. Certainly, I intended my narrator to be an unreliable one, and for her vision of both past and present to be unsustainable. Her view of the past is a bucolic myth, her present filtered through a grey screen.

However, if I set out to write this book now, I would be more circumspect. Perhaps here again, I was influenced by the lush imagery Hartley used to signal the hopefulness of his child's voice. But mine, I feel, could be moderated:

Tucked into the crease at the foot of two small hills, the farmhouse was cosseted by the landscape. The nurturing, rounded hillocks behind the house rippled and undulated, fluffy with greenery, fired with aloes (Richards 36).

Hartley is more subtle in his use of point of view. He allows the voice to glide effortlessly between adult and child, while the voice of my adult narrator is present in the 1989 sections

only. The voice of the intemperate child is the only one present in the 1966 chapters, but lent the vocabulary of the adult.

This combination of the child's sensual experience and the adult's ability to express her excesses signals the unreliability of this backward view. She protesteth too much. But it does contribute to the overblown quality of the text – which adds to the level of sentiment and, therefore, the nostalgia it conveys.

Heyns and I both attempt to highlight the psychic damage caused by apartheid. Where we differ is in our choice of voice. Where the voice of my 1966 chapters is entirely that of the child, with the child's attitudes and visceral response to the environment, Heyns's view is all adult. The hypocritical authoritarianism his narrator has witnessed causes him to view the world of his childhood through spectacles tinted to the colour of Verkeerdespruit's dusty streets.

The damage done

Singularly lacking in nostalgia, Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* is far from a coming of age novel. Appearing first in 1994 in Afrikaans, and in English in 2000, this is not a novel of childhood. But in the adults who people it, we can glimpse in the rear view of their lives a young girl damaged by rape and incest, who in turn damages her own child. At a wider level, the novel concerns the damage done by apartheid even to those it was intended to benefit.

In this caricature of the nuclear family, Mol lives with a husband and a brother, who has for years taken sexual advantage of her. They and their impaired son, of ambiguous parentage, live in quiet desperation. Mol has learnt to calm his fits of wild rage first by masturbating him, and later allowing him to use her for his sexual gratification.

The child is accepted as he is with resignation. This family does not have the privilege to be racked by guilt and desolation, as my protagonist is in *The Imagined Child*, two decades later. Circumstances do not allow Mol to be afflicted by the middle-class expectation to create a perfect, successful and happy child.

The lives of black children

A Christmas photograph described in *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, gives us an inkling of the differences between the lives of black and white children, which followed on this particular accident of birth:

Six young children from the Eastern Cape, from the same farm, who hardly knew each other – two of us white, four black. All of us barefoot. Against the swaying splash of Ouma's bright flowers we stood smiling together, the black children stiff in their Christmas clothes. One small black girl clutched a Christmas toy, an unbending trading-store doll, its hair and clothing painted, its skin white. We, Michael and I, held a shiny silver bicycle bell and a huge, beautiful doll with 'real' hair and closing eyes and baby clothes (293, 294).

Beyond this cursory description, none of the white writers described enlightens us a great deal about the lives of black children, except for Pamela Jooste, who makes the attempt in *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter* and faced a great deal of controversy as a result (Bassett).

Jooste anticipated this criticism by including an author's note which stated:

I am aware that there may be some people who feel it is the height of impertinence for a white South African to write about the suffering of so-called "coloured" people... Like many other white South African children I was raised by a nanny and like many South African nannies her skin was a different colour from mine... Perhaps it was this difference that fascinated me and made me such a keen observer of what life was life across the colour line.

Lily Daniels' childhood is happy and secure in her inclusive community, despite a rather more intimate awareness of gangs and violence than a white child of a similar age would have. But she must face into the teeth of apartheid for her coming of age, alongside her activist mother, as her District Six community faces removal and she must confront an impossible choice – whether to stay or whether to leave the country, never permitted to return.

Children of tradition

In mentioning the burst of new white writers through the '90s, I do not by any means underestimate the influence of established black writers and political figures busy documenting or (re)imagining the state of the black community in the first decade of our transition and beyond.

In the work of significant biographies, we are given access to traditional village childhoods and those in townships. In 1990, Sindiwe Magona showed us a 1940s village childhood lived in the Xhosa village of Gungululu. Under the loving, but strict rule of her great grandmother, she describes a carefree early life, in which she was never aware of an empty stomach. Her early upbringing inculcated the bond of love and the values of duty, responsibility and order, reinforced by evening folk tales.

She played with rag dolls made for her by loving family members. She skipped naked in summer showers, swam in the river, from which the community fetched water and in which they washed their clothes. She played hide-and-seek and was free to run as far as the eye could see.

When she and her mother moved to stay with her father in Cape Town, she had to adjust to being a nuclear family, to the squalor of township life – and to the restrictions and degradations of the earliest years of apartheid. There were liquor raids, fights and streams of human excrement in the streets. But this is not where her literary child focuses her gaze. She zooms in on the close community, which pulled together against the police, ululating to warn others of raids. Despite the poverty, she was happy, and spent many hours in group play with other children.

Her parents believed staunchly in corporal punishment to the extent that neighbours were sometimes required to intervene. But since it was common-place, she didn't take exception and recalls her childhood as stable and happy. "My parents loved us, there was no doubt about that, most of the time (23)."

Her parents were church-going people, whose faith extended also to charms, herbs and muti. They did not believe in consulting children, and made decisions, often without telling them or explaining their reasons.

She wasn't aware of the difference between her own childhood and those of white children, until township women who worked for white families brought home discarded toys and books. "Perhaps children in other lands played at being kings and queens; we just played at being white (40)."

Just four years later, and four years after being released from twenty-seven years in prison, Nelson Mandela released his own autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, which includes a similarly happy description of his early rural upbringing in the Transkei.

“Although my mother was the centre of my existence, I defined myself through my father (14).” His father died when he was nine and he was told he was leaving Qunu. Reared in a similar style of parenting to that of Magona, he was not consulted.

I turned and looked for what I imagined was the last time at my village. I could see the simple huts and the people going about their chores; the stream where I had splashed and played with the other boys; the maize fields and green pastures where the herds and flocks were lazily grazing. I imagined my friends out hunting for small birds, drinking the sweet milk from the cow’s udder, cavorting in the ponds at the end of the stream. Above all else, my eyes rested on the three simple huts where I had enjoyed my mother’s love and protection. It was these three huts that I associated with all my happiness, with life itself... (14, 15)

After that, he was fostered by a relative, the acting regent of the Thembu people, in a similar style to the fostering described elsewhere in Africa. When he was not in school, he had chores: as ploughboy, wagon guide and shepherd. Apart from that, he rode horses and shot birds with slingshots and found boys to joust with. With the other boys, he danced the evening away to the singing and clapping of Thembu maidens.

Two principles governed life: chieftancy and the Church, which was part of the fabric of life. The only time he received a hiding was when he dodged Sunday service.

At sixteen, he underwent traditional circumcision. Required to perform an act of daring, he and the other boys stole a pig and roasted it beneath stars. After a ceremony with singing and dancing and a ritual purification, the boys were circumcised, during which they could not flinch or cry out. The seclusion lodges were then burnt to symbolise the end of childhood.

In these ash heaps lay a lost and delightful world, the world of my childhood, the world of sweet and irresponsible days at Qunu and Mqhekezweni. Now I was a man, and I would never again play thinti, or steal maize, or drink milk from a cow’s udder. I was already in mourning for my own youth (29).

Six years later, two other established black writers gave us a slightly less rose-tinted picture of traditional and township childhoods during apartheid – this time in novels. *The Memory of Stones*, by Mandla Langa, gives voice to the mood at the time of writing – the longing to forget in conflict with the need to remember. "This is where the bones of our forefathers are buried," his protagonist, Zodwa tells her followers, "...this place is the repository of our collective memory" (340).

This novel is about memory – about looking back in order to go forward. Set mostly in 1996 when his protagonist is an adult, he allows us glimpses of her village upbringing – a childhood disrupted by apartheid violence and its consequences.

When Zodwa is born in 1964, she refuses to cry until her mother consults the inyanga. Before their community is forcibly removed, the children walk two miles to school, where the teachers punish latecomers, even though the boys must be up before sun-up to herd livestock and milk the cows.

When they settle in KwaMashu, the water is brack and must be carried for two kilometres. Rainwater, mixed with sewage, becomes a river between the houses. Here also are the first inklings of the destructive effects of male supremacy. Zodwa chides herself for her implicit acceptance of male violence. Their school choir conductor tries to seduce schoolgirls, while young girls are sometimes gang-raped by boys.

Zodwa's is the generation of teens who condemned their parents for their powerlessness and subjugation; a generation of children forced by dissent into the role of warriors. Zodwa's brother Jonah leaves KwaMash in 1976 to join MK when he is just fifteen, receives military training and is ultimately assassinated for being wrongly suspected of being an informer.

Mtutuzeli Nyoka's *I Speak to the Silent* provides us with a sense of two generations of childhood. His protagonist's angry description of his own past is partly a device to represent his transition from "good black", to a man made conscious of the deep injustices perpetrated in the name of apartheid. But partly, his unsentimental view represents the response of a younger generation of writers – the protest generation – to their parents' upbringing and imperfect memory of it.

His father's employer has a son, junior to him by two years, yet "he was senior to me in everything else (127)." In his teens, he is forced to leave school to become the man of the house.

"My father's death signalled the death of my dreams of a better life... Therefore, at the age of fourteen, I swept and cleaned, shoved and heaved, as my father had before me (539)."

A mud hut, Walter Hambile Kondile tells us, is freezing in winter, wet in the rain, intolerably hot in summer, and lacks comfort and privacy. "In winter we froze. When it rained we got wet. In summer the heat was intolerable... My childhood memories are of a life bereft of space, comfort and beauty. It was an unvarying world of constant hardship (412–415)."

However, he also allows there is always food and place for many relatives. No-one is ever turned away. His "blissful" moments are associated with a traditional upbringing: story-telling in the evenings, the kindness, warmth and love in the home "despite its material bleakness (452)". He recalls with approval the traditional stick-fighting he learnt as a boy, after rising early to milk cows and drive them out to graze.

His own child is different. She questions, she argues, she challenges authority. 'I believed in the superiority of the white man and the inferiority of women. My daughter's intelligence led me to set aside my beliefs. (238)'

He and his wife argue, not because they disagree with her, but because they fear for her. While his is the generation who believes in "magic and superstition", she believes in education. "My daughter's generation... had tasted education... They had tasted the freedom of ideas. This freedom led to questions, and the latter to extreme restlessness (650)."

His daughter belongs to the politicised generation of youth who challenge authority, and who are angered by the passivity of their parents.

Children of the streets

The new century heralded the long-awaited torrent of new black writers, providing gritty accounts of a society which was in the process of shucking off its innocence. Among the first was K. Sello Duiker, who provided a devastating version of childhood. Azure, in *Thirteen cents*, is a street child inured to violence and entirely without support.

Describing the death of his parents, he declares: “I came back to our shack only to find them in a pool of blood. That was three years ago. That was the last time I went to school” (20). He didn’t “freak out”, but cried, and then it was over.

At almost thirteen, he lives by his wits on the street and views himself as “almost a man” (5). He takes the brutality of gangs and pimps and the casual cruelty of passers-by for granted and turns tricks for twenty rand. He is a “knowing” child, yet his essential innocence and humanity shine through.

He takes a “laaitie”, nine-year-old Bafana, under this wing (20) and allows the younger child to creep under his defences: “I’m not his father, I say to myself. That laaitie is getting under my armpit, under my soft spot. I mustn’t let that happen, I tell myself. I’ve seen too many kids die and disappear (81)”.

Many of the other young writers, among them Phaswane Mphe, Siphiwo Mahala, Niq Mhlongo, Thando Mgqolozana, Sifiso Mzobe, were preoccupied not with childhood, nor with nostalgic or longing views of the past, but with stark and graphic constructions of youth and masculinity – what it means to be a man and a father. For the most part, these were unsentimental views, but nonetheless redolent with humanity.

In *Young Blood*, Mzobe does provide a backward view of a middle-class childhood. His protagonist is drawn into a life of crime by boredom and impatience, rather than need. He comes from a two-parent household, with hard-working parents who provided a nurturing environment for their children.

His parents believe in discipline, including corporal punishment and care deeply about education. When he drops out of school, “...my mother went into a rage that lasted two days. My father promised me a beating to end all beatings (19).”

The township, however, provides a violent and turbulent backdrop to his stable, happy homelife. School soccer has been suspended due to a stabbing incident in the stands. Beer, mandrax and loose cigarettes are sold from the tavern near his home. The shantytown behind their house provides access to cliques of young shoplifters and car thieves. Boys as young as thirteen sell stolen goods. He is warned to keep away from the shacks and their roaming crooks.

His best friend Musa lost both parents to TB. He and the other boys in his crowded shack wear only shorts – ostensibly because they are hot, but in reality because they cannot afford shirts. He introduces Siphso, still only seventeen, into a world inured to violence. Not long after, Siphso loses his best friend to bullet wounds.

A view from the other side

Pamphilia Hlapha provides us with the other side to all this masculinity. *A Daughter's Legacy* shows the damage caused to girl children by a society infused with excessive displays of male supremacy.

She shows a readiness to break the taboos of tradition in relating the story of Kedibone who, Hlapha makes clear in an author's note, represents a reality for village and township girls. Girls like Kedibone are damaged, and sometimes broken, by a culture in which a traditional way of life has been warped to the point where girls are powerless, a situation exacerbated by pervasive silence.

Kedibone is raped for the first time at six. "Before I knew it my tiny body was on the ground with my legs apart and his 'thing' being forced inside my private parts. I was trembling in shock, pain and agony and my voice was stuck inside me. (194)"

This is the first of many violations, rapes and attempted rapes which Kedibone experiences or is witness to. "This life was all I knew – people moving around a lot, sex, drunk adults and stories of witchcraft. (571)" In each case, there is no justice or retribution and the girls are exhorted to silence. The violence becomes absorbed into the fabric of family secrets. It is tacitly accepted that boys will "experiment" with girls. Yet it is the girls who are punished and beaten for falling pregnant.

She grows up in a large extended family with many grandchildren – but no fathers. Her mother is loving and strict, yet undemonstrative, and kisses her only when preparing to go away.

In an author's note, Hlapha notes: "As she nurtures her child, Kedibone wonders, what if her insecurities, her hurt and her pain, her fear and her anger damage her son in a way that she cannot handle? Will her son forgive her for that?"

As my own *The Imagined Child* does a decade later, Hlapha grapples with the personal damage done to children by mothers who were damaged themselves, in Kedibone's case by

society and a culture that permitted the violence perpetrated against her. She deals with broken societal values, of “mothers’ and fathers’ failure to raise mothers and fathers, and of society’s lack of competence in raising healthy men and women who can parent their own children.”

In the end, though, her story is about forgiveness – for yourself and others – and the will to confront, and ultimately let go of the past in order to move on with a new life.

The balance of childhood

In the second decade of our new society, a fresh wave of autobiography brought with it a more even-handed view of township childhood than early depictions. In *Native Nostalgia*, Dlamini specifically states his intention to write the good and the bad from the apartheid past. “Only lazy thinkers would take these questions to mean support for apartheid. They do not. Apartheid was without virtue (157)”.

It is often taken for granted, he writes, that Africans lived in harmony with the land and each other, followed by the trials of European conquest and apartheid, ending in triumph with the ultimate romantic figure, Nelson Mandela. This offered a neat separation between a “merry precolonial Africa, a miserable apartheid South Africa and a marvellous new South Africa in which everyone is living democratically ever after” (150).

In reality, no such separation existed, and for most people, the past is “a bit of this, the present a bit of that and the future hopefully a mix of this, that and more” (153).

His view of his own childhood certainly contains both “this and that” – and in it we can see a determination to face the past in all its facets. Perhaps this represents a prevailing inclination to confront the past without mythologising dichotomies, in order to move with greater insight into a future no longer infused with the rosy glow of euphoria.

He lived in a house of warmth and love, with a mother who was aspirational in her hopes for her son, but who did not shy away from corporal punishment. He had no electricity for the first eleven years of his life and he saw his first murdered body at ten. Still it was a happy childhood in a community in which a cacophany of languages was spoken and people showed respect for the dead, and tried to offer each other support.

He mentions the drugs, the homelessness, poverty, HIV, the government schools churning out educated illiterates, alongside children's street play, seasonal games of marbles and the joy of radio plays and boxing.

Without stating an explicit intention, Redi Tlhabi attempts a similar balancing act with her memoir. *Endings & Beginnings* portrays township life in Orlando, Soweto, an area besieged not just by the death-throes of apartheid, but by endemic violence.

She shows the effects of trauma and the damage it does to children – how social conditions “create the monsters who terrorise our lives and make us prisoners in our own country” (63). And in this, she demonstrates the middle-class global concern with a style of parenting designed to produce psychologically healthy children.

Like Dlamini, she provides us with an equal mix of nostalgia and criticism. She sees her murdered father lying in the street, and subsequently forms a friendship with a notorious gangster, whom she also finds dead - all by the age of eleven. Accustomed to brutality on the streets, this child nonetheless has the stability and love of a strong family unit to instil in her a sense of morality.

She mentions similar positives: the vibrant mix of a township community, its unity and support against a common enemy, the energy of choral competitions, street games and weddings, at which anyone is welcome.

Through adolescence to maturity

The past has continued to be re-imagined. As we have seen, apartheid continued to reveal its ugly head in the work of both white and black writers, a decade after liberation and beyond. With few exceptions, these explorations embraced at least some degree of nostalgia for aspects of this past. All of this writing revealed the violence and absurdities of apartheid, grappled with issues of truth and guilt, and demonstrated a quest for a new identity beyond its grasp. Some have focused on institutionalised racism, while other works have focused on the damage done even to those apartheid was intended to benefit.

Some of these narratives look beyond apartheid at the kind of adults who emerged from the dark years, and what became of them in the new society – most with a sense of hope for the future.

In fact, like any tale of childhood trauma, these books show the necessity of looking backward to embrace the good and the bad, the nostalgic and the malignant – in order to mature into a healthy adulthood, as individuals and as a new society.

My third novel, *Sad at the Edges*, is not a coming of age narrative, nor essentially about child or parenthood at all. The story is his mother's. The child is not fully realised as a character and his troubled existence is emblematic of the damage done her by apartheid. He represents issues she has refused to face – a theme of ambivalent motherhood carried through to my present novel. The child makes flesh the mother's psychic damage.

His mother has no miracle in mind. She cannot dig out her son's disability like a thorn. What she hopes for is the ability to provide the boy with access to the sense of the normality locked within him. She hopes to show him his inner self, which has knees as scuffed as any other boy's.

Eventually she is forced to tackle the issues surrounding her earlier detention. In confronting her former captor, she is also facing herself, and the complexities of her dual victimhood and collaboration. From this unexpected quarter she eventually finds the ability to forgive, to understand herself, and to "heal" her child.

My Brother's Book, which appeared in 2008, follows a brother and sister through three stages of their lives. Their childhood is played out in small-town Eastern Cape and sets the scene for their adult lives. Products of the same unconventional upbringing, they grow up to be completely different people.

Their childhood is overshadowed by a charismatic rogue of a father and both characters are marked by him in different ways. Lily has his heedless *joie de vivre*, while Tom, as the elder child, is forced to grow up too fast. He sets about being as unlike his father as he can – yet his adult life shows an uncanny resemblance to Pop's in one or two significant areas.

In many ways, theirs is an ideal childhood. They experience the geographical freedom of small-town life and the psychological freedom of a father who treats them as ethical beings. He is a benevolent parent, who does not place undue demands upon them, and has never punished them harshly. Yet, theirs is a childhood characterised by insecurity.

Accepted completely by neither black nor white, they are the scruffy outsiders, forced to skip towns at midnight. They live out a peripatetic youth in a series of boarding houses while their

father travels and dreams. Pop fills Lily with the belief that charm and audacity will always land them on their feet, but Tom takes on the role of quasi-parent.

Tom blames Pop for their having no mother. And he blames his absent mother even more. For him, healing must come from understanding that both their parents did the best they could within an evil system. The institutionalised racism of apartheid deprived them of a mother and made their father the man he was.

Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*, which first appeared in 2004 and, in English, in 2006, reveals two children damaged by parents equally distorted by the roles engraved on them by apartheid society. Reticent Jakkie has his father's bullying form of masculinity forced upon him, while Agaat's identity is distorted by the ambivalence of a woman equally warped by her society.

Agaat is child, but not child, slave but not slave, loved but not loved enough. She is the throwaway child taken from the ash heap of society and taught that she is not "Asgat", but Agaat, a human being, a good human being. But Agaat cannot have her hand held in public, she cannot enter whites-only establishments. And when the "real child" appears, she is relegated to a half life where her relative privilege isolates her from other servants, and her position of inferiority from the only family she has known.

Their ambiguous relationship, twisted by self-interest and social strictures, creates a malformed mother-daughter relationship characterised by unbreakable bonds of tenderness and sadistic relish.

A parent's guilt

Slowly but surely, works of childhood have begun to show a concern with the society we have inherited. Versions of childhood are still riven by deep racial and class divides. But among the middle classes at least, both black and white, parenting has started to reflect more global concerns for happy, successful children fitted to live in the world. We have lost our sense of being exceptional – in our own and the eyes of the world. The institutional has shrunk to the personal, the extraordinary – finally – to the ordinary.

Much of Odette's ambivalence in *The Imagined Child* stems from her guilt, exacerbated by prevailing attitudes to children and parenting. Nothing is more likely to intensify feelings of inadequacy than the expectation to produce a well-balanced genius.

Mandy was this close to being like everyone else. This close. There were one or two things she had to catch up on, that's all. 'See Mandy? Happy face. Well done. And this? No, this is a thoughtful face. It's not cross at all.'

She could be fixed. Between them, they would fight her battles. Anything at all could be learned if you just pushed hard enough (Richards 2013, 64).

Spock's belief that mothers should enjoy their babies has clearly endured. As the mother of a baby who cannot be comforted, Odette is riven by feelings of incompetence and failure.

She couldn't bear that she shrieked and arched her body. She couldn't bear that she was so unhappy. She was angry with the nurses for not trying harder. She hated them for leaving her to cry. She wanted to rush in and snatch her away. She should be able to do it, even if they couldn't. She was her mother. What kind of mother was unable to comfort her own child? (89)

In accordance with the prevalent vision of childhood, Odette feels enormous pressure to make Mandy "happy", something the child seems unable or unwilling to be (191).

The school children who people the book are cruel, products of an upbringing that does not instil a sense of self-sacrifice. Their only task is to seek self-fulfilment, which inevitably leads to a sense of entitlement, and the tendency to despise those weaker than themselves. Among these children, we do see evidence of a global, consumer-driven trend towards products specifically created for children's pleasure and promoted through television. (64–66).

In the small, working-class town in which Odette settles, however, things are very different for both black and white children, and for those from different classes.

There is still a marked lack of protection for vulnerable children. A twelve-year-old white girl who produced a child by her grandfather is seen as a slut, while the product of this incestuous and abusive relationship exists on the lowest rung of small-town hierarchy (68, 147).

Hope and trepidation

The Imagined Child shows hope for the future, although unease is evident in the deep divisions still apparent in their community.

The story focuses on our primary relationships: those between parents and children. But the novel resonates not only on an individual level. We have a formative relationship with the country, which stands as both parent and child. We blame it for our damaged selves, yet feel guilt over the way it turned out. It has become a theme in our society – deciding to leave, deciding to stay: decisions often determined by the guilt, blame, even rage, engendered by that complex relationship.

My protagonist, Odette, is trying to escape, not only her difficult feelings about being a mother and a daughter, but the worst of her feelings about the country, represented by Johannesburg. I wanted her to discover that escaping the past is never an option. The complexities of both relationships – with her daughter and the country of her birth – force her to face her own part in what they both have become.

A sense of unease is palpable also in dystopian views of childhood like Rachel Zadok's *Sister, Sister*, which shows us an uncomfortably familiar world, riven by poverty and disease, where children are not protected, but who must depend on their own wits to survive.

By implication, a degree of trepidation is evident also in the necessity to seek alternative styles of parenting which reach beyond the contemporary desire to create successful children for the world as it is.

Over-parenting has reached its peak in the capitalist nations of the world, where child-rearing fixates on ushering their children towards a prosperous – and consequently, anxiety-driven – future (Lythcott-Haims). It is at this juncture that Finuala Dowling's *The Fetch* provides us with an alternative model in which an abandoned child, Oro, is raised by a gentle man, expert in biology, in an ecologically healthy way, to respect all forms of life. He is taught to value human and animal lives and to live in harmony with, rather than destructively, in the universe.

In this novel too, we see an involvement with the individual and the personal but, equally, a focus on core values, which resonate our more general concerns about society and the world. All of these novels contain the hope of redemption and perhaps demonstrate, to us and the world, that despite our many oddities, we are (almost) ordinary.

It is through children that we see who we are

In the last years of apartheid, Njabulo Ndebele called for a post-heroic cult of irony, the local, the ordinary. "...that is to say, a culture, or a literature, preoccupied not with the polar conflicts of 'the people' vs 'the state' but with textures of life which have eluded that epic battle and have grown insouciantly in the cracks of the structures that South Africa's fraught modernity has historically thrown up (Pechey 57)."

To some extent, perhaps, we have managed to attain these qualities. I would argue that childhood can be used to show how we reached this point, and the circuitous route we took here. It is through our literary children that we can see who we were, and who we are now.

From the earliest years of our democracy, new white writers were quick to make use of the new freedom from the expectation to produce didactic "struggle" writing. Released from the strictures of having to show where they stood in relation to apartheid, they explored the lives of flawed people, grappling with the greys, as well as the blacks and whites.

The white children who came of age in the immediate post-apartheid period allowed us, as a society, to investigate white culpability in simply having been there. These children rode the wave of society's euphoria to highlight our ambivalence in feeling both guilt and nostalgia – a longing, not for apartheid, but for a youth untainted by the violence and injustice which allowed childhoods such as our own. These imagined children acknowledged that their youths were enjoyed at the expense of others. They recognised the damage done – not just by institutionalised racism, but by the concomitant patriarchal and ultra-masculine violence against women and children and boys who couldn't share in it.

The white children who followed through the coming two decades continued to toy with the damage apartheid caused, even to those intended to benefit from it, and an awareness of the disparities which are still with us, due to poverty and an imbalance of power. Either with degrees of nostalgia or none at all, these children explored more fully the casualties of history who emerged from them – the damaged adults we became. But for the most part, these children evinced a redemptory hope in confronting, rather than evading, the past and its damage in order to view the future with a level but optimistic gaze.

With less need to explore guilt and culpability, early black autobiographers had the space to reclaim a way of life demeaned by apartheid. They could explore what black South Africans had come through and acknowledge what it was in their background and culture that had given them the strength not only to survive, but to emerge with dignity and forgiveness.

Black children whose early lives preceded the worst of the apartheid years reclaimed an image of themselves and their culture which had been debased by apartheid. They celebrated traditional lives and values in bucolic spaces, sometimes to the point of what Dlamini later termed the “merry”, “happy-go-lucky” myth of existence.

Even in urban townships, children were granted the stability of communal support and strict but loving families. As the degradations of apartheid impinged to a greater and greater extent, it could not destroy the wholesome cultural values their lives were forged upon.

A younger wave of black novelists produced less rosy childhoods and an angrier representation, of their own and their parents’ youth. They signified a changed consciousness from one generation to the next as generational antipathy made inroads into the deeply ingrained cultural respect for authority. This was the generation who viewed their parents as having failed, and as not having protested enough. The literary youths of the protest generation celebrated their bravery and sacrifice and highlighted the violence and injustice of apartheid.

Dlamini notes that many youths through the ‘70s and ‘80s felt “their parents had failed them by not taking the fight to the apartheid government, that parents had acquiesced in their own oppression and that students had been left out to dry by their cowardly carers” (1013).

Although distinctly South African, this trend matched the corresponding tendency of Western literary children to be failed by weak or corrupt adults – reflecting the erosion of adult authority in the Western model of childhood.

A more measured and even-handed view of an apartheid childhood is offered by later autobiographical writing, which faces the bad while showing a willingness to acknowledge and embrace the good. In this, we can see a determination to come to terms with the past, in all its facets, in order to gain the insight to deal with a future which exhibits its own goods and ills.

A new century brought with it a loss of innocence in our youthful democracy in the worldliness of a dispossessed street child, forced to negotiate violence and death without adult support. K. Sello Duiker’s *Azure* brought home disquieting aspects of the aftermath to apartheid, as did a new generation of young men, all dealing with issues of identity, youth and masculinity in a world of violence, crime and unrelenting poverty.

Phampilia Hlapa's heroic girl-child provides the other side of this coin, showing the destructive effects of rampant and impervious masculinity. Kedibone represents a readiness to break with the secrecy and taboos of tradition and speak out against the violence her culture has allowed, and perhaps even promoted.

Later, as a parent herself, she looks ahead to a distinctly contemporary view of childhood, one which embraces a more personal and individual concern with producing happy, psychologically sound children who can be successful in their own lives.

In this, she shows an affinity with white, middle-class literary parents, indicating a shift toward class rather than racial differences in determining child-rearing practices. The concerns of white parents like Odette, in *The Imagined Child*, have shifted from the institutional to the personal in her experience of the contemporary global pressure – and consequent anxiety – to produce perfect children who are successful, happy and psychologically healthy.

The book's implicit analogy of the country as both parent and child highlights what has become a theme in our society – deciding to leave, deciding to stay: decisions often determined by the guilt, blame, even rage, engendered by that complex relationship.

But the future can seldom be contemplated without trepidation. Deep divisions of wealth, health and opportunity remain, and deepen, leading us both to a dystopian vision of childhood and to a consideration of alternative childrearing practices, in order to fit our children – not for success in the world as it stands – but for a better world in which human and animal life is valued more fully.

A parade of children has danced, skipped, played and crawled after the pied piper of our democratic transition, some laughing in merriment, some weeping, others longing for what they had lost or never had. They came from affluence and poverty, stable homes or abuse and neglect. But these children, with all their differences, show us who we are as a nation and the distance we have travelled to get to where we are now.

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Conclusion

Childhood is the country we all come from – and can never quite escape in the psychological landscape of adulthood. The children who populate our pasts determine the people we become and, perhaps more importantly, show us who we are as a society.

For both these reasons, childhood has become an enduring topic in literature. Since writers began paying attention to childhood at all, a chorus of literary children has recounted both our individual characters and our cultural dispositions.

Children only began to appear in literature in any consistent way from the nineteenth century, coinciding roughly with an image of childhood and children set in motion by the Romantics. Once children are conceived of as innocent and vulnerable, they contrast sharply with and become a powerful means of criticising the corruption and culpability of society.

As a device, childhood works both intellectually and emotionally. Intellectually, it shines a merciless light on deficient aspects of society, by showing how a community of adults deals with its most defenceless members. The emotional impact persists in its ability to draw on our empathy for vulnerability. Our compassion is most strongly aroused when we perceive children to be guiltless, rather than the corrupt purveyors of original sin.

The Romantic conception of childhood as a state separate from that of adults allows literary children also to provide the Martian view – seeing familiar society with new, and guileless, eyes.

Childhood, or some form of it, is universal. The helplessness of infants sees to that. Every society at every point in history has had some concept of childhood. It is their conception of it that changes. Equally, every writer who has used children has done so in a different way and for a different literary purpose. And yet, each has shared commonalities with other writers of childhood.

As I hope I have shown, the literary purpose of childhood is greatly illuminated by an understanding of the historical and social context in which a piece of literature is set, and in which it is written.

No writer exists outside of society and its views on child and parenthood. Every writer uses society to critique a form of childhood, and in so doing, uses childhood to critique and reflect society. The societal influences which have formed the writer's world view at the time of writing create the spotlight which is then trained on the version of childhood, and the society, of its setting.

All the books discussed provide us with a sense of their setting, and yet each reaches beyond to give us some understanding of the time in which it was written. The insight which evades their protagonists, but which is implicit in the narratives, is drawn from later versions of a cultural reality. To miss the zeitgeist of either is to lack an understanding of the piece as a whole, as the 1970s film adaptation of *The Go-Between* shows us.

Dickens used hindsight as a weapon to batter at the injustices he saw in his society. Yet he was simultaneously a man of his time. He was a Romantic in the Victorian sense, essentially an urban writer. Like his society, he absorbed a healthy dose of the evangelicism he despised. He infused this admixture into his alter ego so that his most autobiographical character might safeguard his Romantic sensibilities into adulthood.

David Copperfield encapsulates Victorian child- and parenthood, in all its variants: the Romantic child, the working child, the street child, and their schooled counterpart. The evangelical father swoops in like an avenging, and somewhat sadistic, angel to take issue with the parenting style of the Romantics, signifying the major schism of his time, and within himself.

Hartley could probably best be described as a disillusioned Romantic. He inherited its sensibility, while showing a deep acknowledgment of its dangers. This is a novel about different worlds within a single society, yet its greatest threat to childhood lies in a conception which sought to protect it.

Like the childhood depicted in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Children's Day*, and *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, these Edwardian children are free to roam and experience the natural world. Their constraints lie elsewhere. In *The Go-Between*, they exist in the enforced innocence and dependence of women and children. The South African narratives show equal strictures, imposed both by an authoritarian culture and, in the case of my own novel, by an individual unwillingness to accept the realities that underpin society.

Of all of the novels discussed, *To Kill a Mockingbird* probably shows the least constraint on the lives of its children. They have geographical freedom, their actions confined only by a sense of morality, encouraged rather than imposed by their father. While any coming of age must involve a certain loss of innocence, Scout's is less destructive, largely due to her and Jem's greater agency in their dealings with the world of men.

This agency shows us more about the author's adult awareness than it does about the children of the Depression. Both their idealised father and their upbringing show an acceptance and understanding of the changing inter-generational relationships, and erosion of authority, which emerged only in the decades following the 1930s.

Existing in a literary space more than half a century after Leo, Katie represents the anomalous white children of South Africa. Their childhoods owe nothing to their African setting, except perhaps in their isolation. Constrained by an authoritarian society and cut off, both from black South Africans and from the global influences which formed Scout, both her and Simon's childhood cuts a path directly back to the Puritans, with a brief bypass through Romanticism.

While Katie, in *Innocence*, and Leo, in *The Go-Between*, visualise great agency for themselves, it is in both cases a fantasy, concocted to compensate for a helplessness imposed on them by their society. In *The Children's Day*, Simon lacks even the impetus to conjure a sense of agency. All his dealings with his hierarchical society teach him that he is powerless, just as his father is powerless against the petty bureaucracies of schools, who are in turn powerless in the face of the twin authorities of government and God.

Simon's is a story of burgeoning sexuality. Like Leo, he is damaged by the society which attempts to keep him sheltered. Ultimately though, it is the exercise of excessive power itself which causes his most irrevocable injury.

While discovering the men they will become, Leo and Simon embark on a rite of passage to find their own versions of sexuality. Simon's idealised feelings for Juliana recall David Copperfield's early crushes. Like Leo's feelings for Ted, Steve the ducktail is not only the source of little-understood attraction, but also the image of the man that Simon aspires to be.

David Copperfield touches upon sexual identity, but here class schisms and conflicting versions of child care are most damaging to the child. The damage he suffers is the counterpoint to that of Leo and Simon; the other side of the coin. He represents society's

inability or unwillingness to offer protection to children subjected to a life of labour and abuse.

Sexual identity plays no part in Scout's coming of age. The protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is on a journey to discover her moral self – and her role within a society which is not always as principled.

While every book discussed uses childhood, and some notion of innocence, to critique society, each uses different strategies of writing about childhood. In each, childhood functions in a different way.

While Dickens, a Romantic man of his time, bemoans David Copperfield's loss of innocence, and longs for a return of a childhood separate from the world of men, Lee expresses the desire for a childhood in which the world of children is less distinct from that of adults. Children have greater moral agency and are able to slide gently into an adulthood which retains the best of childhood.

Hartley, Heyns and my first novel all problematise the notion of innocence as a natural state of childhood. Each uses an adult narrator looking back, which allows for different strategies in the use of innocence and the manipulation of nostalgia.

Crucial aspects of the *Bildungsroman* are voice and point of view, which create the tone of the novel and the reader's experience of it. It changes the way in which each writer engages the reader, both intellectually and emotionally. Within every coming-of-age novel written in the first person lies an adult who wrangles with the child for control of the narrative. This conflict determines the level of the narrator's psychological integration, his attitude to the world, his relationship with other characters – and with the reader.

It is difficult for an adult voice, charged with greater insight and different degrees of cynical detachment, to provide an entirely nostalgic view of childhood. The voice of the child is the one who takes us back into the authentic land of childhood, unmarred by hindsight.

David Copperfield contains details of shocking abuse and childhood trauma, yet still allows us some unapologetically nostalgic views of childhood. Like Heyns, Dickens's adult narrator uses a satirical tone, which slides effortlessly aside to allow the voice of the child equal space. This helps us empathise with the child, since we gain entry to his world and experience

his trauma from within his consciousness. The adult is not dislocated from the child and, in this way, demonstrates a level of healing not found in *The Go-Between*.

The adult Leo is a fragmented character who retains little of the child. Like Katie in *Innocence*, however, Leo still shows the possibility for integration. His and Katie's adult voices jar discordantly against those of the children they once were. Yet they are still able to access – and allow the reader access – to the world of the child, albeit unwillingly.

Both children express a yearning nostalgia for their lost innocence. In both books, the obliteration of this innocence flows directly from the nature of society. Through its destruction, each narrator (and novel) shows an innate awareness of its evils. The loss that is mourned is therefore not the simplistic loss of a way of life, but the ability of that time and culture to effect such a brutal loss of innocence. Its yearning is not for that time, but for a different society, one that did not exist.

The adult Leo grants liberal access to the child, which allows the reader to experience the felt life of the child. Once we have walked in his shoes, it is easier to understand the shock of his coming of age. The adult voice never overrides, allowing us to revel in the sensual experiences of the child in order to appreciate the tragedy of his destruction.

To Kill a Mockingbird contains much more of a merging of the two voices. Her innocence is less profound. She has been less sheltered from the injustices of her time, which allows her to develop gradually as a moral being. Her confrontation with the full horror of what her society is capable of is therefore less abrupt.

The innocent may have been destroyed, but not innocence itself. Child and adult segue between and, at times, merge with each other, showing us equally the harshness of injustice and the nostalgia for a childhood not entirely lost.

In contrast, the adult remains in taut control of the narrative in *The Children's Day*, leaving the child scant space to show us his view from within. We remain outsiders, privy only to the adult's commentary on the child that he was, and the characters who surrounded him.

His voice provides us with sardonic amusement, but leaves little room for empathy – for the child and, even less so, the characters who people his small-town childhood. Like astronomers, we view the child as a distant galaxy. Through him, we can gain only faint clues about even more distant objects whose light is refracted by his gravitational force.

The aims of *Innocence* and *The Children's Day* are similar, to critique a brutal society. But their attempts to achieve these aims are different. Both novels gain and lose from the attempt in terms of the emotional and intellectual engagement of the reader.

Childhood has served a different purpose in four of my five novels. My fifth novel, *The Imagined Child*, focuses more on parenthood than on the child's view of society. Of all the novels discussed, this is the only one which contains something of the West's most recent construction of childhood. In demanding that parents deliver bright, successful, happy, well-adjusted and integrated children, this is the image which has created perhaps the most pressure that parents of the Western world have ever had to face.

The construction of childhood in Africa has shown a very different trajectory, and has never been consistent, in life or literature. There is no "African childhood". Equally, the literary children of South Africa show us not just how differently childhood has been experienced in diverse segments of our society, but perhaps even more decisively, they measure the temperature of the times.

The differing versions of literary childhood, and their varying treatments, provide a gauge for the health and vigour of our society from the 1990s. They allow us to understand how we grew and developed from the birth of democracy to the mature society we are now. Through our real and imagined children, we gain a sense of ourselves.

And so each generation of children takes from their own childhoods to become imperfect parents to the next. Every generation creates its own vision of the perfect parent and perfect child. And each generation fails, creating damage that is either integrated within the adults of the next generation, or not.

This, our most primary relationship, lies at the heart of who we are, and of our humanity.

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