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RAISING THE SUBJECT:

IDEOLOGY IN CHILDREN'S FICTION

VALERIE MARGARET KRIPS, B.A. (Honours)

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

School of Humanities, Deakin University

August 1988
I certify that the thesis entitled *Raising the Subject: Ideology in Children's Fiction* and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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Acknowledgements

This project has been made possible through the support and encouragement of my supervisor, Ian Reid. He has combined patience and kindness with a rigorous critical engagement with the work. My first thanks belong to him. The comments of my co-supervisor, Sneja Gunew, have been of great value and assistance. Stephanie Trigg and Kevin Hart read and commented on the final chapter, and have encouraged my endeavours in many ways. My husband has read, quite out of his area, every word I have written. Without his help this work would have foundered indeed. The imperfections and incompleteness of this text would have been far greater without his generous and unfailing help.
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SUMMARY

This thesis is concerned to reveal, by means of textual analysis, ideologies connected to human subjectivity within eight contemporary novels for "children". The analyses draw upon the work of Macherey, Eagleton, Jameson and Bakhtin among others.

The texts discussed cover more than two decades, from 1955 to 1977. The first, Philippa Pearce's *Hinnow on the Say*, attempts to reconcile a traditional form of subjectivity with a less hierarchic and more open type. Lyotard's account of customary and scientific knowledge, and Said's of affiliation, are the basis for discussion here.

Susan Cooper's sequence *The Dark is Rising* grounds humanism in a mythic British past. Within these texts the problem of situating the subject within a wider social framework is linked to one of nationalism. Her novels are fantasies, and provide an opportunity for a discussion of a non-realist form and its ideological implications. Todorov's account of the fantastic as a genre is a reference-point in this analysis.

Jane Gardam's *Bilgewater* presents a discontinuous subject-in-process. Her story is told by a first-person narrator, situated within a framed narrative. Through its themes and structures the text interrogates its central character's project of subjectivity as perfectible, centered and continuous, and finds it untenable.
In Russell Hoban's *The House and His Child* the possibility of self-determination within language as discourse is of central concern. The tin mice, who are hollow, echo in their persons the text's interest in the distinction between inside and outside, the difference which Lacanian theory posits as essential for an accession to subjectivity. Hoban's work gives an account of the postmodern subject, and calls into question the subjectivities assumed in Pearce's and Cooper's texts.
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Everything is language

In her book *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose discusses the grounds upon which a distinction can be made between childhood and adulthood. She concludes that childhood is something in which "we continue to be implicated and which is never simply left behind". This position, which will be presumed in my own work, questions the stability of categories which are often presupposed in criticism of children's books.

Much of this criticism is evaluative or descriptive. Inglis, for example, creates a Leavis-like canon: he says that the 'great children's novelists are Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Arthur Ransome, William Mayne and Philippa Pearce - to stop for the moment at that comparatively safe point on an uncertain list'. He goes on to make it clear that his interest lies in the role which books play in 'bringing up children'. He speaks on behalf of education, a 'theory of a liberal

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education — and of education in the liberal art of the novel. This sort of criticism does not directly interrogate the category ‘children’s book’ or its supposed audience; its object is to sift the genre and to discriminate within it on behalf of children. It speaks, as does most criticism, from adult to adult.

Neil Postman, on the other hand, is interested in the children’s book as part of a larger cultural framework which enables childhood, as a social institution, to exist. He thinks that this framework is in decay and that the ‘decline of childhood’ heralds a ‘corresponding diminution of the character of adulthood’. Childhood is a cultural construct in any society we care to name, and it implicates the adult, too, as Postman suggests. A similar point is made by Ariel Dorfman, who notes a tendency in popular literature to ‘infantilize the adult reader, to diminish the most complex dilemmas to simplified and simpleminded ideas.’

Postman speaks with regret, since the child and the special place it inhabits, childhood, is a site of ‘charm, malleability, innocence and curiosity’. Dorfman is concerned to expose the domination inherent in relationships between child and adult and to show that childishness is not just a matter of age. Whole nations,

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4 Inglis, p.294.


7 Postman, p.xiii.
according to his view, can be treated as childish, which means that they are thought to be irresponsible and unable to determine for themselves what is in their best interests.

These last two accounts add a dimension to discussions about children's books which augments Rose's point that there is 'no child behind the category "children's fiction", other than the one which the category itself sets in place'. Her own argument continues along psychoanalytic lines in which 'children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book [and] it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp'.

She further argues that the 'child's own experience' of books 'despite all the attempts which have been made' is 'more or less impossible to gauge'. Indeed we might add that for any reader the experience of a text is beyond a full expression. But what we can assess, as Rose herself shows, is how the child is constructed in the text. Not, that is, merely as a character or role model but as a project of subjectivity, as a person who will take up a place in the social or fit itself for the place made ready for it.

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9 Rose, p.10.

7 Rose, p.2.

10 Rose, p.9.

11 A more detailed account of subjectivity will be given later in this introduction.
Here I take Rose's account further. Althusser claims that the educational ideological apparatus is dominant within 'mature capitalist social formations', which takes us back to Inglis's point about education, and the value of children's books within it. Children's texts are constructing subjectivities for apprentice members of society; they are helping to construct the social subject.

The subjectivities represented in texts cannot simply be deduced from the characters who appear in the books' pages, for reasons which will be made clear soon. Aidan Chambers' work on the implied reader of children's texts gives an indication of one of the places to seek the subjectivities which texts construct. However, the reader is not 'in the book' as he puts it, but outside it. The reader, who must engage in a dialogue with the text and undertake a performance of it, must not be confused with any partial subjectivity represented in the text, as Rose makes plain. Books attempt to 'secure the child who is outside'. The conventions of fiction allow and procure a dialogue, a partnership, between reader and text. By this means the reader becomes implicated in the text's meanings.

The subjectivity produced within this dialogue is not merely a childish one. Rose says that 'neither childhood nor meaning can be pinned down - they shift, and our own

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14 Rose, p.2.
identity with them.\textsuperscript{15} The subject positions offered by the texts are the product of the totality of culture; they are little different from those available to a mature adult. Just as it is impossible to provide a clear distinction between childhood and adulthood in terms of the psychoanalytic subject, so the social subject is equally caught up in the play of reference. A child is not an adult, an adult not a child, and the line drawn between the two states shifts.\textsuperscript{16}

Humphrey Carpenter's *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, discusses selected books from the so-called first Golden Age of British children's books. He goes on to look briefly at the second, which is generally thought to have begun in the fifties.\textsuperscript{17} The books I discuss overlap this second period and the first was written by one of its most notable authors, Philippa Pearce.

Her first book, and my first text, *Minnow on the Say*, was published in 1955. The other books which complete my study were published between that date and 1977. All of them remain in print as I write. My interest in these texts lies in their representation of the human being as a subject, both within the text, and as the implied reader of it. The account I provide of these subjectivities is

\textsuperscript{15} Rose, p.18.

\textsuperscript{16} Where the line is drawn is a matter of historical contingency as Ariès' historical account of the phenomenon of childhood makes plain. See Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, translated Robert Baldick (New York, Vintage Books, 1962).

ideological. Specific ideologies have a history, so Althusser tells us. They may be residual forms (and we shall encounter one of these in Pearce's text), or they may be a response to a new set of social practices. In this study I am concerned to reveal the ideologies about human subjectivities which can be found in contemporary novels, published as children's books. A detailed account of the sociological and historical implications of these findings is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. My purpose is to provide an addition to the work of other authors who have shown how contemporary culture figures the human being.

The texts I have chosen present a wide range of possibilities for subjectivity. Within the compass of eight novels, by four authors, the human subject is presented as pre-individualistic, as an autonomous individual, as the decentered subject-in-process and finally as the highly fragmented subject of post-modernism.

Philippa Pearce's Minnow on the Say, with which I begin this study, is set in the English villages of Great and Little Barley. The people who live in her villages are not especially extraordinary or peculiar, by fictional standards. The book is comforting, the setting familiar (even to those of us who do not come from English villages); it echoes many another book in which children boat upon a lazy summer river, and speaks of families, friends, neighbours, and strangers. These seem universal things.

\[1\] Althusser, Lenin, p.150.
The book's power lies in more than this, though. Within it certain social differences are presented as ameliorated. The Barleys are a sort of never-never land, where the difficulties which might assail the reader in the wider world are played out on a manageable scale. Who would not hope that potential enemies will turn into friends; that it is possible to be a member of a community in which there is room for all, and all are valuable; and that a sort of magic illuminates the everyday? The differences which the book's solutions repress are central ones, having to do with who we are, which means where we are, too.

*Hinnow on the Say* produces a 'subject position', a place in which a human being can know how to be. The book does not create this out of thin air, as a response to a shadow or a dream. This literary text, like all such texts, is connected to the world, or to the real, in a complex way which we shall discuss soon. The text rewrites what is available to it, drawing the real into itself as it sets about its own, fictional, work.

Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence of five novels is a type of fantasy. These are marvellous texts, a term which will be defined more exactly when we come to discuss the books. They are also set in Britain, but one in which the everyday is overlaid by another world of marvels. The two, in fact, are inseparable. In them we encounter the heroic in all of us and more. The books tell a familiar story: the struggle of the light with the dark, or good with evil. The problems for these texts are old ones: where does authority lie; how can people be free without anarchy; is there something in people which is central and unchangeable? In finding its answers to
these questions, *The Dark is Rising* displays a variation upon well-known humanist themes of subjectivity.

Intertwined with these important questions is a very British one: where is a country which has lost its empire to find a place for itself? This may not seem directly to affect the human subject, but as we have seen in Pearce's text, where we are has an important effect on who we are. Cooper's books throw light upon *Minnow on the Say*, in so far as they both take pains to 'place' their potential subjects, not only as single entities but also within a wider social framework.

Jane Gardam's *Bilgewater* is the story of a few weeks in the life of a girl of seventeen. The events which take place during this period are both funny and sad; she has an exciting time. But unlike either Pearce's or Cooper's people, Bilgewater (for that is her name) is not quite sure who she is. She manages to sort something out, and achieves a definite project of a self, an outline of a future which looks good, and appears to be, in the end, quite like Cooper's. But she is undone; Bilgewater's problems, which are those of adolescence, are not solved, once and for all, as she thought (and led us to believe: she narrates herself).

But her problem is deeper than that: of course no life proceeds according to some fondly-imagined personal plan. The problems which she presents to us as those of an unformed malleable adolescent are in fact the constant uncertainties of the subject. Bilgewater is the subject-in-process, who will never achieve the humanist ideal. Just what this implies will become clear when we turn to the text, but the irruption of this subject marks a new turning for our argument and a new model of subjectivity.
Russell Hoban's *The Mouse and His Child* takes this further. In this book a toy mouse and child set out on adventures which, precisely, at self-winding (which for them means self-determination). Their story is all about achieving subjectivity, something which was a subtext in Pearce's and Cooper's books, and is more evident in Gardam's *Bilgewater*. Hoban's book shows how subjects are located in society: by language, by the social, by the family, by place (territory, in the case of the mice). In their journey the mice are captured, enslaved, used as mere machines, drowned in words, and made new. This making new is what sets Hoban's text apart from all the others.

Can the reader be presumed to recognize that, say, Bilgewater's project of subjectivity is undone? It is the purpose of this study to show how we can claim that readers do understand such things in texts, though we shall need to define what such an 'understanding' amounts to. Although I leave fine details of the argument to the following chapters, an introduction to the sorts of criticism which will be my mainstays seems appropriate.

My analyses of these books rest upon four sets of theories, and explicit references to sources will be made in the chapters which follow. These theories are linguistic, narratological, ideological and psychoanalytic.

The linguistic ones tell us that words are not the things they represent, but stand between them and us. The word 'tree', for instance, is not a tree but represents the object tree (so long as we know the English language, that is). If the word 'tree' appears in a book, English
language readers will make the connection between those letters, formed into a word, and the object which they represent or signify. So when I write 'once upon a time there was a tree', this seems plausible to my reader, who will assent to it as part of the story.

However, many of the words we use do not refer to things which can be pointed out, like a tree. The word 'Ent' (the name of Tolkien's tree-like people) does not have an actual exemplar, a 'referent' in the world we know. But if Tolkien's readers are to continue to enjoy his story, they must accept this unverified referent 'Ent' on its face-value.

We assign meaning to this word by a cumulative process. The word 'Ent' appears in a sentence, and the relation of that word to others surrounding it helps us to give meaning to it. Its repetition in other sentences confirms (or refutes) our original supposition. Tolkien actually describes his Ents but the process of meaning-assignation could have been achieved without this. Alan Garner, for example, uses dialect words in his Stone Book Quartet. He gives no explanation for a word like 'baggin': the reader realizes it must refer to lunch or food, because of the word's position in sentences.²⁰

The species Ent does not exist in the world outside the window, in the way that a tree does. But we can make sense of it just the same. We can do this because much of our language includes words which have no empirical

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referent. 'Holiness,' for example, is not something we can point to, though we may be able to agree upon what we mean by it, or even know of someone to whom it can be applied. The word 'holiness' refers to an idea, a thing created by people through language. 'Holiness' and 'tree' represent different sorts of things and we can distinguish between them by using language to do so, but these distinctions are not inherent in the words themselves; both are just signifiers.\textsuperscript{21}

Novels are created from a multitude of signifiers. Some of these signifiers can be taken as referring to things which actually exist (such as a tree, or a concept like holy) but, since the world created by the novel is not real at all, even a tree within it is, strictly speaking, imaginary. Some of the worlds presented to us in novels have fewer 'real' referents than others: such is the case in fantasy, for instance. But, because of the conventions of reading, it is no more difficult to suspend disbelief on behalf of fantasy than for the imitative (mimetic) world of the realistic novel.

The world that Dickens wrote about in David Copperfield is no more 'real' than the world that Tolkien wrote about in his saga of middle-earth. But Dickens was trying to re-present the world he knew; it seemed 'real' to us as readers because we have learned to read it as real, to take this re-presentation as being like the world we know. David Copperfield asks Peggotty has he children of his own. "No, master," he answered, with a short

\textsuperscript{21} My understanding of this term is based upon Saussure's theory of language. See Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, translated Wade Baskin (London, Fontana, 1974).
laugh. "I'm a bachelordore" (p.47). Here a piece of supposed dialogue is given in which Peggotty's distinctive speech is shown by spelling (this is how we know he 'speaks' differently from David, his narrator); it is broken up by tagging ('he answered') so that the reader knows who it is that speaks, and a non-verbal inflection is indicated, to give the words extra 'life' ('short laugh'). He also 'speaks' with a comma between 'no' and 'master'. That is not how it is in everyday conversation, but it seems to us, used as we are to conventional speech re-presentation in fiction, to be very lifelike indeed. If we have become used to this, it is not a very surprising thing that we can accept an Ent, especially since he will speak in ways already familiar from Peggotty, David and hosts of other fictional characters.

We have become used to it, so much so that unless we look especially, we will hardly notice the tagging and the author's other directions which help us to recuperate 'speech' from its representation. These conventions have become transparent to us, and we can no longer remember when 'he said' and 'she said' caused us to stumble when we read aloud. And it hardly seems to matter: the author needs some way of showing dialogue.

But these and all the other fictional conventions we have learned to read are not neutral codes; they seem transparent only because they have become, like language itself, second-nature to us. In particular, how we look at persons in texts, as we have seen in the example of Peggotty's speech, is not a 'natural' activity, but one which we have learned. But that little analysis was only

the tip of an iceberg. No character in any novel, not
even in Proust's, can be compared in complication to any
living person. To begin with, they have no physical
reality. Very often, indeed, readers are given only the
slightest hint about the appearance of characters. Just
an indication will do: a piece of clothing, the colour of
eyes. We supply the rest ourselves, and the dismay which
we sometimes feel when a favourite character is brought to
the screen in a film shows the extent of our interest and
investment in this activity.

More importantly the narrative of lives is never as
simple as even the most complex novel supposes. It cannot
be: it would take a lifetime to tell a lifetime. But the
richness of novels can seem to surpass the ordinariness of
everyday, and the people of novels may appear better, more
interesting, deeper than the people we know. This is the
result of selection: novelists do not bother to tell us
about the days when 'nothing' happened, or the hours spent
in uninteresting chores, or at the office or school, or
the endless thoughts which go through people's heads,
unless these moments carry the story further or make some
specific point. I shall discuss this particular
selectivity more fully in the chapter on Bilgewater, but
it is important to note it here, since it bears on the
presentation of all characters in all novels.

And here we have, almost in passing, raised one of
the most important distinctions between persons in novels
and in the real world. A character's thoughts can be
narrated or given as free direct discourse which, in a
more 'psychological' turn of phrase, is also known as
interior monologue. This seems to represent a direct
access to the character, to that person's inner self. The
idea of such access is based upon the presumption that an
inner self exists which is not only knowable in language, but which expresses itself in this form. A moment of introspection will show that this is not an accurate representation of how all our thoughts, let alone feelings, work. Yet interior monologue is one of the marks of the modern, realist novel. It is perhaps the best that can be done to represent the unrepresentable, in language at least.

The textual character represents the place at which the reader can make an imaginary identification. We recognize, if not ourselves, then someone we might know. It is like looking in a mirror which reflects ourselves. So if a work of fiction presents us with a subject who thinks in grammatical language, we identify with this actually quite unrealistic idea. This portrait of a person suppresses the fact that language is actually exterior to us, a point we shall discuss soon. It also privileges reason and suggests that a truth exists which is recoverable and representable and that subjects are whole, complete.23

The reader engages with the text, taking part in the narratives, filling in gaps, fleshing out characters, stitching the text's meanings to the real of everyday. We live, as one critic has said 'immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects,

23 See also Julia Kristeva's note on interior monologue in The Kristeva Reader, edited Toril Moi (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.38, note 11. She claims that 'Western man's state of "interiority" is thus a limited literary effect' which is revealed as such by Freud's 'discovery of the split within the subject'. This exposes 'the subject's radical exteriority in relation to, and within, language'.
situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed'.

The narratives of fiction and the narratives of life as it is lived are different only in that those of fiction are recognised as completely imaginary, though even the distinction between fact and fiction is not so easily made as we might think. The stuff upon which we build our knowledge systems of the actually existing world is largely narrative, too. As Jameson points out, 'protonarrative structure' is the 'vehicle for our experience of the real'.

The ways in which the work engages us in its narrative are as important as the story it tells by virtue of its textual conventions, actually more important for an analysis such as mine, because they are taken-for-granted, unseen and unheard, unless the reader is looking out for them. So when the text says (although of course it never speaks) something like 'A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment' it begins the process of introducing us to its own ways of 'seeing'.

Hardy, whose sentence beginning The Return of the Native provides my example, is marking out a certain audience by his choice of words. He calls a wild place 'unenclosed'; the enclosure of common land in England is not presumed, a matter of fact, in this fictional world. In calling the heath 'unenclosed' he not only makes it

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possible for an alert reader to place his text within a
certain historic period but also lets the reader 'see'
through the eyes of a narrator who takes enclosing into
account when looking at landscape. These are not the eyes
of a city dweller; they are possibly those of a commoner
to whom such deprivations are real, such restrictions of
liberty still new. Or they may be those of a landowner, to
whom enclosure perhaps represents pasturage for his sheep,
a mere economic fact of agricultural life, or the
improvement of the view from his terrace.

The description of Egdon Heath which ensues is quite
long and in it Hardy describes this place as 'Titanic';
its austere beauty is appreciated by those of a 'subtler
and scarcer instinct' than those who look for a view
'charming and fair'.26 In these few words the text has
begun to involve the reader with what it has to say; it
makes classical allusions which the text's reader is
presumed to understand. We can follow the meaning even if
we do not know what a Titan is. However, this is a sample
of similar allusions to come; they represent the
expectation that the reader and the text will share, in
broad outline at least, a cultural background and the
implicit beliefs which go with it. These few lines also
imply that people have 'instincts' and that some of these
are more noble than others. The book's narrator is god-
like: omniscient, this narrator knows all there is to know
about the story and people to be recounted. This is an
authority which cannot be discounted while we read, any
more than we can refute 'once upon a time' and still
listen to the story it introduces.

26 Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native, with an
introduction by Derwent May, New Wessex Edition
Texts are addressed to someone; not to a particular person (except in rare circumstances), but to potential readers. The person who can understand all of Hardy’s allusions, who can accept and accede to the cultural beliefs and attitudes which the book displays and interpret its many significations, is the text’s 'implied reader'. This figure, constructed by the text, is the text’s ideal partner in dialogue, its perfect interlocutor. Actual readers cannot expect to achieve the status of perfect interlocutor; to do so would mean a duplication of all the text’s positions on everything it discusses and describes as well as what it leaves unsaid. It is not clear that this would be a desirable status if it were achievable, for we would then be reading solely on the text’s terms, rather than our own. Nevertheless, readers must enter into a transaction with the text. In order to do so, at any level, even an incompetent and partial one, the reader must accede to the restrictions (and opportunities) of textual systems and take up the position of 'implied reader'.

The activity of reading has been called a 'performance'. When a musician picks up a score it is to take an active part in its interpretation, so that what eventuates is a conjunction of the score itself and the musical ability of the person concerned. Reading is like this; it is an inter-action and engagement between the reader and the text. Like the musician, the reader must enter into the spirit of the occasion, to see how it will turn out.

As we shall see from the analyses which follow, readers are constantly at work in the text, interpreting its significations, adjusting these interpretations as they go, seeing how the narrative fits together. Readers will have to fill in gaps. We presume, for instance, that characters in novels sleep, as we do, but often narrated weeks and months pass without any mention being made of sleep as such; this ordinary activity is assumed: the reader 'takes it as read'. This is such a commonplace that it goes without notice, but it is precisely upon such interpretative performances, which the reader produces with little or no prompting from the text, that novels rely. Some make use of this for especial ends: a piece of science fiction, for instance, might propose people who do not sleep at all, or who hibernate. So something taken-for-granted will be foregrounded and the reader must read against expectation.

How the reader is enabled to interact with the text varies from text to text, as we might expect. We have all taken part in spoken interactions, conversations, in which the role of one of the actors was to speak while the other listened. The listener's role is passive but still important. At other times the position of speaker moves between participants, so that each contributor adds a voice and point of view to the transaction. Texts mimic this aspect of human interaction too. Such interaction, whether passive or active, creates the reader's position in the text. *Minnaw on the Say* provides an interesting example of a mixture of reading positions: narrated omnisciently, it seems to require its reader to stand under, or understand, meanings which come from an unimpeachable source or authority. But as we shall see this is not enough to satisfy another of the text's requirements, and the narration breaks away startlingly
from this position to one in which the reader's active engagement is sought.

As the idea of performance suggests, the traffic is not one-way. As the reader actively engages with the text, so it returns the compliment. Whether the reader's position is active or passive, an exchange is taking place. The text is suggesting ways of looking at things to its reader, who responds. The text enriches the reader; presenting, perhaps literally, novel ideas. This point is especially important when the presumed audience for the work comprises children. Novels are one of the sites from which readers get their ideas about the world. Children are not clean slates, but novels may present views of the world which are quite new to them, although possibly well-known to adult readers. The importance of this is brought home sharply when we consider that one of the things, perhaps the primary thing, which readers encounter in novels is the person.

What sort of a person is it that the reader is being asked to help create in these children's texts? Our discussion so far has used certain terms to describe the human being: person, character, subject. We must add one other to this list: people are also known as individuals. Although his primary concern is moral theory, MacIntyre's distinction between characters and individuals makes a good starting point for a discussion of the human person as subject.\(^{20}\) Characters, according to his argument, can be stock ones, who partially define the possibility of action. Characters in morality plays are of this kind. However, in order to understand the play and to recuperate

the ideas involved in it, those who are watching need to recognize what it is that characters represent. To do this a shared cultural background is called for: characters representing Evil, say, or Sloth, will not elicit the desired audience response if these are not recognisable traits. What marks a character in this reading is a conjunction of role and personality: the character called Evil has an evil personality; that is how we know that Evil is before us.

A character is marked by the social. MacIntyre gives the example of the character 'priest', who will embody certain religious beliefs and carry out the duties and rites associated with these. An individual who is a priest can perform these in spite of the fact that belief in some or all of these rites may have failed in his case. Even this very brief account of MacIntyre's argument makes it clear that for him a 'character' is a different entity from an 'individual'. While an individual priest can lose his faith the 'character' of 'priest', the office and role, cannot. MacIntyre claims that 'characters' are rare nowadays. We are no longer prepared, it seems, to judge people as characters; lining them up against preset, culturally agreed standards such as evil, though this way of judging lingers on as a residue: we still call someone honourable or magisterial though it is not always easy to say what we mean by this.

We might object that characters in novels cannot afford to be like people in miracle plays: no-one would believe in them. And this is just MacIntyre's point: no, of course not, not now. What we believe in now is the individual: those internally constituted, internally judging, undetermined, free persons. A text may not use the word 'individual' to describe its characters.
However, if we think of persons as 'individuals', if this is second-nature to us, do we stop doing so when we read? This word, more than its alternatives 'character' and 'person', has extended into ways of thinking about the world and the people in it so that its influence is pervasive: even when it is not used its meanings help to create the 'character' we read about and the one we become as we read.

This is not to claim that the word 'individual' is itself transparent of meaning. We can get some idea of the disparities subsumed by it if we consider that its collective term, individualism, can represent the idea that people are the product of society as well as one which says that society is the product of people. The implications of these views are so different, it seems unlikely that they could both be incorporated under the same banner. But individualism does so, although the ground of agreement or disagreement about its definitions is hotly contested. One version, for instance, claims that the person exists as an autonomous, self-determining whole, while at the other extreme the indivisible person disappears altogether, to be replaced by a discontinuous, disintegrating play of selves. This last person may not seem to fit the category of individual, but the theory which supports it suggests that society is modelled upon the human unit, the individual.  

And, whether we realize it or not, and whether we can articulate them or not, these concepts and contexts are

27 For an introduction to the varied forms that 'individualism' can take see Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality and the Self in Western Thought, edited by Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellerby (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1986).
brought to the texts we read. Characters in most contemporary novels are impersonations of individuals. In romance this impersonation may result in certain characters representing only good, while others are wholly evil. Such 'characters' bear a resemblance to MacIntyre's. Realistic fiction, on the other hand, draws back from such polarities, representing people as they 'really' are: as individuals, neither wholly bad nor wholly good. Cooper's texts provide an interesting insight into a modern account of individuals as characters, as we shall see.30

Naturally, individualism is not the only image of a person which Western societies admit. Marxism, functionalism, structuralism all suggest alternatives. But these ways of categorizing persons oppose individualism and rely upon their opposite for a full understanding of their own position. In the way that 'male' can only be truly understood in relationship to 'female', so it is, for example, with Marxism and individualism's ideas about the subject.

Gardam's and Hoban's texts introduce a specific variation to the account of the individual found in either Pearce's or Cooper's work. Both texts take as their theme the constitution of the subject, and display an awareness that this is a dynamic process. In particular, each text interrogates the way in which social practices and language as discourse affect the subject. One social practice which has helped to produce the modern subject is

psychoanalysis. In particular, Lacan's re-reading of Freud provides an account of signification in language which marks the latter as central to the subject. His perspective is that the subject is fragmented, and that 'to be human is to be subjected to a law which decentralises and divides'. However, 'an ideological world conceals this from the conscious subject who is supposed to feel whole'.

According to Lacan's theory, infants believe that they and the world around them are one. Gradually they learn that this is not so: mother is not always there, food and other comforts do not always arrive on demand. The child creates elaborate artifices to alleviate the pain this knowledge causes of which the most famous example is Freud's Fort! Da! game. A child throws a toy on a piece of string onto the floor, saying Fort!(gone). The toy is drawn back, and the child says Da!(there). This action is repeated over and over again. Among other things, this is the child's way of overcoming the fear that the mother, who has gone out of the room, will never return. The child can make the toy come and go at will, and displaces the fear, aroused by the mother's absence, onto it.

This protective device works, but there is a price to pay. The toy stands in the place of, signifies and


replaces the mother. But for the stratagem to be effective the knowledge of this must be repressed. If the child were asked to give an account of its actions it would not say that they were performed in order to help it cope with its mother's absence. The originating force (or drive) behind the displacement is lost. The completed displacement is encapsulated in the words Fort! and Da! and is a paradigm or model of all future significations, including those made about the human's self.\textsuperscript{34}

Signification is based on absence.\textsuperscript{35} The mother is gone, and is replaced by a presence: the toy. This signifies (though this thought is repressed) the mother. Thus the real thing (the mother) is replaced (she is absent) by another thing (the toy) which had, until then, no connection to her presence or absence. The representation (toy for mother) masks, or erases the event which was its first cause.

The child does not have an image of itself. Lacan asks us to imagine a child seeing itself, for the first time, in a mirror. The child takes this as an image of itself. But this image is located elsewhere: in the mirror. And the child in the mirror is complete: body, face, hair, all can be seen. Until this moment the child has only seen parts of its body and, further, the child's


motor functions are insufficiently mature for it to feel properly in charge of its own component parts. The child in the mirror, by contrast, seems to be in control, to be whole. (The mirror-stage, as it is called, is a convenient fiction. Not all children reach this position by looking at themselves in real mirrors, though they do undergo a similar process by other means, such as observing other children.) This 'specular image' becomes (in a gradual process) the child's I, the subject. The child takes this image as itself; not as an image merely, but rather as the only 'self' it can know. So the child's 'self', that thing which seems intuitively to be the most interior, the most inherent thing possible, is actually placed on the exterior, outside.

This is an event which, according to Lacan, none of us can avoid. It results in what is called the 'splitting' of the subject. And as the subject has found itself able to symbolize itself as 'I', so it enters into the mode of representation which Lacan calls the Symbolic. This is, in effect, a process of alienation and some ways of talking about it manage without the fiction of a mirror altogether, preferring instead to locate these identifications purely in language. In future, in talking about the subject within this theoretical position we must distinguish between the 'me' which is the self, and the 'I' which is how we nominate the subject which now comes into being.

The subject actually thinks of itself as 'I'; and 'I' only has meaning in language. This is a reversible term as Benveniste makes clear: 'the one whom "I" defines by "you" thinks of himself as "I"' and can be inverted into
"I", and "I" becomes a "you". Language is always addressed to an other, at least to one's own 'I'.
'Talking to myself' is thus a misnomer: 'talking to I', though a grammatical mistake, is a better description. The self is effaced by the 'I' in language, and is actually unavailable for such a dialogue.

Language stands between us and the real (which, it turns out, we are barely able to experience directly at all, given that we come to 'know' most of our experiences through the net of language): we live within representations of actual material practices, as well as that of our own 'self'. These 'representations' of material practices are ideological. Ideology is also a material practice itself; through its workings a subject (a person) is located in the world. Ideology constitutes the social subject. When a child is born its birth is 'expected', we say: the child comes to a place which is ready for it, and the practices which are in place will create a space for the child, will enable the child to identify itself. The child is 'interpellated' or hailed by the ideological practices which will surround it from birth. Naming it, telling it stories, buying specially coloured clothes (blue for a boy, pink for a girl), enrolling it in a school, opening a bank account for it,

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37 'Interpellate' is the term Althusser uses to describe ideology's function in 'constituting concrete individuals as subjects'. Ideology 'recruits' subjects, and this applies to everyone, by 'hailing' them: it calls them out, says "Hey, you there!". This is an engagement which no-one can avoid or pre-exist. Althusser, *Lenin*, p.163.
drawing it into a family hierarchy: all these material practices constitute ideology.

Fiction is a supreme example of ideology at work. It takes raw material from the world, already mediated material, language, and reshapes it. Ideologies from the society of the author will, therefore, be carried into the book by language and ideas about persons, about society, about everything in the world. The set of ideological practices which dominate at a given historical moment Eagleton calls the 'general ideology'. This is 'constituted by a relatively coherent set of "discourses" of values, representations and beliefs' which 'guarantee those misperceptions of the "real" which contribute to the reproduction of the dominant social relations'.\textsuperscript{38} The text does not reflect these ideologies, rather they are reworked by the material practices through which the text is produced. The text will represent people, but its people are not the result of all the practices which go to constitute the living being. The textual people are literary, aesthetic productions, existing nowhere but on the page.

The text represents ideologies and, because it is a practice in its own right, like any other, it in turn gives rise to an ideology. This is what Eagleton has called the 'ideology of the text'.\textsuperscript{39} It is unique, and specific. No text shares an 'ideology of the text' with another, any more than people share fingerprints. The text re-works the ideologies which come to it, deals with them in its own special way and, most importantly from our


\textsuperscript{39} Eagleton, p.97.
point of view, tells its own story. What it tells and how it tells it is implicated in ideology, and creates ideology.

The subject cannot stand outside this fabrication. Not the character in the text nor the person who reads. To see how the reader becomes implicated in the ideology of the text we need to see this process in action, and this is what I attempt to show in my readings.

I am not a child, nor were the books I discuss written by a child. However the structure of narrative and the implications of signification and ideology know no age barriers. My primary concern is to uncover the ideologies which constitute the subject within the text and without it, that of the implied reader. The implied reader of texts is necessarily implicated in their ideological, linguistic and narratological structures since it is an integral part of them. If the text is readable at all, it is in virtue of these structures, which invite the active participation of readers. A performance of the text institutes a dialogue between the work's significations and those of its partner, the reader.

Children may, of course, fail to grasp all that a text offers, including its ideological positions, but so will any reader as our discussion of implied readers suggests. Indeed, ideology's task is to conceal both the material practice which gives rise to it and the fact of its own existence. For example, when I claim that in most Western societies people are generally seen as 'individuals' I do not mean that most of the people in such societies have sat down and thought about how they imagine a person to
be, but precisely that they have not done this, and yet still think that people are "individuals".

How do we 'read' the ideology of a text? Not, by and large, by analyzing a text in the way that I shall shortly show. But the fact that the average reader does not articulate an ideological analysis does not mean that the ideology has missed its mark. All readings require that we complete an exceedingly complex circuit of signification.

We accumulate significations in a sentence until we reach its end, and then we 'know' what it 'means'. We constantly reappraise these meanings while we are in the process of making them. My love is like nothing on earth: a red, red rose: an ever-living thing: my mother's: is called Henry: what a joke; we could go on endlessly showing how those two first words are altered by the addition of others. But the change from 'my love is like a red, red rose' to 'my love what a joke' is considerable, and to give an account of the change we need to deal in complications of linguistics and grammar. But readers can 'read' these words without knowing the rules which in fact govern the changes they have performed. They have substituted and combined, and made connections: they know that the claim is not that my love is actually a red coloured flowering plant, or even that my love looks like one.

The words 'my love is like a red, red rose' are only representations of the things they signify. Within this representation subtle movements have taken place. The word 'love' stands for the object so named (here, presumably, a person). In standing for something (love for person) the word erases the thing. In the place of the
person whom Burns loved is the word 'love'. The object, which is a person, is covered over, occluded by the word. 'My love' is the manifest content of the sentence; the latent content is a person. In this way, just as the child whom Freud watched playing replaced his absent mother with a toy, presence (my love) is constructed out of an absence (the absence of the person). What is consigned to 'absence' in this way is, to use the language of psychoanalysis, the unconscious or the repressed part of the signification.

We 'read' what is not said as well as what is. In the ordinary way, that is when we are not reading in order to analyse, we make little or no conscious attempt to recover the unspoken elements of a text. And, indeed, language is so fertile that we could not uncover all the possible connections, displacements and substitutions which have taken place. Nevertheless, we respond to them. Ideology is similarly present in texts, so that although Biggles books may not say straight out that white races are superior and that brave men are forged in battle, readers infer this. Of course, if they are asked if this is what they 'thought' when they read, the answer might well be 'no', because ideology typically works in concealment; 'it is profoundly unconscious'.

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40 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, translated Ben Brewster (London, NLB, 1977), p.233. The ideology in Biggles books may be slightly more apparent to critical child readers today when somewhat different ideas connected to multiculturalism and gender have gained a degree of acceptance in western cultures. Biggles now represents old-fashioned views of these things, which, as alternatives to prevailing contemporary views might well be remarked by an alert reader.
If you ask a child what difference having a bank account has made to its subjectivity, the answer might be in terms of having savings, being like its parents and so on. But ideologically more is at stake: the bank account has interpreted the child as a subject of a money economy, with all that is entailed thereby. If you ask a girl child what difference it makes to her that she is expected to keep clean and pretty, she will no doubt be equally ideologically naive in her response. Nevertheless, she is being constituted as a subject: girls are clean, sugar and spice. Boys are not: frogs and snails.

Textual analysis can illustrate the ways in which the text attempts to limit possible readings; it will thereby reveal ideology. Fiction, Macherey tells us, 'is a determinate illusion'. As critics, we must 'go beyond the work and explain it, must say what it does not and could not say' because 'the literary work gives the measure of a difference, reveals a determinate absence, resorts to an eloquent silence'. An ideological reading is the result, according to this theory, of paying attention to what the text does not say: and we can know what this is, since we know what it is that the text does say.

This may sound a trifle odd. After all, there must be thousands of things that the text does not get around to saying, or seem to want to say. Macherey tells us that the work is 'compelled' to say certain things that it would have rather left unsaid, simply in order to be able

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42 Macherey, pp.77 and 79.
to speak of the things it prefers. If we recall that individualism and Marxism, that unlikely pair, need each other in the sense that they are the 'difference' or the opposite of each other, my account of Macherey's idea becomes clearer. When we speak of the subject of Marxism, it is individualism which is absent, which has been effaced, which it would not want to speak, but which it must 'speak' somehow, just in order to define itself. This 'speech' will be found 'at the edge of the text' where 'the language of ideology, momentarily hidden' is 'eloquent by its very absence'.

We know that the subjects we become acquainted with in fiction are not really there. Although they are imaginary they share a signifying system with 'real' people; both are constructed in and by language. Both are constructed according to certain ideas about how a person can be, ideas which are the product of ideology. The person in fiction, it is true, responds to ideology at second-hand; this person is a representation of a representation. This is why we cannot assume that any person (or any ideology) we come across in a text reflects the world as it is.

But all the same ideologies of the society from which the text comes will be present in it. They determine its production; as an object, as the work of a special category of person 'author', within a literary genre: children's book. The text has been created by the intersection of ideological practices, not least the author's own. The critic's task is to attempt to reveal what has been erased by the re-representations of the text, and to point out what has been created by the text.

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43 Macherey, p.60.
to cover over its own erasures: the ideology of the text.

The analyses which follow will reveal ideologies that the reader of the text will encounter. These are inscribed upon the text by its language, in its structure, themes and characters. No implied reader will be able to produce an account of them which is exhaustive, but this is far from any ideology’s purpose. The readings which follow often read against the text, in an attempt to ‘refuse the spontaneous presence of the work – to deny that ‘naturalness’ in order to make its real determinants appear’. To encounter them it is not at all necessary to go to such lengths. They are, in fact, impossible to avoid. Ideology is part of the warp and woof of the text. Fiction is, according to Eagleton, the ‘fullest self-rendering of ideology’. I shall attempt to unpick some of ideology’s threads and in doing so will also illuminate some of the paths the reader may take through the texts’ narratives. And these narrative paths make no distinction between child and adult. What cannot be understood falls behind or beneath the meanings which can be recuperated and joined with the reader’s own. But narrative itself ensures that enough will survive, and in this ideology too will maintain an existence.

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45 Eagleton, p.77.
Chapter Two

HIDDEN TREASURE - MINNOW ON THE SAY

When Philip came to the single Rose
Ouer the water
The tresor was taken where no one knows
None but my daughter.¹

This rhyme, or riddle, is the clue to a family's treasure, jewels deliberately hidden against bad times. Jonathan Codling, who concocted the riddle in 1508, thought a Spanish invasion was imminent. The riddle has kept its secret for four hundred years, but the family is now in very straightened circumstances. If their home is to be saved, the treasure must be found.

A canoe is washed up at the end of the Moss's garden after a summer flood. Its discovery and David Moss's successful attempt to find its owner lead to the meeting of the book's central characters. David is the son of a bus driver from Little Barley, Adam (the owner of the canoe) is the descendant of a landowning family from Great Barley.

The boys try to unravel the riddle's meanings through detection, by stitching together their own narrative of the original treasure-hiding story. They have to do this because the daughter of the riddle was, in fact, faulty in

knowing. The rhyme she was taught was supposed to reveal the hiding place to her family. But the mode of her knowing could not have been explicit reasoning: if it were, the riddle's solution would have been available to anyone competent. Instead the rhyme contained coded messages.

The riddle is really very simple. Philip is the King of Spain. The single Rose (which could be taken to refer to Elizabeth the First) also refers to a rose carved upon a bridge across a river; Jonathan Codling hid his treasure there: 'over the water'. Put like that the riddle seems open to explicit reasoning, and now it is, because its connections have been revealed and its meanings reconstituted. All the same it invokes an older way of 'knowing', quite different from the logic to which we are now accustomed. The question is not whether Pearce's text provides a good example of this older form, but what the sort of 'knowing' implied by the riddle is doing here at all.

In large part, Minnow on the Say is a story of detection. The point of such stories depends crucially upon the fact that certain 'clues' are missing: actions, intentions or whatever. Once these have been discovered or uncovered, resolution is at hand, the story undone. In particular, the narrative of detection relies upon the recovery of an earlier sequence: the detective tries to retrace a plot originated by someone else. Once this sequence is revealed all the elements of the story can be seen to have led to its inevitable endpoint, and all is re-understood or re-conceptualized in its light.

A riddle is a much older form, and is a fairly odd thing to find in a realistic, contemporary novel. Riddles
do not look towards a closure but instead propose something radically different. They present problems and their solution as synchronous, as inhabiting the same space-time. While the detective struggles with chronology in an attempt to understand the past in the light of the present, and to restructure events in a chain, the riddle-solver must attempt to identify with the riddle and its time as the only way of grasping its meanings.

Bakhtin introduced the word 'chronotope' to indicate 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' as they are 'artistically expressed in literature'. Chronotopes not only display different ways of perceiving temporal existence, they indicate ways of organizing the world. The detective story and riddle represent different chronotopes and world-views: one diachronic and the other synchronic. These frameworks are repeated and expanded in the text's guidelines for knowing how to be, for the constitution of a subject.

The treasure, hidden at the time of the Armada, was found by Adam Codling's grandfather but he re-hid it, to surprise his son when the war was over. But he never returned, and old Mr Codling, who does not know his grandson, Adam, waits always for a son who will never come home. The treasure is inadvertently removed from Mr Codling's hiding place and then taken away by a gardener called Squeak Wilson, who has no interest in the jewels at all. This is finally understood, in a neat confirmation of the riddle, by the daughter of the man who re-hid the jewels, Miss Codling. She 'knows' where they have gone.

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because she remembers something. For a moment the past comes back to her, and things fall into place. Interestingly, she has done none of the earlier work of detection.

She has been more successful than her ancestor, the daughter of Jonathan's riddle, whose name was Judith. Judith Codling should have been able to make the connections in the riddle by recognizing that the words 'single Rose' had many potential meanings, but that one of them, in the context which she knew, should claim her attention. She ought to have connected 'single Rose' to the carved one, on the bridge. She would have made this connection in a way unique to her, but the system which would have enabled her to do this is shared by all English language users. So, 'rose' for her, as for us, can signify rising (as in 'the sun rose'); a flower; a colour; a person (my love is like a red, red rose; an English rose; Elizabeth) and so on. Of all of these, and endless other possibilities, she was supposed to think of the rose carved 'over the water'. Why she did not we cannot surmise. Why she could have, we can know.

'Rose' is not a word which is inevitably connected to a flowering plant, or a loved person, or the surroundings of a light fitting. Nor can we be sure of which thing it is at the moment signifying unless we hear it or use it in context with other words, which then make its reference plain. Judith Codling was supposed to be able to understand the riddle because the connection (rose on bridge; rose in riddle) was part of the knowledge she had by being the person she was: child of the man who had built the bridge, who could play with the word 'rose' in this way, and look her in the eye, speaking the words in a certain manner which she could remember and mark. The
riddle's solution lies in being able to make all those connections which are the result of belonging to a certain sort of society, and speaking its language.

Society and how it is comprised is the problem at the heart of Minnow on the Bay. The text's meditations on this theme can be detected in three 'codes' (to borrow Jameson's description of groups of textual data*) through which the characters and actions are displayed: those of class, knowledge and subjectivity. Class is not a simple matter. At one level it implies economic concerns: do you own the land, factory, minerals, institution, which provides someone else with the means of earning a living? Or is your labour the only resource you possess? At another level it concerns itself with rank: are you a member of the aristocracy, the middle classes, or the lower classes? And these (very much generalized here) positions connect to ideologies which are antithetical.

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* For an account of the ways in which the word 'class' has accumulated meanings see Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London, Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976) p.51-59. His argument here is that 'class' is a relatively modern concept when applied to social formations and is particularly linked to economic, productive factors. This use is dated from the period of the Industrial Revolution (between 1770 and 1840). Before this, and as a residual form used concurrently with 'class', differences in social formation were described by distinctions in 'rank'. He links this latter to hierarchical societies in which social position is determined by birth. In 'class' societies, on the other hand, position is created, made by the individual concerned.
The code of knowledge is organized around another opposition. We know things through a system of knowledge, a set of conventions which allow us to make sense of what would otherwise be random data. Minimal on the Say implies two such systems and Lyotard's descriptions of 'customary' and 'scientific' knowledge find a ready response in the text. 'Customary' or 'narrative' knowledge is based upon criteria which are 'accepted in the social circle of the "knower's" interlocutors'. In this, societies reach a consensus which marks out the sort of knowings possible. In achieving this, such societies are also able to indicate who does and does not possess this 'knowledge': the child and the foreigner do not, for example. The possession of knowledge actually 'constitutes the culture of a people'.

Lyotard's distinctions turn upon the presumption that language plays an important role in creating social bonds. When we speak we presume a listener, whose position in respect of what is spoken is determined by what we say, and how we say it. Some societies, those of 'customary knowledge', ensure that all their subjects are potentially equal in this language exchange: the persons who speak are authorized to do so because they were once the subject of a narrative themselves, were 'placed' by it, called by name. Equally, the persons who listen are authorized, since the narrative they hear 'calls' them. This implies an interchangeability very like that Jameson describes as operating in 'preindividualistic narratives' in which the 'psychological subject has not yet been constituted as

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* Lyotard, p.19.
such'. In these narratives 'later categories of the subject, such as the "character," are not relevant'.

Societies in which 'scientific knowledge' predominates deal with things in a different way. In them competence is required only on the part of the speaker. Knowledge is a specialized activity and it is one which is 'set apart from the language games that combine to form the social bond'. Not that hearers are not important; far from it, but 'a person does not have to know how to be what knowledge says he is'. Subjects can be 'called', expected in the way of customary knowledge, but still not 'know'. Scientific knowledge excludes all language-games except one: denotation. And the sole criterion to be used in deciding upon a statement's acceptability is argumentation or proof.

The third of the text's codes deals with subjectivity. Knowing 'how to be' is a vital piece of knowledge, both for the subject and for the society of which it is a part. **Minnow on the Say's subjects 'belong' either by filiation (genealogical connection) or by affiliation (adoption).** Filiation implies a closed society, the sort we know from anthropology and our own families. But outsiders may become part of these societies: they can marry in or are imported because they possess some needed attribute. They are then affiliated. In tribal societies special ceremonies generally accompany these adoptions, and residual forms persist in our own. The relatives of a bride and groom may still sit on

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8 Lyotard, p.25.
different sides of the church at a wedding ceremony, expressing their 'difference'. They only come together at the reception, after the new alliance has been formalized.

_Minnamon on the Say_ has two ways of knowing 'how to be' available to it. Prefigured in the detective story and riddle, they will be elaborated in the wavering course of the boys' treasure-hunt, a hazardous enterprise only in the sense that some working compromise must be struck between these chronotopes. The text fills out the details of its subject positions while it undertakes the task of creating a new society.

The task is begun by making social boundaries very clear. These are described both physically and symbolically. The boys conduct their treasure-hunt up and down a river which runs through the villages of Great and Little Barley. The river's length is restricted by the older narrative of Jonathan Codling, which tells the boys that he was away for 'a clear hour' (p.53). This means Folly Mill in one direction and a half-hour (at the most) in the other. Both distances are measured from Codlings', Adam's home.

The river, the hour's return-journey river, passes both boys' houses. Codlings', of course, is in Great Barley. The boys' homes have certain similarities: both have gardens which back onto the river though, in David's case, he is particularly lucky: his is the only house in Jubilee Row to be so distinguished. Moreover, his house has a landing-stage (though its only function is to allow Mr Moss, a keen gardener, to fill his watering-can). Until, that is, the canoe arrives to form a floating bridge between this garden and one in Great Barley.
Adam’s house predated David’s, which stands in a Row commemorating a Jubilee, probably Queen Victoria’s. The age of Codlings’ fabric is never specified; what is certain is that the house is dilapidated. This is how the narrator gives David’s first response to it:

It was gaunt and shabby, with paint peeling off the door and window-frames. The garden-door stood wide open, and he could see right into the house, to the hall, and at the farther end of it, to a front-door with deep panels of glass. (p.25)

This is an ambiguous description: shabby, certainly, but with a remaining grandeur: ‘gaunt’, ‘deep panels of glass’: this is not Jubilee Row. Codlings’ is surrounded by:

...the big, untidy garden. Parts of it were neglected, as though all hope of cultivation had been given up: briar roses and blackberry-bushes arched themselves across paths where grass grew lank and high. Other parts were more carefully tended, with rows of vegetables, and beds of flowers in bloom.

Adam led the way to a high south wall, where espalier fruit-trees sunned themselves. The early plums were ready to eat, and wasps moved drunkenly over the ripest. Adam picked the best of the unspoiléd ones, handing some back to David and then filling his own pockets. (p.27)
The grounds surrounding the house represent a mixture of past glory ('big garden', 'espalier fruit trees', 'high south wall'), diminishing potency ('all hope...given up', 'lank and high') and of remnants ('the unspoilt ones'). There is also an overgrown woodland abutting the river.

David's house has a smaller garden:

Their house was like all the others, but their garden was something quite out of the ordinary: it ran straight back for the first twenty yards, like all the other gardens; then, when the others stopped, this took a sudden turn to the right and, in another minute, it had reached an unexpected destination. When the other gardens ended in a hedge, a fence, or a stretch of wire-netting, the Mosses' garden was brought to a stop only by the softly flowing waters of the River Say. (p.7)

Ordinary, but 'out of the ordinary', like all the others but 'unexpected', stopped only by the physical margin of the story: the River Say.

David had expected things to be different at Codlings'. He delivers newspapers to the house every morning, but he has only ever glimpsed the building itself, which is at the end of a long drive. When he does see it close up he thinks it dilapidated, as we have learned. And their tea-things are surprising, too.

David had expected the Codlings to have old and precious china, and silver tea-knives, but there was nothing like that.
The knives were ordinary dinner-knives
and the cups and saucers were of thick,
white ware, often chipped. (p.29)

David's expectations of Codlings' are provided for
the reader in free indirect discourse. These thoughts,
supposed to be David's, are channelled through another
consciousness: the omniscient narrator's. David's
response to the cutlery is not his thought at all. The
terms in which David's supposed thoughts are given seems,
on reflection, to represent surprising insights and
interests for an eleven-year-old boy, whose father is a
bus driver. He expects, the reader is asked to believe,
'old and precious china' and 'tea-knives' but finds
instead 'white ware'. The explanation for this detailed
interest in utensils is that David's 'thoughts' and the
narrator's voice are fused. David's is the central
consciousness through which most of the story is told, but
it is a consciousness which is very close indeed to the
generally effaced narrator's.

David does, of course, have a consciousness of his
own. According to Bakhtin, a character always has 'a zone
of his own, his own sphere of influence on the authorial
context surrounding him, a sphere that extends — and quite
often far — beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse
allotted to him'.\footnote{Bakhtin, p.320.} The moment in which David's
expectations about someone else's tea things is given
illustrates how David's zone intersects with the
narrator's. David is interested in Codlings'; he
delivers newspapers there. But the house lies behind a
long drive, very different from the front fences of
Jubilee Row. He is a thoughtful boy, and can be presumed
to have made certain assumptions about the house which stands in so much ground, in the greater of the two villages. These assumptions are made before he knows anything of the family at all. His first response is surprise: the back of the house is 'gaunt and shabby' (p.25). He does not think, or rather, the narrator does not tell us that he thinks, that the house is imposing when he finally sees all of it. But he does find it rather overwhelming. "So this is what they call Codlings'," he thought' (p.24). And it is 'gaunt', with 'deep panels of glass', and 'they', the community, call it Codlings': not just a number in Jubilee Row, but a landmark, an entity with a name it shares with its owners.

So when tea is carried out, he expects something other than the tea things which arrive. At least, this is the climate of expectation created in the reader. But David has just fallen into the river Say, after Adam has accused him of stealing the canoe. David, as we know, is honest. As much as he longed for the canoe, he reported its presence at the bottom of his garden to the police. He meets Adam because he is looking for clues. A piece of rope is attached to the canoe; the craft had clearly broken away from a mooring and a lump of wood is still caught in the rope. David, shocked by Adam's accusation and aggression, has fallen into the water. Fortunately he can swim. He has also lost his father's wheelbarrow-end, which he had taken without permission, to use as a paddle. He has been rescued by Adam's aunt, who looks rather odd, and is forgetful. Adam washes the river water off him with a watering-can, and David has been dressed in some of the older boy's clothes. In spite of all this, he takes time, or at least the narrator takes time on his behalf,
to assess the Codlings’ house and the tea things in terms of ‘precious china’ as opposed to ‘white ware’.

The narrator is giving information about the boys’ backgrounds which are, in many respects, very different. An implicit comparison is made between the tea-things owned by people who have large houses called by their family names and those who live in a row of village houses. This is then concealed, passed off as the observations of an intelligent boy in new surroundings. And indeed the character of David, as it develops, assures the reader that he is the sort of person who would observe acutely. What is interesting here is not the fact of observation but its terms. David makes adult judgements, and looks at things through the eyes of a narrator to whom such things as ‘tea-knives’ are metonymic of a life-style.

Two discourses are at work in David’s thoughts about the tea-things. David’s, although hardly present in marked language (he really cannot be expected, for example, to speak in such detail of different sorts of knives; silver, tea, dinner) is there as the vehicle for comparison. Codlings’ is not the same as Jubilee Row, by a long shot. It is through David’s character-zone that the reader is made aware of this, but distinctions in life-style which might threaten the boys’ alliance are suppressed by the presence of the all-encompassing narrator to whom the world-views of all the character-zones and their implied chronotopes are alien. Alien but dependent: the narrator’s moment is anterior to theirs, and their story is told by a consciousness which attempts to impose homogeneity on their difference. To what purpose we shall soon see.
The houses and boys are joined by the canoe, which is called the 'Minnow': David's choice, though he manages to finesse his domination well:

David had foreseen this moment, when the Minnow must be known by another name, for she had never really been his to name. He could not bear to speak.

'What name do you think?' asked Adam.

'I don't know.'

'Come on.'

'After all, it's your canoe,' said David, with an effort.

'No, it isn't. She was my father's; and now we're doing her up together, and you've paid for half the varnish. She's as much yours as mine.' (p.41)

This makes it clear that Adam has already given up his claims: all that David need do now is to exercise tact, to refrain from upsetting the balance struck between right of ownership springing from inheritance and ownership achieved by a very different means: David buys his way in. Balance is, as David's mother knows, very important in a canoe:

'And if you weren't very careful, the boat would go right over, and you'd fall into the cold, wet, dirty water. A canoe is a boat that goes over very easily - the most easily of all - isn't it, David?'

'Well - yes - perhaps.' (p.12)

David wisely replies.
Adam and David have embarked upon a relationship whose purpose is to prevent such a cold dousing, and each stands to gain from this. Adam's own Eden is failing; cultivation is giving way to nature which is now disorderly ('lank and high') and whose ripeness is spoiled. He is an orphan, unrecognized by the most senior of his line still living and yet heir to a tradition and a treasure which seem almost beyond his grasp or capability.

If Adam's garden is a metaphor for his situation, what can be said about David's? His is 'out of the ordinary' and leads to an 'unexpected destination', marked only by the Say. Because of his garden David is already in an extra-ordinary position, one which is bounded and defined by a river, the same but ever different, the gently-flowing Say.

Saving a frail bark from wobbling takes rather more than a good seat in a canoe, though. Societies are constituted by people, and Pearce's text attempts to create a solid edifice within which the human subject may discover itself. And just as the society of the story is defined by physical margins, so the sorts of people who inhabit Great and Little Barley are specified by socially marginal people.

One of these is called Mr Smith; his commonplace name is also the name of a job of work. And some of the older members of the community defined by the book can remember a smith working his forge in Great Barley. His name implies a certain type of subjectivity: one in which your name reflects who you are. You are 'called' Butcher because you are one, or Warwick because you come from there, or Johnson because your father's name was John. Mr Smith is not a smith at all, though. The older forms of
naming have broken down with him, just as they have with
the miller, who is called Mr Tey.

The resonances in Mr Smith's name are part of a
textual pattern which is becoming familiar: as the riddle
shows the text's interest in words and word-play, so Mr
Smith's name reminds us of the metaphoric content of all
language, its inbuilt ability to 'stand for' things, both
literally and figuratively. For his name is so unspecific
that it has become the archetype of an assumed name;
anyone could be called Smith. The boys, and particularly
Adam, are sure that it is not Mr Smith's real name at all,
and unflatteringly project his character from it. As a
result Mr Smith is thought by them to be a sinister
interloper. His status is confirmed by Mr Tey, the miller,
a garrulous local historian. He says that:

'They're a poor lot - hardly belong to
the village at all, with their trips to
London. London indeed!' Mr Tey here
spared time faithfully to give his
opinion of London. 'And then they say
Mrs Smith's so haughty, she'll walk down
the street with not a how-d'ye-do to
people she knows as well as I do you;
and their daughter a wretched thing they
won't have about the place - they're
downright cruel to her in that, I've
heard.' (p.163)

Philip 'Squeak' Wilson is another type of outsider.
A native of the villages, his marginal status seems to be
the result of some transgression on his part. He is a
frightened man:
'You'll be late home again, and then your daughter will have something to say,' warned Mr Tey.

This threat speeded Squeak's movement, and he was just sidling past Mr Tey and the two boys when he happened to raise his short-sighted eyes to Adam's face. 'Oh!' he whispered, and fell back.

'Yes,' said Mr Tey, who seemed almost to have been hoping for this, 'he's like his grandfather, old Mr Codling, isn't he?'

'Yes,' said Squeak faintly.

'Squeak Wilson knew your grandfather well, Mr Tey said to Adam. 'Didn't you, Squeak?' There was no answer. 'You worked for him for years, didn't you, Squeak?' There was still no answer. 'Come, Squeak,' said Mr Tey, who seemed to be enjoying some private joke, 'where's your tongue — where are your manners?'

'How is your grandpa?' stammered the old man.' (p.84)

Squeak's other distinguishing characteristic is that his (and his daughter's) speech is sometimes given as ungrammatical dialect. Squeak, for instance, says 'Dessay' (p.169) and 'It was Ellen worked for them' (p.168). She, talking of the Smiths' treatment of their daughter, says 'Twas right-down pitiful' (p.171). Apart from this, the language of the narrator and the speech of the other characters is generally undifferentiated. The dreadful Mr Smith, the superior Codlings and the ordinary Mosses all speak in a homogeneous tongue.
Squeak belongs to the society of the Barleys but is alienated from it. Mr Smith, on the other hand, is an interloper who 'hardly belongs' as Mr Tey says. But we have said that they define the margins, so although they may face out into the cold other world, they are also part of the society of Great and Little Barley. If this were not so, they could not define it in the way that they do, which is not by opposition but by being part of its definition. ¹¹ So they each, in their own way, 'belong' to it.

Squeak's way of 'belonging' is evident: he is a son (a very natural son at that, speaking dialect as he does); his relationship with his society is one of filiation, of birth. Mr Smith is a stranger, an interloper. How has he been allowed in; how can he define the margins of this society, except by opposition?

His relationship is one of affiliation. This, as Said points out, not only 'provides men and women with a new form of relationship...[but] is also a new system'. ¹²

The Smiths live in a house by the river at Great Barley. They punt upon the river; Mrs Smith sits in the stern knitting. Her husband's mode of living in the village is different from that of any other character: Mr Smith only spends his leisure-time in the Barleys. He represents the phenomenon of the commuter who 'adopts' village life.

¹¹ For a more detailed account of marginality, see chapter 5.

When Codlings' looks certain to be sold, after Mr Codling's death, Mr Smith offers to buy it. The settlement (which, in prospect, causes the boys especial dismay, since if selling the house is bad, selling to Mr Smith compounds the injury) is averted when Squeak's daughter, who cleans for the Smiths, tells David that their name is actually Ashworthy-Smith: he is, in fact, a relation. This causes Miss Codling to think again about his offer; she now knows that he is after the treasure, too. Mr Smith's daughter, it turns out, has been kept from the village because she so resembles Adam. Mr Smith wants to buy the house to find the treasure and will pull it down, if necessary, to do so.

Since it turns out that Mr Smith is related by blood to the Codlings (Judith Codling, who married a Mr Ashworthy, was his ancestor) it seems impossible for him to be affiliated since his relationship is one of filiation. But Mr Smith has not grown up in the villages, and his ancestor failed in her form of 'knowing': she was, after all, unable to decipher the riddle. So filiation has failed, too.

As soon as his filiation is confirmed, Mr Smith announces that he will go back to London, affirming that he does not, even by virtue of blood, belong. Why does he do this or, to put it another way which makes its impact clearer, what is it in the text which insists that Mr Smith may not join the community to which he now 'belongs'? Why is the text unable or unwilling to display him as a success, in its own terms? We need to unpick more of the narrative's threads to understand why Mr Smith's 'belonging' is an impasse and not a vindication.
Ways of 'belonging' are also ways of knowing 'how to be'. Two sorts of belonging thread their way through the text. One is customary knowledge, and its 'mode of temporality can be said to be simultaneously evanescent and immemorial'. For the subject to whom this sort of knowing applies the distinction between past and present is of small interest. Presence, and the present, is all-important. The perspectives of history are absent, the idea of 'the present lying open to the depths of the past' is as foreign to the subject of customary knowledge as it was to Homer. The other way of knowing 'how to be' is that of scientific knowledge. This implies a 'memory and a project', sequence, and an ability to question in terms of cause and effect.

These 'knowings' are manifest in the boys themselves. Adam’s idea of searching for the treasure is, originally, to thrust a fork into the ground where he thinks it is likely that the treasure is buried. David, although he is new to this, thinks of a problem:

'Forking for treasure is pretty hard work,' said Adam. 'Besides, you can't start doing it all over a person's crops.'

David acknowledged the justness of these remarks, yet he could not help wondering privately whether Jonathan Codling’s limit for hiding might have

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13 Lyotard, p.22.


been not at all the same as Adam's limit for searching. Even if Jonathan Codling has wanted a hiding-place on his own land, he had, according to Miss Codling, the whole of the two Barleys to choose from; no consideration of crops need have stopped him. (pp.61-62)

David is too considerate of Adam's uncertain temperament to mention this just yet; he digs stoically in spite of his misgivings. The boys' reactions come from different places: Adam is locked into a thought-pattern which restricts his possibilities. Customary knowledge tells him certain things: you do not violate someone's crops, for example. But it does not provide him with a way of dealing with changed circumstances. The crops might once have been his ancestor's, but the lie of the land has literally changed. It is not possible for Adam to think that what he wants may be underneath someone else's crops. Such a way of thinking would imply historical and logical perspectives which Adam lacks. But David is able to recognize the problems inherent in Adam's method of searching, since he applies a 'knowing' which is linear, and can pose questions about cause and effect.

David provides the steadying influence which the hot-tempered and temperament Adam needs, encouraging him when Adam falls into deepest gloom, working out clues which Adam fails to grasp, and finally understanding that Squeak Wilson had taken the flask containing the treasure by mistake. David is the one who knows and who is able to understand the mystery. In doing so he affirms for himself its status as a piece of detection, which we can connect to scientific knowledge through its chronotope.
Adam accepts: his ‘knowing’ is of the order of the riddle and customary knowledge:

There the treasure was at last, although how exactly it had come there seemed beyond any power of understanding. ‘Mislaid’ was the explanation upon which Miss Codling insisted; in spite of its unlikelihood, it was one that Adam accepted, then and forever, utterly without question. What did he care for question and explanation? (p.240)

When David puts together the last pieces of detection and tells Miss Codling (who knows it perfectly well, since it was she who finally realised that Squeak had taken the jar of treasure in mistake for wine) she responds:

‘Oh!’ breathed Miss Codling. ‘Oh, Davy!’

‘So you see,’ said David eagerly, ‘I think I know everything: who stole the treasure, where they hid it, and who brought it back. I think I know —‘

‘Then never tell, Davy, never tell.’

‘But Miss Codling!’ insisted David. In his excitement, he had slightly raised his voice. Idly curious, the others had turned their heads to listen; in the dusk, he could see the paleness of their faces turned towards him. Yet he must make one more attempt to speak for he felt his opportunity — his last opportunity — slipping from him for ever.

‘Miss Codling!’

‘Hush, David!’ said Miss Codling. She shook her head at him, smiling, and
laid a finger across his lips. 'Hush - hush and listen: there's a nightingale singing in the trees by the river.'
(p.252)

David knows, but Adam will never want to hear this 'scientific' knowing. So it seems that David is constrained by the other form of knowledge which is, in its turn, vindicated by Miss Dodling's 'knowing'. The two appear to be interdependent, subsumed by the greater forces of the society which enables their harmonious balance.

David's way of knowing is linked to detection, and what Davis calls 'de-plotting', in which 'all the previous material is transformed by the ending'. This provides 'a location in which things can be worked over and changed through intelligence'.10 The narrative of detection becomes important, according to this view, as the dynamic relationship of narrator and audience of traditional storytelling is replaced by reading, a more passive activity. Reading needs to claim its audience's attention by other means, and institutes ways of ensuring their active involvement with the story, of which 'de-plotting' is an example.

Plotting in novels is also linked, by Davis, to a view of history in which the past (or at least our version of the past) can be changed, just as the detective's work reformulates and transforms the past narrative upon which it works, bringing it to order. The riddle fits badly with these formulations. Unlike the plotting of novels

its disclosures are achieved by revelation: the truth it proclaims, once understood, banishes all that has gone before, replacing and effacing it as if it had never been. The misunderstandings which cloaked it, once dissolved, are not usefully recuperable: nothing can be learned from them, no 'method' developed which can be applied in the future. Nothing except that the penny dropped, because the person who understood had always been able to understand. Things fall into place; they fall into place in a way which is, theoretically, open to anyone from the society of the riddle.

David's subjectivity depends upon a temporal advance, an ability to remember and to conjecture about what is remembered. Above all, it is an individual response, which relies upon validation of truths from a position of personal knowledge. As the detective 'works things out' for himself so, too, does this subject. Adam's, on the other hand, is based on a collectivity: a riddle may be solved by a single person, but the knowledge which enables the solution is acquired by being a member of the group to which, as a community, the riddle is directed: this much Minnow on the Say makes clear. It is Adam's aunt who 'knows' and affirms her society's collectivity.

Mr Smith embodies the text's failure to amalgamate these forms. The terms of the opposition which he was meant to reconcile resound in his very name: he is both smith and Smith, and neither, as it turns out. He is named, hailed, as if he were part of a society in which 'knowing' meant knowing 'how to be', a sort of knowing to which names like Smith, Turner, Thatcher bear eloquent witness. But he is not a smith at all, and this is not even his true name. Judith Ashworthy's failure in 'knowing' has been supplemented by her descendant, who now
sports a name of a very different kind: Ashworthy-Smith. Another layer of signification has been added which at once specifies and effaces 'smith': no longer the name of an occupation, it becomes the symbol of another way of knowing 'how to be', which is Said's 'new system'.

But this is an impasse for the text. David's and Adam's subjectivities are presented as interdependent. What this conceals is the fact that these two forms cannot be combined. They are contradictory. The arrangement which the boys strike over the canoe highlights this problem. David wants to name the canoe (a momentous thing; where the authority lies for naming and hailing is a vital piece of 'knowing' in terms of subjectivity) but does not like to say so. Adam abrogates the authority of lineage by saying 'She was my father's; and now we're doing her up together, and you've paid for half the varnish. She's as much yours as mine' (p.41). What was his father's is not necessarily his, it seems, especially since to come into it, to make use of it, he must rely on help from another source and another system. David (or at least David's father) pays.

The text's ideology requires that the forms of subjectivity which David and Adam represent should remain active and co-operative. The complicated transaction about the ownership of the canoe is the emblem of an attempt to create an understanding and an epistemology which can be shared by both subjectivities. But in illustrating the sorts of manoeuvre required to achieve this, the text strays perilously close to revealing the fact that their contradictions will not admit the desired amalgamation.
Mr. Smith's affiliation is in fact the solution to the problem of these subjectivities. He is a filiate, linked to the treasure, and imported into the community of the Barleys from the outside world. But to admit him would be to project a future in which Adam's and David's subjectivities as such no longer existed at all. Co-operation would be replaced by amalgamation. This apparently desirable situation is rejected, because the text must conceal the differences which are inherent in the boys' subjectivities, passing them off as mere attributes which need not obstruct a good and perfectable relationship. The ideological thrust behind this situation is revealed in David's response when he finally realizes what finding the treasure might mean.

At the end of the book, David is afraid that his energy and detection have brought about a restoration of the Codling family which will, in future, consign him to Little Barley. He asks his parents if getting the treasure will mean that Adam can afford a bicycle. His father exclaims that they will now be rich; a bicycle will be nothing to them. "Rich?" The news that David had brought had appeared of unmixed good; now, he saw a cruel gulf opening between the Codlings and himself' (p.244). But Miss Codling says no, of course they will not be 'footmen-rich' but they will be able to have a little dog; not a pedigree one, of course, just a 'small, reliable, cheerful, sensible, nice dog. You know the kind I mean, David.' (p.245). Well he might; it sounds just like him.

Codlings', and what it represents, was failing precisely because it relied upon a social system which no longer existed to support it, the system of smiths and thatchers and butchers. David's appearance was timely; the Codlings were utterly unable to resurrect their way of
knowing and could not tap the resources available to them, symbolized by the treasure. David's injection of a vigorous new subjectivity, and way of knowing, gave them the impetus to close the gap which yawned between them and Jonathan Codling. 'The Codlings' 'knowing' is healed and restored as Adam's reply 'What did he care for question and explanation?' makes plain (p. 240).

But with the restoration of the Codlings' way of knowing, 'a cruel gulf' seemed about to open up; the boys' relative class positions threaten to irrupt nastily into the text. But this unpleasantness is averted: the treasure is a mysterious object, promising excess and a simple sufficiency at the same time. What would be riches to the Mosses is only enough for a sensible dog for the Codlings. A treasure indeed, and one which has been the locus of a treasure-hunt of a more figurative kind, as well.

The ways of knowing which have enabled such a voyage of discovery and exposed the boys' subjectivities have effaced another important aspect of their make-up, an element which they undoubtedly share. The boys have travelled the boundaries of their society, mobile upon its moving waters, so secure in their gender that it has been taken for granted. Their boating is undemanding, and their adventures free from physical or moral danger. Their only opponent is both redefined and removed, and his opposition was, in any case, hardly life-threatening. Their adventure could just as easily have been undertaken by girls, and yet the only one who is of the right age, with a stake in the treasure herself, is refused entry into the business of treasure-hunting. Adam's relation, Elizabeth Ashworthy-Smith, so like him to have been
banished to London for most of the book, is someone he
does not take to.

She becomes a messenger between her father and Miss
Codling, after Mr Smith has taken to his bed. She is a
fine little woman: 'after delivering the latest message
and offer from her father, she would start helping them,
or, if they seemed very weary, she would slip away to brew
tea in the kitchen, where she now seemed quite at home'
(p.200). She is helping them to pack up the house; at
this stage they still have not found the saving treasure.
Elizabeth's father has done 'exciting' things: 'he had
climbed to the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and seen
police-cars chasing gangsters in New York and - rather
surprisingly - had been taken in a Red Indian canoe to
shoot rapids' (pp.200-201). Elizabeth has done none of
these things, nor has she been in a canoe. Nice, sensible
David would like to take her in the Minnow. He guesses
Adam will not be amenable to this suggestion. As usual,
he is right:

'I don't trust her,' he said.

'Well, I do,' said David; 'and your
aunt does. You heard her say she thinks
Elizabeth's going to be as good as she'll
be beautiful.'

'Beautiful!' said Adam scornfully, and
then, 'They say she's like me.'

'So she is.'

'Ah!' Adam pounced. 'You're not going
to say I shall grow up to be beautiful.'
He pushed a threatening face towards
David.

'No, of course not.' (p.202)
Adam says he would prefer to sink the canoe than have her in it; the narrator tells us that he "could not accept Betsy [Elizabeth], because he still could not accept the idea of losing the house" (p. 203).

Minnow on the Say's females are restricted to their domestic spheres and engaged, for the most part, in relationships with males which are either dependent, manipulative or coercive. There is only one female who appears to be somewhat independent and almost male in her taken-for-granted quality, but she is out of her proper place for most of the narrative, independent only because circumstances have forced this upon her. This is the eccentric Miss Codling. But, as we shall see, even she succumbs in the end, when the treasure reinstates her.

Mothers and Aunts display strange virtues. Here, David is lying fully-clothed in bed waiting to keep a midnight appointment with Adam. His mother asks Mr Moss to fetch David’s trousers, which she noticed were torn; David is wearing them. Mr Moss comes upstairs, and fumbles about in the dark:

Luckily, however, Mr Moss was not as persistent as his wife would have been; after a while, he gave up the search and went downstairs. David could not hear what was said but, from his mother’s tone in reply, he judged that she was taking the incident as another interesting example of a man’s inability to find what was under his nose. (p. 125)

Mr Moss’s failure of persistence seems almost a virtue: is fortuitous not only for David but also for the
narrative, by eliciting a response from Mrs Moss upon which David may meditate. He has further cause for thought when he meets Mrs Tey. The miller is so in awe of his wife that he has to pretend a dislike of boys. It is she who dislikes them:

'Mark!' she said, 'I've called you twice.' Then her gaze moved to Adam and David: 'Boys!' she said to herself, quietly, but with a lifetime of dislike in her voice.

Mr Tey flourished his hand and spoke so loudly and suddenly to Adam and David that they jumped. 'Be off!' he cried, 'I can't have you pestering me like this. Off with you!' Without waiting to see them go, he turned and followed his wife back to the mill house and tea.

'Well!' said Adam resentfully; but David, who perhaps had more opportunity, in the Row, of observing married life, said: 'Poor Mr Tey!' (p.07)

Squeak Wilson, we are told, is so terrified of his daughter that he has a hidey-hole for things she thinks are not good for him, such as sticks of liquorice; it is beneath a wicker chair in the garden. This is where he hides the treasure when he finds, to his horror, that this is what he has got instead of wine. Mr Smith, in contrast, is a tyrant. His daughter is kept in London, away from her mother, in case she is recognized in the village; her resemblance to Adam is extraordinary. For 'all her ways' with which she is credited by Squeak's daughter, (p.171) Mrs Smith cannot persuade her husband to
allow their daughter to live with them. She is also vain: she does not wear her glasses in the village so is mistakenly thought to be 'stuck-up' by Mr Tey, when in fact she simply cannot see.

Mr Smith has some sort of seizure when his identity is unmasked. David is sent to his house with a letter from Miss Codling, which Mrs Smith opens. She is unequal to the task of responding to it, in spite of her husband's illness:

'He seems to have nothing but that business of buying the house fixed in his head.' She began to cry quietly, as she spoke. 'And he won't take care of his health; and he came home from Castleford so dreadfully ill in that taxi.' She wiped away her tears and controlled herself. 'Anyway, I can't give any answer myself; I must ask him.' (p.188)

And Mr Codling had found the treasure before his grandson's birth but would not tell the daughter who cared for him, and whose livelihood depended upon where he had put it: this knowledge must wait for his son, for his true heir. Ironically, it his daughter who finds the treasure. But this is a fact which she hides, as we have already seen: 'Then never tell, Davy, never tell'.

How can we explain this female subject position? The Lacanian account is helpful, telling us that we achieve subjectivity through language, and this, as the Fort! Da! game shows us, substitutes, putting the presence of the word where, in fact, there is absence. Mother is gone: language gives us mastery over that absence, a mastery we
are bound to repeat, as the child repeated the game. We are bound to do this because it has become the only form of satisfaction we can know. This is the cultural promise: we accept loss, expecting in return an imagined plenitude which is, actually, unachievable.

In substituting the toy for the mother, we replace her with a metaphor. Lacan tells us that this is a cancellation of the object (the mother) and the proper name. The metaphor 'flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain'.¹⁷ So substitution occurs at the same time as the displacement; it is the beginning of an endless process and part of the socializing, mediating function of language.

Metaphor, like language itself, is a system of differential values. The subject is caught by this: the child identifies with the one, the complete individual it sees in the mirror and this idealized representation becomes the child's 'ideal-I'. But in doing this, the child has made a metaphor of itself: cancelled itself. It does this in response to a principle which 'one is not free not to obey'.¹⁸ This is the principle of the Oedipus complex, through which every subject must pass. The result is a relationship with the Law, the Name-of-the-

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Father. This great metaphor implies a negative as well as a positive value, as all metaphor must.

The negative value of the metaphor of the Law is not-male: female. Minnow on the Say’s female subjects illustrate this perfectly; the male, here, is undoubtedly the paradigm and the female is in his shadow, negative to his positive. Male subjectivity is taken for granted and is the unspoken assumption in the text. Female subjectivity, when alluded to at all, is defined in some detail. The reader could be forgiven for thinking that negativity has been taken rather literally here. Minnow on the Say’s females display few positive virtues and those they can claim, persistence, housekeeping skills, fineness of feeling, are presented through the net of David’s consciousness. Even when the narrator assumes an ironic distance (David has ‘perhaps more opportunity’ of observing married life) the effect is the same.

That ‘perhaps’ is a nod in the direction of David’s character-zone. David’s ‘observations’ are narrated with a touch of irony. It is not certain that he has had more opportunities of observing married life but ‘perhaps’ this is so. What is at issue is not David’s experience, which is clearly greater than the orphaned Adam’s, but the conclusions David adopts as a result. The narrator distances David’s thoughts, removing them from David’s character-zone and presenting them in a peculiar


20 To associate love and roses for example (my love is a red red rose), we must be able to disassociate the opposite, hate and roses, and to distinguish between rose and not-rose. See Roland Barthes, ‘Myth Today’, in *Mythologies* (London, Paladin, 1973) pp. 109-158 and MacCannell, p. 97.
narratorial aside. The narrator is omniscient; 'perhaps' is doubly ironic. The narrator knows perfectly well whether David's remark is based on his observations of married life, but installs ambiguity where certainty could have been. The reader is left in no doubt that Mrs Tey is the bane of her husband's life, and that David's compassion for him, whatever it is based on, is well-placed. David is not presumed to have knowledge beyond his years, but his 'thoughts' are confirmed as wise and true.

Both narrator and characters within Minnow on the Say assume that to be a subject is, in effect, to be constituted within a social relationship based upon difference in which one gender assumes a positive role. The new subject to whom the text points is still caught in this dilemma of gendering. Here this problem is expressed in the most common and ancient way, as the difference between men and women. But it is also the difference between those in power and those who are powerless. Minnow on the Say's new subject, whatever else it is, has not escaped this circuit of signification. 21

Miss Codling demonstrates this dilemma. One of her first 'little indulgences' after the treasure is found is

21 In The Way to Sattin Shore (London, Kestrel, 1983) Philippa Pearce provides a portrait of a girl searching for her father. Her heroine, Kate, is the product of a female-dominated household. Her father is signified by his absence (literally, by a tombstone). When the tombstone disappears from the churchyard, Kate begins to search for him. She finds him and is the vehicle of his 'resurrection', his return to his family. Kate's is a very strong female subjectivity and stands in marked contrast to the females found in either Minnow on the Say or in Pearce's slightly later book Tom's Midnight Garden (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958) in which one of the major characters is a girl.
to set a large and sumptuous tea for everyone, including a splendid cake. Her response when Mr Moss says that it would be 'quite practicable and not too expensive' to build a small green-house is interesting: "Your husband is so kind!" cried Miss Codling to Mrs Moss, almost curtsying to her. (p.247). These activities, somewhat at odds with her hitherto strong, independent and slightly eccentric nature, express the difficulty into which the text has plunged her.

She has, in fact, been used to employing servants and Squeak is called back to help in this capacity when she is preparing Codlings’ for sale. Her earlier failure to provide sumptuous teas is presumed to be a response to poverty, rather than some unfeminine motive which might preclude her from thinking that teas were the be-all and end-all of social life. The narration of her decision to embark on a tea party repays quoting at length:

At the same time, there were Miss Codling's 'little indulgences'. An immediate plan was to hold a small party, with the Mosses as guests. The tea alone would be of a kind that Codlings' had not been seen for a very long time. Miss Codling was going to buy peaches in Castleford, and real cream from Nunn's farm; there would be sandwiches with various fillings, including salmon; there would be chocolate biscuits; and Miss Codling was to try her hand, long unused to such things, at several kinds of cake, with ingredients - cherries, candied peel, almonds - that David felt sure she had not afforded for many years. (p.245)
At the end of this passage David is required to feel sure about the erstwhile state of Miss Codlings' larder, an end-note which draws all the narrative towards his character-zone. The 'little indulgences' are obviously part of Miss Codling's character-zone, but with 'immediate plan' the passage has moved into narration. This is bent towards the boys' character zones, since we have learned that both are very interested indeed in teas. Whether eleven-year-old boys are delighted by the thought of fresh peaches rather than, say, doughnuts, is perhaps debatable but chocolate biscuits strike the right note. Candied peel, however, is very much a cook's idea of an ingredient rather than, say, sultanas or nuts, things a boy might eat straight from a tin in the larder. As for its expense, David once again shows a nice sense of household economy which may well seem, on reflection, untoward for a small boy who may not cook at all himself. The narrator is clearly involved in making a point about Miss Codling which is to be passed off as part of David's conception of things. Miss Codling's earlier eccentricity is being reduced: she seemed odd because she was too poor to buy candied peel and so on. It is a sad reduction of a strong and determined woman. What is its purpose?

Miss Codling is supposed to be identified both with a treasure (a very un-ordinary possession) and ordinariness, the expression of which forces her to treat the Muses as more than equal. She must be different because of the treasure, but she must also be the same, not 'footmen rich' at all. In effect, she has become a parody of paternalistic feudalism, in which masters are imagined to be caring of and, but for some feature which marks them as elect, actually the same as those who are their social inferiors. It is a way of dealing with wealth and social status which allows these forms to remain in existence and
to exert power, while assuring everyone within society that this actually results in equality.

Miss Codling, like Mr Smith before her, is another site at which the text attempts to amalgamate social forms. As Mr Smith was banished because he showed only too clearly that his subjectivity would mark the end of David's and Adam's, so Miss Codling's commonsense is trivialized, and her proud independence brought low so that she does not threaten the text's proposed subjectivity. 'Never tell'. Poor Miss Codling.

The text's project, to achieve a blending of classes, knowledge systems and subjectivities, falters. And so the text must resort to asking its reader to become what it cannot show, because that subjectivity does not yet exist. What is needed is a subject who can combine Adam's and David's way of 'knowing' in a particular way, which the text will proceed to elucidate. This necessity surfaces in the text when the history of the Castleford and District Bus Company is related. It begins: 'while David stands with his hand up and the bus is coming nearer, there is time to explain something of importance in the running of the Castleford and County Omnibus Service' (p.177). The reader is told that bus stops are an innovation in the Barleys:

The buses in this Service are, of course, country buses. For instance, the bus that is coming - and it is a little nearer David by now - is a single-decker: you never see a red bus in London that is a single-decker. The rules for buses in the country, too, have always been less hard and fast than in the towns. In the
old days you only had to mention where you lived to the conductor in a country bus, in order to be set down at your very door, if the bus went near it. There were several informal ways of making the bus stop to pick you up: you could wave from a window to it, and it would stop and wait for you; you could send someone ahead with the message that you were just coming, and it would wait for you. The most important thing was that it would stop anywhere — anywhere — along its route, to pick up and put down passengers. (p.177)

Then the transition:

Then, after many years, and to everyone's interest, notices labelled 'Bus Stop' began to appear along the Castleford and County bus routes. (pp.177-178)

There are difficulties at first with this new idea: people ignored the bus stops, and still expected to be picked up at their will, so the bus stopped twice as often as before. But these people, clinging to their old ways, are 'no better than pirates' (p.179). This last comment comes from the otherwise amiable Mr Moss, and with this the transformation is, in effect, complete. No longer a law unto itself, the community of the Barleys has had rules from outside forced upon it.

The passage, which covers a page and a half of text, is a parabasis. The narrator effectively steps outside the story and addresses the readers directly: 'if you think that is at all in David's favour, you mistake the
workings of Mr Moss’s mind’ (p.179). The narrator’s purpose is the same as the chorus’s in a Greek play: an insight is to be given, or some information relayed which will help the reader’s interpretative task. In stepping out of the frame of the realistic narrative the narrator runs the risk of calling the reader away from it, since parabasis suspends narrative. What is at stake here is the reader’s involvement in the story. The narrator interrupts; how will the reader react?

The topic itself is quite extraordinary. Buses are peripheral to the narrative in just the way that all the rest of the givens of the realistic world-model are: they are assumed, taken-for-granted. And yet it is for these objects that the narrator runs the risk of unpicking the web of narrative which, until now, has surrounded the reader. Or, looked at another way, it is by a discussion of these unproblematic vehicles that the text reveals its own textuality; as the audience in the theatre is reminded that they watch a performance when the chorus steps forward, so the reader is reminded that he or she is involved in the unreal world of the text.

The history of the bus company tells us something about the society of the story. In the ‘old days’ you (the implied reader) and the buses acted together in a community of interests. Within this community individuals could and did expect to be treated on a personal basis. New rules, however, came to obtain. These rules took time to find approval: ‘People argued a good deal about the matter’ (p.179). Eventually even those who were ‘never convinced of the justice of the new rules’ could be found ‘waiting exactly at the bus stop when ...[they]...wanted to be driven into Castleford’ (pp.178-179). The bus company requires homogenized
behaviour from the community in order to further some goal which is not theirs: people should learn 'that even in the country you must get on and off only at bus stops'. These innovations will mean that the bus can get to Castleford 'quite ten minutes earlier' (p.178).

It seems that this 'history' is providing an account of the way in which Barley society has been pressed into some other form, but it is an unsatisfactory explanation. Because, of course, the rest of the book shows that the old ways are alive and well and can, for the moment at least, look after themselves. So lively are they in fact that they still provide subject positions, places for people to know 'how to be'. To add to the confusion the narrator tries to draw the chorus back into the narrative momentum of the text with phrases such as 'While David stands' and 'there is time to explain'. The chorus speaks only in the instants during which, in the time of the text, David waits for the fast approaching bus.

However, it is in these moments, when narrative time exceeds storyline, that the time of narrating governs and overcomes the time of the narrative itself. Replete with this absolute authority over the text, the narration's moment stands over and suspends all of the text's moments, insisting upon its own supremacy. In this moment the narrator interpellates the reader: hailing the reading subject as 'you', a precise and explicit calling

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out which engages the reader in the narrative and invites response.23

The immediate focus of that response is the history of the bus company, or rather the changes forced onto the society of the Barleys by this representation of the outside world. 'You' are invited to take up a position within the new association between the wider world and the intimate world of the Barleys; 'you' are the absent subject in the text, the subject which the text cannot otherwise speak, a subject worth the risks the text has run.

Why is the text forced to construct its reader in such an overt way? The subject position created is comforting and personal, and suggests that the old ways can coexist with the new, because the new carries the old within it. But this is something the text cannot speak, since, were it to do so, the material practices, the ideologies, inherent in it would be revealed. Adam's and David's subjectivities cannot be combined without exposing their contradictory positions, a fact which the text is at pains to obscure. Rather than revealing these, the text instead transfers them to the subject who has been created by the performance of the text: the reader. This subject now not only completes narrative gaps, but conspires with the text to ensure that the subjectivity they have created together, which has grown out of their interaction, can keep its secrets.

Mr Smith is banished along with the 'new system' of affiliation not because it does not work, but precisely

23 Althusser, Lenin, p.163.
because it does. He represents male power and authority, a fullness which the boys and all the other men in the text must not exhibit. The highly negative definition of female subjectivity in *Minnow on the Say* is called into being by the presence of Mr Smith's extraordinary male strength. This mars the text's ideological project since negativity is not simply and solely a matter of gender but is a question of power and access to power. The text's ideology installs the ideal of democracy, but does not tackle the difficulty posed by the retention of past and still lively forms of subjectivity which retain within them hierarchic and phallocentric forms which actively operate to deny sameness and equality.

The 'new system' which Mr Smith inaugurates so successfully has not changed the institutional framework of society as radically as the history of the Castleford and District Bus Company might suggest. In place of local authority an unnamed one asserts itself, whose intentions are unknown. This authority and its purposes are given a pseudo-rational explanation in the history of the bus company: the buses will reach Castleford 'quite ten minutes earlier'. This explanation is supposed to be sufficient in itself. Who required this new timetable and who will benefit from its innovation is left unexplained. Saving time, manipulating resources, and hence people, is self-evidently useful, so this 'history' says.

And it is a history provided directly by the narrator, who adds a further horizon to the subjectivities already illustrated. Beyond Mr Smith, beyond the amalgamation of David and Adam which he makes possible, lies a faceless authority which will nominate what is for the good of society. This authority is the concomitant of the classlessness which the text is at such pains to
instal. If there is to be no hierarchy of birth, or wealth, if decisions are in future to be handed down from some distant place, what is the institutional framework? If people are to achieve subjectivity through the social, what sort of society will be their model?

We can take the narrator's discourse as a guide. It has attempted to create within the text itself a homogenized language. The motive for this would seem to be a desire to reduce the levels of difference in the boys' subjectivities so that what is carried over into the new subject is an articulation of all three of the texts' codes: class, knowledge and subjectivity. Those of knowledge and subjectivity are foregrounded, and the boys' character-zones are created within their ambit. Class, although ever present, is effaced by the imposition of the narrator's discourse upon that of the characters. Mr Smith appears to be the living exemplar of the new system which the narrative has achieved, but his subjectivity would in effect create new problems for the text, to do with authority and power.

These matters must remain unspoken and unrepresented. The Castleford and District Bus Company provides an allegory of the construction of a new subjectivity, one which leaves aside the question of legitimation. Neither David's, Adam's or Mr Smith's interpellation has proved satisfactory, though each has provided a discourse and chronotope which has engaged the narrator in dialogue. What the narrator wants to say is said directly to the reader, in the bus company episode. In this the new subjectivity, unsullied by Mr Smith's personification, is projected.
Mr Smith is a filiante who forces society to take him on new terms, but these are not those which the text wants to insist upon. When he is exposed as a fruitful Coddling: strong, determined, tyrannical, rich, his presence threatens to topple the ideological project of the novel, which is to impose a recombination of its earlier subjectivities, untainted by questions of power and authority, as Miss Coddling's strange behaviour illustrates.

But these questions are there all the same, pressing on the boundaries of the Barleys in the guise of the red single-decker buses from Castleford. The reader's adjustment to the 'new system' of the text is mediated by the story of a similar adjustment which the patrons of the buses have undertaken. But while this explains the experience, it conceals the cause. That is a secret which Mr Smith bears away to London. This is a new way knowing 'how to be' which is authorized not by customary knowledge, nor by scientific knowledge but by affiliation, a new system. What lies at the heart of this knowing 'how to be' is an alternative site of power, benign but faceless, the modern state. This is a new society which cannot be represented directly in Pearce's text since it is precisely the product of the new subject, which Ninon on the Say has just created, with its reader's co-operation.
Chapter...Three

MARVELLOUS LIVES: THE DARK IS RISING

'Make no mistake about it. Any great
gift of power or talent is a burden, and
this more than any, and you will often
long to be free from it.'

'All through the world, wherever the idea
of Fairyland or of a supernatural country
was evolved, it was accompanied by a
strong feeling of the relativity of
time.'

Minnow on the Say illustrates the importance of
drawing boundaries to connect us to other people and also
to define our differences from them. In a world which
seems to be growing smaller, and where communication
systems lay ways of life bare for everyone to see,
differences have become commodities. French regional
cooking can now 'belong' to anyone who has a television
and is willing to buy the book of the series. How are we
to say who we are?

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1 Susan Cooper, The Dark is Rising (London, Chatto and
Future references will be given in the text, prefixed Dark.

2 Katharine M. Briggs, The Vanishing People: A
Study of Traditional Fairy Beliefs (London, B.T. Batsford,
Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* series deals with these things on a global scale. Pearce's text seemed content to take much for granted: a system of ethics, for instance, a thing which is pretty central to any idea of the social. And we can see why: would an ethical system be specific to the Barleys or would it apply more widely? In Cooper's texts the Light and Dark, or good and evil, are central concerns, as her series title suggests.

Cooper's texts are 'marvellous', to use Todorov's description of works in which the supernatural is accepted at once, and where no explanation for it, or its activities, is given. In the marvellous the 'physical world and the spiritual world interpenetrate' and, as a result, 'their fundamental categories are modified'.  This profoundly affects the status of time and space within each category: 'time seems suspended, it extends beyond what one imagines to be possible'. This is a temporality very like that of infancy, in which 'time was not, in the earliest period of our childhood, the line joining these three points (past, present, and future), but rather an eternal present - obviously very different from the present we know, which is a verbal category - something elastic or infinite'.

Todorov distinguishes two groups of themes in the marvellous. One set relates to the self, and concerns 'the structuring of the relation between man and the

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4 Todorov, p.118.

5 Todorov, p.145.
world." An important part of this relation is 
perception: how do we distinguish between subject and 
object, between real and imaginary: is such a distinction 
necessary or possible? The second group, 'themes of the 
other', relate to 'man and his desire - and thereby with 
his unconscious'. They are also called 'themes of 
discourse' and so connect to social relations and 
signification. Through the themes of the other the 
subject's dynamic interaction with society is figured. In 
Cooper's texts themes of the self dominate, with 
interesting results, as we shall see.

The dark is rising over the world but the eye of the 
storm is in Berkshire. The central character in the books 
is Will Stanton, seventh son of a seventh son. He is an 
Old One, a representative of the Light. On his eleventh 
birthday he is initiated into the rights and duties of his 
election. There is no escape:

Make no mistake about it. Any great gift 
of power or talent is a burden, and this 
more than any, and you will often long to 
be free from it. But there is nothing to 
be done. If you were born with the gift, 
then you must serve it, and nothing in 
this world or out of it may stand in the 
way of that service, because that is why

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4 Todorov, p.120. Todorov says on p.57 that he 
will be discussing 'the elements of the marvelous, as 
themes' when he deals with the themes of the other and 
the self. But when he comes to do so he talks of them as 
a 'group of fantastic texts' (p.118). The themes can 
clearly apply to any of the forms of the fantastic 
which Todorov describes, though here I am specifying 
their use within the marvellous.

7 Todorov, p.139.
you were born and that is the Law. (Dark, p.52)

The series begins quietly enough with a story of three young children, Jane, Simon and Barney Drew, on holiday in Cornwall. Accompanying them is an elderly man whom they call 'Uncle Merry'; his full name is Merriman Lyon. His relationship to the family is obscure. The children stumble on a manuscript and become involved in a quest as they call it, a nomination soon confirmed by their Uncle: "This is your quest," he said, "You must find the way every time yourselves. I am the guardian, no more". The children are involved in finding a grail, which heralds the return of King Arthur. They and their Uncle are opposed by the Dark. The combat between the Light and the Dark, which will extend over the five books, is set in motion.

Merriman Lyon is a representative of the Light. It becomes clear that he has great insight and power. When the children find the manuscript the Light gains the upper hand; for the advantage to go to the Dark they and their Uncle must waste their opportunities, mistake the manuscript’s meanings and fail to keep it safe. Upon the possibility of such failures and mistakes the narrative interest of this and the subsequent books depends. They must suggest that such mistakes can be made in spite of the fact that powerful representatives of the Light are always present in the texts, have foreknowledge, and are not really threatened by the Dark, since it has no power over them. It is, naturally, generally left to the

children and other human helpers to make these mistakes. In order to achieve such stunning inefficiency and ineffectiveness, in spite of their daily dealings with people of power and wisdom, the Drew children must really stay as they are: no intellectual or spiritual growth is allowed them.

In Over Sea, Under Stone the supernatural must be accepted at once without hesitation or question. The advantage is clear: anything can happen. The disadvantage, if it can be called that, lies in the necessity of linking the marvellous world with the one the reader knows: how to anchor it in reality. It must be so anchored if it is to be readable; it must refer to things the reader can understand. As readers we must be able to fill in its necessary gaps, refer from its world to our own; it is, after all, a piece of communication. In setting out to ensure that reference to the real world is possible from within its narratives, the text will, paradoxically, enhance its marvellous qualities which are thrown into relief against its other, everyday, references. However, Cooper’s texts have good reason, apart from necessity, for maintaining close links with the representation of reality. Their desire to ensure a place for the realistic leads to various complications or transgressions of the marvellous form, as we shall see.

The second book in the series, The Dark is Rising, elaborates the marvellous by introducing the idea of Old Ones. They are ageless representatives of the Light, with considerable powers: shapeshifting, time travel, arcane knowledge and immortality are just some of their special abilities. In this book the newest Old One, Will Stanton, is initiated. This provides an opportunity for
elaborating the history of his kind, their place in the
scheme of the things and their connection with legend.

When the book opens Will is on the eve of his
eleventh birthday. He lives in the country, son of a
middle-class household. Will's birthday falls upon
Midwinter's Day. The birthday eve presages new things: a
farmer gives Will a ring of iron, with an injunction to
keep it with him, and adds an enigmatic remark: "The
Walker is abroad," he said again. "And this night will be
bad, and tomorrow will be beyond imagining" (Dark, p.16).
Farmer Dawson adopts an attitude which will soon become
familiar. An unexplained situation is revealed (Walker is
abroad); the effect of this situation communicated (the
night will be bad; tomorrow beyond imagining); these two
phenomena are linked by repetition which stands in the
place of a causal chain (again...And...and instead of
'because'). A different way of accounting for events is
at work here, the way of this text's 'marvellous'. This
is insinuated into an ordinary 'realistic' moment (the
boys have gone to the farm to get hay for their rabbits)
and reconstitutes it: the ordinary is, for a while, made
unfamiliar and strange.

Fiction does not deal in the probabilities of the
world we know. The fictional world is one of illusion.
But its illusions are powerful, since they are the
productions of, and themselves produce, ideology.
Realistic fiction follows the logic of 'because' or, as
Frye puts it, 'hence'." Marvellous fiction defies these
bounds, as does some romance. For both these genres,
Farmer Dawsons' 'and' or 'and then', as Frye would say,

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9 Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of
the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, Harvard University
does duty instead. Where the realistic narrative will link events to each other in a recuperable chain, the marvellous will simply set one after another, in a relationship of contiguity. Its narrative events are a series of discontinuous episodes strung one after another. The logic of this narrative form is similar to that encountered in dreams. Cooper's texts rely upon this form both to engage the reader's interest and to forward themes which prove to be otherwise unrepresentable, for one reason or another. How a text can represent the unrepresentable, or figure what cannot be exactly described, is one of the things we shall uncover as this analysis proceeds.

In the early morning of his birthday, Will wakes to music and snow, and a household which is deeply asleep. He cannot awaken it. Will's innate understandings are beginning to make themselves felt. The sleep is one which 'would not be broken' and:

He accepted everything that came into his mind, without thought or question, as if he were moving through a dream. But a deeper part of him knew that he was not dreaming. He was crystal clear awake, in a Midwinter Day that had been waiting for him to wake into it since the day he had been born, and, he somehow knew, for centuries before that. (Dark, p.31)

Will walks into the snowy morning and enters a world which is the same and yet different: 'the same road that he had trodden almost every day of his life, but it was very different now' (Dark, pp.31-32). He meets a man he knows, one of those from Dawsons' Farm. His name is John
Smith, and he is working at a forge. With him is a man on a horse, who invites Will to ride. Will thanks him but refuses. "I am out to find the Walker." He heard his own words with amazement. So that's it, he thought" (Dark, p.34 italics original).

When he was at the farm he was given an iron ring in the form of a flat circle quartered by a cross, to thread through his belt. This is the first of the Signs which he must collect in order to gather strength to the Light. He is bound by nature to devote himself to the long conflict between the Light and the Dark (Dark, p.53). He is the Sign-Seeker.

And he succeeds in this task. In doing so he encounters the old straight tracks which criss-cross the land, meets Herne the Hunter and witnesses ceremonies for Christmas and Twelfth Night including the proper preparation of a yule log, which must be a root of a tree and not a branch, and the hunting of the wren. These represent a fine mixture of myths and legends, linking the pagan and Christian pasts of Britain.

He also learns the lore of the Old Ones, which is inscribed in the Book of Gramarye. This is a remarkable text. In it 'he might read no more than one line - I have journeyed as an eagle - and he was soaring suddenly aloft' (Dark, p.118, italics original). This is a book of hidden things, of real magic. Long ago, when magic was the only written knowledge, our business was called simply knowing' (Dark, p.115). Simply knowing: that sounds easy.

And it seems from the account of Will's acquisition of this knowledge that it is. He only needs to be who he
is to acquire it: he is 'bound by nature' to do so. It is integral to him, not acquired by his placement as a social being but anterior to it, awaiting only for him to 'come into his own'. It comes from a 'deeper part of him' (Dark, p.31). In fact socialization seems to have very little to do with who he is. Neither time nor language are constitutive of his subjectivity; indeed, he acquires his 'knowing' without stories as such. The Book of Gramarye is like the book of nature, giving him 'simply a snatch of verse or a bright image, which somehow had him instantly in the midst of whatever experience was involved' (Dark, p.118). And yet Cooper's text is dedicated to showing Will's socialization. He is an apprentice at its beginning, and a master at its end. He learns through trial and error in a way which echoes ancient forms of tutelage.

The things which he learns are 'hidden' and 'real magic': the marvellous world in which he moves is constructed by a series of vivid places, existing (so it seems) in discrete space, places which are experienced by him without mediation. He 'learned the nature of all trees', flew into the heavens and 'knew every star in the heavens'; he becomes a bird, one of the five who can see the Dark, 'and in turn he was each of them' (Dark, p.119-120). And he goes down into the sea. He inhabits a world which is a part of him and interior to him, a world which he experiences directly and about which he can meditate without the distancing of signification.

This picture of unmediated reality is a romantic ideal. This seems to be, to use Frye's words, 'the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but
will still contain that reality'. The advantage of the sort of world which Will now inhabits is that its extent can be contained, figured by the parts of it which he knows. For the realistic characters in the text 'the world' as such is unknowable in its entirety and exceeds any possible signification: its horizon is always retreating. But Will has overcome this, and has reappropriated that state when the self and the world were one; before language, before signification, desire itself, and our individual Fort! Da! game.

Take the Old Ones' language: they claim they are 'born with it in our tongues' (Dark, p.116). It is called the 'Old Speech', and is a language of special qualities. The Old Ones work their magic by incantations, and the words they use have a direct connection with things: they are part of the things, rather than representations of them. Will only has to read 'I have journeyed as an eagle' in order to do so. Underlying this is the idea that a direct apprehension of the world is possible, of which 'old' speech is a transparent vehicle. 'Old' here means lost; lost to the realistic characters in the text, anyway. Nature always satisfies the Old Ones in a way in which it does not satisfy the realistic characters in the texts, who have a mediated relationship with it.

So the socialization which Will undergoes is of a very special kind: it uncovers what is already there, in the way that the Old Speech gives transparent access to the real, living, world. Will and the world are one; he merely has to awaken to this knowledge. His apprenticeship

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echoes the first Adam's who, walking in the garden with God, was at one with the Creator and creation.

But this state is a failure of subjectivity. It is precisely in the tension between the self, the 'me', and its constructions of meaning, its narratives, that the subject exists. It is 'actually and necessarily created within a split', the rupture which occurs when the infant recognizes that it has needs - for if they were always met, how would such a 'knowing' eventuate?\textsuperscript{11} And in response to these needs, which become demands, the child adopts signification; words stand in the place of something which is missing (the satisfaction desired) and the subject 'is therefore constituted in language as this division or splitting'.\textsuperscript{12} Will's apprenticeship is a refusal of language, which is actually a refusal of subjectivity.

In the meantime, the ordinary world of the children (Jane, Simon and Barney Drew) continues. The next book, Greenwich, finds them in Cornwall again and here, for the first time, they meet Will. The grail, found on their first adventure, has been stolen by the Dark. The Drew children are on holiday with their Uncle Merriman and some friends of his; their purpose is to find the grail. Merriman brings with him, to their dismay, a boy called Will Stanton. Now fully established in his power as an Old One, Will's marvellous identity is hidden from the others. The book's title indicates where the real interest in the story lies; the Greenwich is a thing made by Cornishwomen from stone, hawthorn, hazel and rowan. It is

\textsuperscript{11} Mitchell and Rose, p.5.

\textsuperscript{12} Mitchell and Rose, p.31.
a powerful condensation, a figure from myth and nightmare:  

...this silent image somehow held within it more power than she had ever sensed before in any creature or thing. Thunder and storms and earthquakes were there, and all the force of the earth and sea. It was outside Time, boundless, ageless, beyond any line drawn between good and evil.  

Jane, whose reflections these are, is present when the Greenwitch is made. She is invited to wish on it, before it is cast into the sea. She does so: 'Oh dear,' she said impulsively, 'I wish you could be happy' (Greenwitch, p.41). The result is that the Greenwitch eventually gives up its secret to Jane, which is the manuscript bearing the translation of inscriptions on the grail.

13 As with all condensations, the associations here are multiple. Folk stories about green men, green giants and green children abound. Green men are often found carved in medieval cathedrals, peering out from leaves and branches. The personification of springtime and eternal life which some of these figures represent can be inverted into a horror. In books for children, one of the more pleasant aspects of greenness can be found in Kevin Crossley-Holland's The Green Children (London, Macmillan, 1966) which tells the story of a green boy and girl found in a woldpit in Suffolk; in contrast, Lucy M. Boston's The Children of Green Knowe (London, Faber and Faber 1954) creates a terrifying green figure, who threatens the hero of her story.

The Dark attempts to wrest the Greenwitch's secret from it during the few hours which separate its time of creation from the moment when the tide bears it far out into the ocean. In order to prevent the Dark's interference, Merriman and Will seek out the Lady of the Sea. They begin by flying like birds off a cliff, completing their journey by swimming like fish into the deeps. Tethys, the Lady of the Sea, is 'a presence merely, she was the sea itself, and they spoke to her reverently, in the Old Speech' (Greenwitch, p.86). She is persuaded to let the Old Ones ask the Greenwitch for her secret.

But the Greenwitch gives it up to Jane: '"You made a wish that was for me, not for yourself. No-one has ever done that. I give you my secret, in return"' (Greenwitch, p.130). So the elemental, the world itself, is touched by human selflessness, and this is rewarded. The Light is on a winning streak, if only it chooses the right people.

Or if they choose it. What is never for a moment doubted in all the texts is that the Drew children will do so. They are also foreordained: when they find the manuscript in Under Sea, Over Stone Merriman expects it: '"I did have an idea that you might find it, because I know you three very well"' (Under Sea, p.77). This may not seem to be much of an explanation: what is his 'knowing' based on? Clearly not the realistic aspects of the text, which enable the reader to engage the marvellous world with the known everyday. These might enable him to know that the children are honest, reliable or whatever but cannot predict that they are likely to find things hidden for untold years. The marvellous is taking on the task of explaining the realist elements of the text, a complication in which it will repeatedly engage.
Merriman's explanation is one the realistic elements of the text demand. Brooke-Rose has shown that the realistic novel requires the circulation of vast amounts of information. 'The sheer amount of information calls for clarity' and is dealt with in various ways, one of which is the 'knowledge of the author circulated through substitutes'. However, the marvellous need not explain its own features, such as Merriman's 'knowledge'. This, along with other marvellous abilities and occurrences, must be accepted without question. Merriman's pseudo-explanation about knowing the children well adds nothing to the marvellous. Merriman does not need to know people well to gain insight into what they are likely to do: his marvellous powers ensure such knowledge.

Will illustrates 'the knowledge of the author circulated through substitutes' when he tries to explain things to his brother:

'It's like this...This where we live is a world of men, ordinary men, and although in it there is the Old Magic of the earth, and the Wild Magic of living things, it is men who control what the world shall be like...But beyond the world is the universe, bound by the law of the High Magic, as every universe must be. And beneath the High Magic are two...poles...that we call the Dark and the Light. No other power orders them. They merely exist. The Dark seeks by its

dark nature to influence men so that in
the end, through them, it may control the
earth. The Light has the task of
stopping that from happening'.

Here, from Silver on the Tree, the last in the
series, comes an explicit expression of the difference
between the two worlds. The human one exists in a state
of supernatural gamesmanship in which one of the
combatants is marked as an aggressor while the other
blocks; the Light's purpose in blocking on behalf of the
human world is unquestioned. But it is precisely the
Light's right to 'protect' the human world which this last
book struggles to justify under an increasing narrative
pressure to bring various threads from the series into
order.

Will is invited to Wales, where the Drew children are
also staying. They gather on a hilltop. Will, the three
Drew children, and the Pendragon, a boy called Bran, whose
role was uncovered in the preceding book, The Grey King.
On seeing him Jane Drew 'had a sudden extraordinary sense
of great rank, of high natural degree, almost as if she
were in the presence of a king' (Silver, p. 76). Will and
the Pendragon embark on their quest for the crystal sword
in a Lost Land while the children are embroiled in various
adventures, the narrative purpose of which seems to be to
keep Merriman away from Will and Bran.

The Lost Land embodies the riddle-form. Houses
without walls, carriages without drivers, palaces which

\textsuperscript{10} Susan Cooper, Silver on the Tree (London, Chatto
references will be made in the text, prefixed \textit{Silver}.
are mazes of looking-glasses: the two find their way by calling upon Will’s special Old One knowledge and the Pendragon’s flashes of insight (which seem to be connected to the high natural degree which Jane noticed). Bran speaks the name of the sword he has come to claim: Will is astonished: how did Bran know this? “I didn’t know,” Bran said. “It just...came” (Silver, p.149). The companions achieve their goal because they are able to interpret a riddle passed on to them from the Lady (High Magic) and to complete a rhyme which they piece together at various stages of their journey through the Lost Land.

They have a way with riddles, as we might expect. They make their necessary connections in flashes of inspiration, by means of the same sort of knowledge that the Book of Gramarye contains. The riddle is an example of ‘knowing’ in which hidden connections can only be made by those who are in a privileged, reciprocal relationship to it. In Hinnon on the Say this was an important element in the social constitution of the subject, but here it represents an innate knowledge which comes, unbidden, to the aid of Will and Bran. The book ends with a challenge by the Dark. Its representatives contest the Pendragon’s right to act in the interests of the Light since he was raised out of his time. The challenge is that:

'The Light chose, and made sure that Bran ap Arthur, Bran pen Dragon, came to this time to grow into the right place at the right moment for the working of the quest of the Light. Thus all the old prophecies have been fulfilled only by their manipulation of Time. And that is a twisting of the terms of the High Magic, and so we claim that the boy Bran,
who is here only through the craft of the Light, should go back to the time in which he belongs’. (Silver, p.263)

An ordinary man is chosen by the High Magic to be the arbiter of this challenge. His judgement is:
'I judge that Bran Davies belongs to the time in which both he and I live our lives. And that since he is not separate, as I am, but has thrown in his lot with the Light and risked much for them - then there is no reason why he should not be free to help their cause'.
(Silver, p.266)

Although the logic of what he says may be cloudy, the affirmation that time is important, the time of the subject, comes through clearly, as clearly as the Dark’s assertion that it is Time itself which has been manipulated.

The time in the texts that the human, non-marvellous characters know is one which imitates the temporality the reader experiences. This will be called realistic time: timeR. One of the advantages of the marvellous in the text is that its time, timeM, can halt timeR. When characters enter marvellous time they may spend weeks or days away from timeR, which will be unchanged when they return to it. In The Dark is Rising, for example, a Black Rider, a character of the Dark, enters Will’s home. Will:

...was instantly a furious Old One, so furious that he did not pause to think what he should do. He could feel every inch of himself, as if he had grown in
his rage to three times his own height. He stretched out his right hand with its fingers spread stiff towards his family, and saw them instantly caught into a stop in time, frozen out of all movement. Like waxworks they stood stiff and motionless round the room. (Dark, p.148)

'Freezing' is a technique used fairly often in the books to prevent humans from knowledge of the doings of the Light and Dark. The marvellous characters can insert themselves at will at any space in time, can halt it, and actually change it: 'For all times co-exist...and the future can sometimes affect the past, even though the past is a road that leads to the future (Silver, p.37 italics original).

The integrity of time is subverted, for example, when Will retrieves the Signs. He collected them in The Dark is Rising but they are not mentioned in Greenwitch or The Grey King although Will is sometimes solemnly addressed as the Sign-Seeker when he meets other Old Ones. In Silver on the Tree it seems important that their whereabouts be accounted for: consequently they are hidden and retrieved, a moment of narrative complication which seems to serve no obvious purpose. The Signs are buried at Caerleon while the town is being built, in the time of the Romans, to which Will has access through time. In order to work the spell which will retrieve the Signs Will must relive their hiding: 'first he must re-enact the casting of it; turn Time so that once more he could live through the hours' (Silver, p.41). He relives their hiding in order to show the reader that it has occurred, of course. He then reclaims them at a dig taking place at Caerleon in time.
Putting his hand forward in the darkness of what he knew now was his own time, Midsummer Day a matter of seconds after he had first left it, he reached scabbling into the earth that had lain since the decay of Rome's Empire, some sixteen centuries before, in the hallow of the big rock of the broken arch. And his fingers met a circle of metal quartered by a cross, and putting down the flashlight to scrabble with both hands in the earth, he drew out the linked circle of Signs. (Silver, p.50)

Will, moving in time, inserts himself into time in two places, first burying the signs in the new Caerleon and then removing them from its ruins.

What is affected, as Will's manipulation of the Signs makes clear, is not that part of lived history which subjects may know, but an area which is hidden from them. Will went back to the Roman town in time, and apparently re-wrote that part of Roman history. But neither the Romans, nor the archaeologists at the dig in Will's own human time were affected by his actions, since he both hid and retrieved the Signs secretly. In what sense, then, can we claim that time affected time, at all?

Simply by going back in time, Will disturbs the course of events. But in spite of the pronouncements about co-existence, the text is at pains to ensure that there is no effect upon the time of the Roman subjects. The reader knows that the Signs were hidden and have lain buried for hundreds of years, but this is very hard to
explain realistically. However, if no-one but the 
marvellous characters perceive the action, it can be 
deemed both to have happened (time \( t \) really affected time \( a \) 
and not to have happened (people at the various times \( t \) did 
not see it happen, so for them, in effect, it did not).\(^7\)

And although it is neat, and an example of a well-
known solution to the paradox of time travel, the 
motivation for this elaborate explanation is of more 
interest for our purposes than the philosophy it employs. 
Will's hiding and finding the Signs is a narrative effect 
of the desire to ensure that there is a full accounting of 
the realistic everyday world of the reader. In the 
marvellous world the Signs need no explanation, they exist 
to be brought forward when required. But the awkward 
arrangement through which they are hidden and found is at 
cease explained if the logic of the everyday needs to find 
a place in the narrative, not merely to oppose and so 
 enhance the differences between it and the marvellous, but 
for some other purpose. It is noticeable, for example, 
that the Dark rises conveniently during school holidays, 
when the children are free to help.\(^8\)

The importance of the realistic in these texts is 
easily overlooked. The texts tell a story which is 
grounded in an indifference to realistic time, which is an 
indifference to human experience, at least as understood

\(^7\) For a discussion of time upon which this argument is 
based see D. H. Mellor, *Real Time*, (Cambridge, 

\(^8\) A more extensive discussion of time and character 
will be found in the next chapter, which is concerned with 
Jane Gardam's *Bilgewater*. 
in the realistic, mimetic parts of the books. As John Rowlands makes clear in *The Grey King*: "Other things, like humanity, and mercy, and charity, that most men hold more precious than all else, they do not come first for the Light" (p.135).

The dominance of the marvellous ensures that the human beings in the series are reduced to roles, almost to what Greimas has called 'actants', characters who exist to support narrative functions, furthering the action and little else. Will is less a 12-year-old boy than a channel for nature itself, while the Drew children exist to ensure that the inevitable success of the Light is delayed through their misunderstandings. Merriman and Will also make mistakes, or under-estimations, to a similar narrative purpose.

And yet the realistic is important enough for Will to go through the foolish ritual of hiding and finding the Signs. The challenge by the Lord of the Dark highlights the importance of the two temporalities which are, of course, different chronotopes and represent distinct world-views. The basis upon which a decision is made asserts the measure of a new element in the texts. A mature human being is chosen to adjudicate. When the challenge has been settled, and the advantage gained by the Light taken to its conclusion (the Dark is finally driven back), the Old Ones depart to 'a quiet silver-circled castle at the back of the North Wind, among the apple trees' (*Silver*, p.278). The result of withdrawing

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19 For this point see Brooke-Rose, p.76.

20 A.J. Greimas, *Du sens*, quoted in Brooke-Rose, p.20 (an actant is an abstract role of sorts—such as addressee—of a quest).

21 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*. For a more detailed account of chronotopes see my chapter 1.
marvellous time from the texts is not to assert time, but to create a new form of time altogether, a new chronotope.

Before this, time existed at the will of marvellous time, to be called into being or changed at its whim. The new time, ushered in by the removal of the marvellous and its dependent 'real', is one in which there will be no going back, in which cause and effect ('hence') will brook no interference and in which mankind, at last, is fully responsible. As Merriman makes clear:

For Drake is no longer in his hammock, children, nor is Arthur somewhere sleeping, and you may not lie idly expecting the second coming of anybody now, because the world is yours and it is up to you. Now especially since man has the strength to destroy this world, it is the responsibility of man to keep it alive, in all its beauty and marvellous joy. (Silver, p.202)

The episode in which Will hides and finds the Signs is the effect of the texts' attempt to rationalize the chronotopes of the marvellous and the realistic. Marvellous time is an 'eternal present' which Todorov connects to our earliest childhood, a time of which we are disabused only by the (necessary) irruption of signification. Realistic time is the time of Frye's 'hence', of causality and the temporal ordering of human consciousness. This attempt to synthesize them foreshadows greater restatements to come and a collapse of the texts' master metaphors.

Time is not the only thing which will be changed always. While the marvellous, the Light, the Dark and
High Magic kept their watch upon humankind the extent to which subjects had control over their own destiny was limited; people moved within a world which was, unknown to them, protected and threatened by actors and powers beyond their knowledge. Humankind can now make its own future. Merriman says:

And the world will still be imperfect, because men are imperfect. Good men will still be killed by bad, or sometimes by other good men, and there will still be pain and disease and famine, anger and hate. But if you work and care and are watchful, as we have tried to be for you, then in the long run the worse will never, ever, triumph over the better. And the gifts put into some men, that shine as bright as Eirias the sword, shall light the dark corners of life for all the rest, in so brave a world.

(Silver, pp.282-283)

A shift of momentous importance to the subject has taken place, in a flurry of activity and narrative ordering. Marvellous and realistic times have collapsed, but elements of each have recombined to create a new temporality, now firmly stitched to history and the subject. The categories of Light and Dark have been separated for ever: the Dark seems to have been banished, but the Light lives on as the 'gifts put into some men'. Knowledge of the Light and Dark has 'retreated to the hidden places of your minds' (Silver, p.283). In effect the residual marvellous is now all light or good, and is integral to the subject for whom 'worse will never triumph' because of the 'gifts put into some men'.
To put this new marvellous into perspective, we must turn to a figure whose marvellous status is unblemished by touches of realism: Arthur, King of Britain. What he shares with other figures (Hermes the Hunter, the Wounded King) is an excess which is the hallmark of condensation; he is greater than the texts - so great, in fact, that his story is not told at all. To a certain extent, it is assumed to be part of the cultural background of the reader. The particular audience implied by these texts necessarily limits inter-textual reference: how many texts and contexts can children be presumed to know? But figures such as Arthur step straight out of folktale and myth, the building-blocks of literature, whose outlines can be most clearly seen in fantasy and works addressed to relatively inexperienced audiences. Arthur is an amalgamation of all the heroic figures the reader has imagined or met in texts, specified here as British and kingly.

Cultural allusions work at the level of ideology, tapping an extra-textual understanding which, while it is more than texts themselves can convey, may be pressed into the service of their significations. Gathered to the texts' meanings this excess of signification is both satisfyingly abundant and ambiguous. Arthur's excess is the trait which enables him to be conjured up by the most brief reference. The value of this to the texts is considerable; he brings to them attributes which the works can then reflect upon their own creations. Merriman becomes Merlin, an addition to his created

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Connections between children's books and so-called 'popular' fiction can be made along these lines. Each of these represent different 'social forms' of literature, to use Frye's term. Frye, Secular Scripture, p.27-28.
characterization calling for small narrative investment. The Arthur legends add lustre to the books' own meanings, enriching them almost effortlessly.

Arthur, a representative of the mythic, is an ambivalent figure. He represents contradictions, personifying the paradox of being both Celt and Roman, pagan and Christian, glorious and defeated, honoured husband and cuckold, dead and alive. A signifier of exceedingly dynamic form, he is a British hero, a man from legend. Knight gives an account of such a figure:

The hero's reputed father is a king, but may actually be a god, because the circumstances of his conception are unusual. He is spirited away after birth and raised in obscurity by foster parents, returning to seize the kingship in early manhood. At the other end of his career, he is betrayed when in triumph and driven from his throne to meet a mysterious death. He is not succeeded by his children if he has any. His body is not buried and the myth of his return is widespread: places are

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Like the figure of the trickster, Arthur is a mediator. Lévi-Strauss says of these that their 'mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms...[and] must retain something of that duality - namely an ambiguous and equivocal character'. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, translated Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest-Schoppf (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977), p. 226. What terms Arthur mediates will become clear as we proceed.
made sacred to him throughout his former territories.\footnote{24}

On the scale of heroism, in which there are 22 possible functions, King Arthur does quite well. Knight's source suggests 19, he favours 17. This is not just a point about the British having a hero too but suggests something more profound. The hero is an important figure in many cultures, whose power need not be military. From the outline above, for instance, it is clear that Christ is in the first rank. King Arthur's over-determination as a signifier ensures that he may tap longings and needs much deeper than those of nationalism and hero-worship. But he does appeal to these, too, and it is here that the Matter of Britain is harnessed in *The Dark is Rising* sequence to ideologies connected with authority.

One of these ideologies is linked to origins and the inauguration of hierarchies. Where authority is located in society is of constant importance in the books. In the textual here and now, the historical present, authority comes from birth and blood. An individual associates with this authority by responding in an almost spiritual way to what is clearly right, or Light, in this case. This is seen most clearly in the responses of Will and Jane to Bran the odd, white-haired, white-skinned, amber-eyed boy who is the Pendragon, Arthur's son. Jane senses in him great rank, natural high degree, and has to restrain herself from curtseying. She also notices that Will, an Old One, adopts a tone towards Bran which indicates 'a kind of respect, that Will did not show even

when he spoke to Merriman' (Silver, p.78). Shades share her feeling; when Bran and Will awake six sleeping knights in *The Grey King* they pause to greet Bran:

The six riders, glinting silver-grey on their silver-grey mounts, curved round after their leader and paused for a moment in line before the place on the hillside where Bran stood. Each drew his sword and held it upright before his face in a salute, and kissed the flat of its blade in homage as to a king. And Bran stood there slim and erect as a young tree, his white hair gleaming in a silver crest, and bent his head gravely to them with the quiet arrogance of a king granting a boon.  

The texts also draw on the extra-textual cultural production of Arthur to legitimate an ideology of authority with a nationalistic flavour; the authority of Britain itself. The Old Ones seem at first to be entirely British. Merriman tells Will that his birth 'completed a circle that has been growing for four thousand years in every oldest part of this land: the circle of the Old Ones' (Dark, p.53). But the Dark, which the circle is formed to defy, is 'reaching out now steadily and stealthily over all this world' (Dark, p.53, my emphasis). When he is fully engaged in his initiation, Will:

...saw a time when the first great testing of the Light came, and the Old Ones spent themselves for three centuries

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on bringing their land out of the Dark, with the help in the end of their greatest leader, lost in the saving unless one day he might wake and return again. (Dark, p.121)

Arthur is the 'greatest leader' who helps the Old Ones save 'their land', which is Britain. The Caribbean Old One who sends Will a carved head, which Herne the Hunter later transforms to living flesh, and the Arab Old One, who sends good wishes in Silver on the Tree, are token foreigners. Their leader, too, is Arthur.

There can be no doubt from the texts that Light will operate from Britain to save the world. This replays a well-known British theme, which connects civilizing culture to Roman Britain (and native-born, celtic 'Romans'), suggesting that their heritage was nurtured with difficulty during the ensuing 'Dark Ages' and kept alive by traditions which persist. The Arthurian legends themselves play a central role in this. Knight links the idea of the maintenance of a classical curriculum in English schools (the 'heritage' of Rome) to

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Rosemary Sutcliff has done much, in her books for children, to promote the idea of a special heritage. In The Lantern Bearers (London, Oxford University Press, 1959) this heritage is described in a way which will strike readers of Cooper's texts as familiar: 'It may be that night will close over us in the end, but I believe that morning will come again. Morning always grows again out of the darkness, though maybe not for the people who saw the sun go down. We are the Lantern Bearers, my friend; for us to keep something burning, to carry what light we can forward into the darkness and the wind.' (p.250) This passage comes from a chapter entitled 'The Blossoming Tree': Ambrosius Aurelianus (sometimes thought to be Arthur himself) has just been crowned High King of Britain.
'civilizing' justifications for British imperialism. Cooper's books are post-imperialist in period and employ the 'civilizing' theme to redefine a national identity in which influence is reduced to a moral force. Britain, according to these texts, has an invisible asset greater than the City of London's: its status as the guardian of classical Western, Christian, civilization.

The Arthur stories are used as a support for an ideology of moral superiority, refurbishing residual ideologies whose function was to justify Empire and expansion. In this way a 'moral' empire replaces a 'lost' actual one, a refinement which both endorses the former state and replaces it with one which is transcendent.

And Arthur does more than this. By invoking him, a past beyond questioning is brought forward into the texts. Through this the subject is linked to an originary moment, unknowable experientially but preserved in cultural codes and traditional beliefs, resonating within culture as myth. The sort of belief urged upon the reader by this representation is one of tacit consent, including 'the consent of silence, rather than conviction'. And Frye adds that 'the anxiety of society, when it urges the authority of a myth and the necessity of believing it, seems to be less to proclaim its truth than to prevent anyone from questioning it'.

Arthur represents, in its purest form, the marvellous which is incorporated within the new realism of the texts.

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28 Frye, Secular Scripture, p.16.

29 Frye, Secular Scripture, p.16.
ending. It is integral to the subject because one of its aspects, the light, lingers on within the human being through the 'gifts put into some men'. Put into, that is, not developing as a matter of nature. But things are not so simple as Merriman makes them seem. The texts have still not explained why 'some men' will receive these gifts, and others not.

The Drew children are assumed, from the first, to be ready to give their allegiance to the Light, once they are made aware of the possibility of doing so. Other non-marvellous people are similarly attracted to it, as if by nature. What the Light does for those who are so drawn to it is made clear by Will's explanation to his brother. The Light 'protects' and the Dark 'seeks to influence'. Within the contexts created by the books the word 'protect' implies a defence mounted by the Light on behalf of what is, for the most part, an unknowing human race. The Light's protection is not without an element of oppression, as John Rowlands' trenchant comments on the Light's indifference to human happiness makes clear. "Other things, like humanity, and mercy, and charity, that most good men hold more precious than all else, they do not come first for the Light" (Grey, p.135). People are defended for their own good, it seems. This is a commonplace idea to which proverbial knowledge attests: spare the rod and spoil the child, this hurts me more than it hurts you, I have to be cruel to be kind. The motivation for this is, supposedly, to save humans from the Dark. But what is the Dark?

As Will puts it 'the Dark seeks by its dark nature to influence men' so that it may 'control the earth'. It is the Light's 'task' to stop that 'from happening' (Silver, p.22). Here the Dark's position is made clear: it
actively seeks to do something, control the earth. The Light's 'task' is to 'stop' it; the Dark is the agent, the Light merely responding to its actions. The import of this rhetoric is clear: the Dark is aggressive and threatening, the Light protective, defending and defendible. Who can question the source of this 'goodness'? It is enough, surely, that it exists to protect us.

Influence is, of itself, no bad thing. But in these texts it is implacably opposed to goodness. The Light's human helpers, like John Rowlands, respond to it because of some element in their very nature. John, for example, has 'a certain indefinable strength about him' (Grey, p.25). He will support the Light because of this. The people of the dark are marked without subtlety as plain nasty, from the smallest fry to the great Lords. A boy in Under Sea, Over Stone, who helps the Dark, has 'a short thick neck and a strangely flat face'; he swears, too. He is 'a bad lot, that lad, evil-tempered as they come and evil-minded with it' (Under Sea, pp.16,17). These people, and their masters, end in shrieks and collapse. The Dark Lord who mounts an attack in the first book in the series ends in diminishment: 'And the dark figure in the other boat seemed to shrink within himself at the sound, so that the menace and power were all at once gone out of him'. He seems 'smaller' and 'ridiculous' (Over Sea, p.212).

The Dark makes its final mistake in choosing John Rowlands to adjudicate. His loved wife turns out to be a creature of the Dark, something John discovers just before the Dark makes its challenge about time. When the Lady representing High Magic asks the Dark to choose a judge it nominates John, presumably thinking that his love for his wife, who is beseeching him to save her, will influence
his decision. In spite of his comments about the Light’s indifference to human happiness, John has been as steadfast as the children in his help. Those who seek to influence require a modicum of insight; the Dark ought surely to know where John’s allegiance lies, and know too that he is a man of high moral tone. Their choice of him as arbiter is an inexplicable mistake if the Dark is, indeed, an opponent of the Light, its true match in power and intelligence. This signal failure of judgement alerts us to certain alternative explanations.

We have taken the Light and Dark so far on face value as opposing categories. The marvellous characters assure us that the two are in conflict, and the purpose of the narratives seemed to be an unfolding of the marvellous qualities of these forces, leading to a final resolution. But at the end the texts have collapsed the marvellous and the realistic into a new ‘real’ and as an effect of this, they have delivered the Light to the new subject, as a central element in its constitution.

At the beginning of the books the Light and the Dark themselves seem to have little bearing upon the human subject. For the individual, apart from the marvellous Old Ones, they are dead letters, exterior and supernatural forces whose presence in the world is glimpsed occasionally by a chosen or lucky few. As the narrative unfolds the categories are filled out from within the marvellous. The Light is other-worldly, its avatars existing in a human form free from the constraints of time and the social. The Dark is more vulnerable to the realistic world: its helpers fail it or attempt to cheat it; it has no Lord who can compare to Arthur or even Merriman. The Dark’s threats are always turned back by the superior forces of the Light, expressed either in
terms of its resilient and reliable human helpers or in the innate power of its Old Ones or other legendary figures encompassed by it: Arthur, the Wounded King. The Light (or good) has always been the more powerful and the Dark 'smaller' and 'ridiculous'.

The Dark's human helpers are far more numerous than those the Light musters. Such numbers are an essential element in ensuring that the Dark's opposition remain credible. After all, much of the texts' narrative energies are directed towards illustrating the Light's unassailable position. And unassailable it must be, since it is to be the lynch-pin of the new subject's constitution.

The Dark's helpers have to be explained away, since failing to turn to the Light is aberrant in these texts. Since the Dark is an element which seeks to influence, some psychological motivation can be provided for its adherents; the grounds which made them open to its influence may be sketched. For example, one of the Dark's helpers thought that if he could 'complete one of the Things of Power, he could by a sort of blackmail make himself one of the great lords of the Dark' (Greenwitch, p.139). Even such slight detail enables some elements of realistic characterization to attach to the people of the Dark who, although seldom given the benefit of extended narrative, are more mimetically convincing than their opponents, the Drew children.

As the concepts of good and evil have been made more palatable, watered down to fit the human subject, so the categories of marvellous and realistic which provided the stage for the conflicts of their earlier, stronger forms, contract to a new 'real'. This is neither the unmediated world of Will and the Old Ones nor its dependent, the
realistic world of the Drew children. The new 'real' contains, at its core (which is the hearts and minds of its people) the elements of the old world, hidden behind a veil but perhaps remembered in 'the hidden places of your minds, and you will never again know any hint of it except in dreams' (Silver, p.283).

This seems to be a reworking of a well-known explanation. If people are formed in the likeness of God, the eternal good, how can we explain evil? One answer is to presume that human nature is fallen. This text offers a less theological explanation: people are created essentially good, but can be influenced by another side of their nature which is not quite so good; 'smaller', 'ridiculous', reflecting the idea of a subjectivity which values the dignity and autonomy of the human being, and makes the person the measure of all things.

And at the heart of this person is the marvellous Light. And although this is now integral to the subject, its beneficent effects will not be known to all, but will be present only as the 'gifts put into some men'. Some form of selection still applies, a reworking, perhaps, of the old theme of attraction. These fortunate few will 'light the dark corners of life' for everyone else. How shall they be known?

The text's burden of explanation is now revealed to be radically incomplete. The Light, now integral to the subject, has been given a pseudo-explanation: it protects human beings. The entity from which it protects, the Dark, has been reduced to a dependent category: it is not-good or not-Light. This reformation is completed by the banishment of both Light and Dark. All that is left is now internal to the subject, hidden even further from
view. Rather than responding to the Light, human beings respond to their better selves. But what is the source of this 'better self'? It is plainly not a social construction, but an effect of the human being which precedes the social, even though it remains open to its influence. However the social as such is not evil, but is pernicious only in some unspecified areas. What is pernicious about it is what is not-Light.

The Light, like every other aspect of the marvellous in the texts, finds its authority in the law. This connection is vague indeed, but what is plain is that the relationship is hierarchic. The law binds the universe as 'every universe must be' bound (Silver, p.22). It is a law which Arthur, the Wounded King and Herne the Hunter all know, and to which they have a special relationship. It is represented by the Lady, who touches Arthur's arm in 'the casual closeness of those who belong to the same family' (Silver, p.275). And although it may come as a surprise to recognize that the highest authority in the books is represented by a female, it is not without precedent. Some forms of Arthurian tales connect him with representatives of old religions, whose gods were female.\footnote{A recent retelling of the Arthur legend, Marion Bradley's The Hists of Avalon (London, Sphere Books, 1984) shows Arthur initiated into the rites of such a female deity. His downfall is then explained in part by the changes set in train by the passing of the old ways and the increasing hegemony of Christianity.}

But female deities seem difficult to represent nowadays, both figuratively and literally: in these books the Lady is continually fading away. When Will first sets eyes upon her, she is leaning on a stick. 'She was very small, fragile as a bird, and though she was upright and...
alert, Will, looking at her, had an impression of immense age' (*Dark*, p.43). Will is only just beginning his initiation as an Old One, and in a moment of human emotion, exposes the Light to danger. 'And suddenly he realized that the luminous golden figure before him was fading too, vanishing away, like smoke that grows thinner, thinner, until it cannot be seen at all' (*Dark*, p.61). She appears to Jane, in *Silver on the Tree*, as a little figure 'floating before her, an isolated fragment of whatever world lay there behind the greyness' (p.100). Even at the end her struggle to maintain physical integrity is still evident:

'It is done,' she said. Suddenly there was a deep weariness in the music of her voice, that spoke of great age in spite of the calm ageless beauty of her fine-boned face. 'Our task is accomplished, and we may leave the last and longest task to those who inherit this world and all its perilous beauty.' (*Silver*, p.275)

Like the Lady, Tethys and Greenwitch exist outside the confines of Light and Dark. They are part of the Wild Magic of living things which Will described to his brother. They represent female principles of mothering, fecundity and immeasurable power which, formless and vast, are linked to the most female of processes, tides waxing and waning with the moon. Through Jane, a link is made between these representatives of the power of living things and ordinary femaleness. Jane makes her wish on the Greenwitch impulsively and it is one to which the powerful creature responds, so that Jane succeeds where the marvellous, Will and Merriman, as well as the Dark, failed. They all sought the Greenwitch's secret, the
manuscript which would interpret the messages inscribed upon the Grail. The Greenwitch gives up its secret to Jane, because she 'made a wish that was for me, not for yourself' (Greenwitch, p.130). It is also Jane who recognizes that Bran is different. She has to resist a 'strong irrational impulse' to curtsey to him. And when the Lady comes to give the message which will enable the Pendragon and Will to attain the sword in the Lost Land, it is to Jane that she makes herself known:

'Some things there are that may be communicated only between like and like,'
the sweet voice said from the mist. 'It is the pattern of a child's game of dominoes. For you and I are much the same, Jane, Jana, Juno, Jane, in clear ways that separate us from all others concerned in this quest.' (Silver, pp.100-101)

Apart from her association with the great maternal life-forces, Jane is also very much a girl-child of her time. When the children first find the manuscript which begins all their adventures she suggests, to the boys' horror, that they should tell their parents because "I suppose we ought to, that's all" (Under Sea, p.36). When it comes to needing pieces of string or other valuable adventure aids, Jane can only turn out empty, clean pockets 'a trifle smugly' (Under Sea, p.138). She frets when the boys creep through caves, worries about everyone, and is generally the most timid of the three adventurers. Her status in the books rests squarely on her intuitive, that is 'female', powers.

Most of the texts' other females are pleasant and well-meaning figures who also demonstrate flashes of
inspired guesswork or intuition. They play out their roles in the kitchen where they engage in informative gossip, providing the background for traditions like making the Greenwitch and the brief history of Guinevere's few days in twentieth-century Wales, when her son Bran was left behind. Others are baneful, disguising their affiliation with the Dark behind smiles and cakes.

This picture of femininity is an old one. In it, females possess certain gifts or powers which are connected to timeless mysteries beyond the representations of speech and reason. In virtue of these gifts they are peculiarly able to pierce language and logic and to uncover the 'true' nature of things. But this ability is fleeting, more like a dream than waking reason. It is within this shared framework that Jane and the Lady respond to each other, as 'like to like'. Jane and the Lady are alike, and they are also like the law.

Readers are given very little insight into the nature of the law, except that it is always represented by a female. It is presumed to coexist with, and in some sense enable, all the other forms of being encountered. It cannot be defied, not even by the Old Ones.

'But there is nothing to be done. If you were born with the gift, then you must serve it, and nothing in this world or out of it may stand in the way of that service, because this is why you were born and that is the Law'. (Dark, p.52)

The law is beyond good and evil and is the unknowable first cause which provides the superstructure for the books' propositions about time and space and, therefore, for all its world-views. It is the unspoken element of
Will's incomplete subjectivity, and also provides a reference-point for the humanism of the new subject created in the texts' ending. It is enabled to accomplish these disparate tasks because of its extraordinary composition.

It corresponds to what Kristeva describes as an 'operational state', which enables other forms to materialize. A female principle, it is 'receptacle or chora nourishing and eternal' which exists in a moment before the significations of language and the Symbolic. Its Imaginary status is revealed in the relationships with the law which the marvellous characters enjoy. This results, as we have seen, in Will's failure to achieve subjectivity. He, and other marvellous characters, represent the individual who has not yet fully emerged into the Symbolic, but continues in the Imaginary. The marvellous, and its characters, thus provides The Dark is Rising's 'genotext', that framework within which 'the subject will be generated as such'. And the subject to be generated is not the marvellous one, as we now know, but the subject of the new 'real' who only comes into being at the end of the texts.

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31 Moi, pp.94,95. The chora 'precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality' (p.94) and discourse. It is therefore Imaginary, in Lacan's sense of the word.

32 The Imaginary is a Lacanian concept. It precedes the Symbolic, but continues to operate after the splitting of the subject. In it, in relation to meaning, 'perceptual features like resemblance operate - that is to say, in areas where there is a sort of coalescence of the signifier and signified, as in traditional symbolism. For Lacan, the Imaginary relationship, of whatever kind, is also that of a lure, a trap'. (Lacan, Language of the Self, p.175.

33 Moi, p.121.
The law has two distinct functions in *The Dark is Rising*. One is to provide the 'operational state' for the development of the subject. The other is to ground the subject which will emerge, to provide a system of ethics to which it may refer. This second impulse is symbolized in that other element of the marvellous, its mythic figures, of which Arthur is chief. His claim to authority always lay beyond the realistic time of the texts. Its legitimation was founded in an unspecified anterior moment, one to which the marvellous characters themselves were in fee. The texts thus reveal themselves to be engaged in historical inversion. This 'locates such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society and the like in the past'.\(^{34}\) This inversion has the effect of promoting the present and past at the expense of the future since everything of value, everything perfectly good, always existed 'before'. The present and the past can exist in state of simultaneity if the past's values and meanings are coexistent with the present. But the future is unknown and unknowable. It does not yet exist and, what is more, 'never did exist' because the chronotope operating within this framework is at best cyclical and never linear.\(^{35}\) This temporality is mythological and folkloric, the time of Arthur, Herne the Hunter, the Wounded King, and the marvellous.

Will's activities at Caerleon take on yet another layer of signification. Neither the female law of the text nor its marvellous embodiments can provide of themselves the impetus for a future orientation, which

\(^{34}\) Bakhtin, p.147.

\(^{35}\) Bakhtin, p.148.
Merriman will impose upon the children at the end of the texts. As he says, so unprouetically: 'the world is yours and it is up to you' (Silver, p.282). Without the text's efforts on behalf of the realistic at Caerleon their task would be hopeless.

However, in keeping the realistic alive, the texts have retained a foothold for history and its chronotopes. And among the world-views thus given a slim purchase are those which enable a fully-fledged subjectivity which does not rely utterly on the past for its authorization. The realistic which Will represented valiantly at Caerleon was still dependent upon the marvellous. At best it was a project and possibility. It is not until the advent of the new subject, to whom the marvellous and its real will become psychologised effects within 'the hidden places of your minds', that a truly realistic chronotope takes effect. Then, at last, the Dark is Rising's subject comes into its own.

The text's project is to achieve a subjectivity which is socially constituted, in a quite specific British way, but is yet possessed of self-determination. Such a subject must contain within itself a pre-social element which is responsive to the law. The response of right-minded people to cultural archetypes such as Arthur, who bridge the gap between the unrepresentable law and the subject whose generation it enables, is a measure of their right response to the Light within. The texts' impulse is utopian: all subjects may enjoy the fruits of the marvellous. But it admits that this potential will not be easy to achieve. It thus arms its subjects with a mythological, perfect past, against which the future can be measured.
The ideology of the text produces a utopian subject who is constituted by the social and responsive to cultural norms while retaining self-determination, the essential requirement of humanism. The Light thus provides a grounding for the humanist subject in which reason is replaced by the 'consent of silence'. And in an almost gnostic reference, female power is reinstated as fundamental to the world. Male power is utterly dependent upon it, but its presence can only be represented within a system of symbols which actually militates against bringing it into presence. The female principle, opposing signification as such, provides the genotext for the text's new subjectivity. And this subject will carry within itself the legacy of the marvellous: the affirmation of a female law, so far unrepresentable, but the fount and potential of a subjectivity with a 'perilous beauty'.
Chapter Four

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME: BILGEWATER

Nick-name. Old Nick’s name. Bilgewater.
Bilgewater Green.¹

Marigold Daisy Green is also known as Bilgewater or Bilge. Known, that is, by the boys at the boarding school where her father teaches and where she also lives. Her ‘true’ and ‘christened’ name ‘comes into Chaucer’ as she tells us: ‘Daisy, the day’s eye, the eye of day’ (p.12). She has two flower-names; the other also means Mary-gold, though she does not say this. Nor does she remark that her surname, Green, is polyvalent. She shares it, naturally, with everyone else whose surname is Green. But its field of reference is wider than this. Not only do its significations slip away into playing fields, herbage, hothouses, insects, baize and innocence but she lives within another of its shadows. Her father is a housemaster, so they live in Green’s House, a place which is both private and public, their own and an institutional home.

Bilgewater is a name she acquires as a result of relationships. The boys call her this, because she is ‘Bill’s Daughter. Hence Bilgewater’ (p.11). Hence also:

nonsense, rubbish, detritus. But naming is not nonsense at all; it is a very serious business, as we have discovered. Such a plethora of names as Bilgewater displays, and her evident interest in them, justifies the reader in taking special care in piecing together the text's representations about this person, the locus of all these names. The text shows itself to be well aware of its reader's potential caution. Before Bilgewater presents herself as the possessor of such a singularly unspecific torrent of names the reader is granted a privileged position from which to view her equivocal self-narration. Bilgewater's story is framed by a prologue, an introduction to discourse.

The prologue combines effaced narration, in which the narrator's presence is covert, with free indirect discourse, in which some direct speech is given. This is a propitious beginning for an 'I' narrative, combining a hint of omniscience in the opening paragraphs (maximum authority invoked) with a style conventionally used to express a character's thoughts. The movement from one form of narration to the other is seamless; by contiguity an 'I' character, who comes to dominate the prologue, is insinuated within the effect of the earlier narrator. This connection advances the reliability of what the character has to say considerably. An 'I' can be unreliable, but omniscient narrators, no matter how effaced, cannot.

The prologue, in the immediacy of present tense, leads into the inner narrative which takes up precisely where the prologue leaves off, with an 'I' narration. The first three chapters of the inner narrative provide details of Bilgewater's history in first person interwoven narration. The point of equilibrium from which her story
departs, and to which presumably it will return, seems clear in the light of the prologue. Bilgewater's history as given is a kind and embraced one. Her father (a widowed housemaster), the woman who brought her up (the matron, Paula) and a variety of other characters are introduced by means of anecdote, recollection and directly reported speech.

All texts are framed by their existence as material objects, as cultural productions and, in their textuality, by literary conventions. Bilgewater draws attention to itself as a text by naming its frame 'epilogue' and 'prologue', pointing out to its reader that it presents a story within a story. And the connection of frame to what it encloses seems clear: the reader is to be told of the events which led to the situation in the prologue, an interview in a Cambridge college.

Frames are valuable textual devices. Imagine a white painting hanging on a white wall. Unframed, a painting like this allows those who look at it to be implicated in decision-making: they can construct their own beginning and end to it, create the boundary, and decide what is and what is not within the representation. But if the painting is framed, the boundary is clear. The spectator must operate within the limits set down. The painting's frame serves two functions: it denotes the end of the wall and the beginning of the picture.²

² For the concept of frames upon which my discussion is based see Jacques Derrida, The Truth in Painting, translated Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987) especially 'Parergon', pp 17-147 and Jay Caplan, Framed Narratives: Diderot's Genealogy of the Beholder (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1985).
Capturing an object within a frame and enclosing it seems to pin it down, to place it once for all, like a fly in amber. But although the frame limits the interior object it also sets it free, creating it as an object in its own right. No longer part of the wall, its existence is heightened. The frame marks it out and mediates between the spectator and the painting. The frame is more than a mere addition; in the case of the white painting it has actually created it as a perceptible object. Before the frame was put into place the painting’s existence lacked definition. The frame provides a context for its inner object: now we know for sure that it is a painting, not a wall. Once defined the painting can begin to signify as a painting, it can take its place within a semiotics.

Textual frames repeat these purposes. They range from the formulaic simplicity of ‘once upon a time’ to the elaboration of Conrad’s Marlow, who tells a story about Africa to a group of friends sitting in the twilight upon a boat at anchor in the cold currents of the Thames. Because of her frame, Bilgewater need not affirm her authority as a narrator; the prologue has done that for her. She is in the centre of the picture.

The story is contemporary, Bilgewater’s age approximately eighteen (she is being interviewed for a college scholarship). She is English, but not from Cambridge. She is clever. All this serves to provide a ‘frame-work’ for Bilgewater’s character, conveyed, so it seems, by the narrator whose word it is impossible to doubt. The reader comes to the inner story well equipped
to hear what Bilgewater has to say; the prologue has
interposed between reader and Bilgewater's narration to
her apparent advantage. We cannot doubt her story; we
began at the end of it, so that what she tells us has
already happened. It is known and completed. The reader
will assent to the story since it is authorized by an
anterior moment represented by a linguistic consciousness,
the narrator, whose knowledge is presumed to be complete.

Framed narratives make possible a rapid transition
from the reader's world to that of the 'novel' fiction,
but narratives which are not so framed present a world and
characters to which the reader must become gradually
accustomed. When we encounter a character in an unframed
story not only do we have to get used to him or her, we
also have to find a place from which we can undertake the
performance of the character. As we have seen, the 'life'
of this individual depends more upon us, as readers, than
we generally realize. If a character is unframed then our
approach seems to have the advantage of freedom. In
Bilgewater's case, for instance, we could take her to be a
girl without special intelligence. She might turn out to
be anything, really. But the frame has restricted these
possibilities; it has taught us a great deal about
her.

Our interest and investment in Bilgewater's own
narrative begins in the prologue. The latter is a dense
piece of writing moving carefully from a position of
authority to one which is almost confessional. And the
confession: 'Have you ever run mad for love? Considered
suicide?' (p.9) is made by an 'I', a discourse which
presumes an interlocutor. The interlocutor is 'you', is
another 'I': is the reader. So we enter the inner
narrative, Bilgewater's own, as a speaking subject, as an
'I'. The reader is 'you' to Bilgewater's 'I'. Benveniste tells us that these are reversible terms: 'the one whom "I" defines by "you" thinks of himself as "I" and can be inverted into "I", and "I" becomes "you"'. And in speaking the word 'I' the subject does not refer, contrary to our intuition, to its 'self', to the 'me', but to an ideal 'I'. So Bilgewater's I is a projection, as all of our 'I's must be. What can it be for the reader?

Fiction, as we have learned, only tells part of the story. Readers bring a great deal to a text. It is they who, as Docherty points out, evaluate and synthesize the clues they are given about characters, as well as place and event. He calls this 'an act akin to creation'. It is 'an artistic act, the creation of an artefact'. In taking up this role, the reader leaves 'the passive state' and enters into a dialogue of collaboration with the text. This entry into discourse is also 'entering society, for the or she [the reader] breaks the monologic authorial voice, and the evaluations which are made are a joint product'.

The reader must embark upon this task in order to fulfill the requirements of the fiction itself and those of the reader's own desire for the narrative. These are part of the transaction in which readers are implicated as

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3 Benveniste, p.199.


5 Docherty, p.15.
soon as they open a book to read. Bilgewater does not conceal our engagement as readers: on the contrary, the frame gives us the opportunity to stand back and review the processes by which we have constructed the fictional character of Bilgewater herself. Some of the literary conventions which have made it possible for us to engage creatively with the text have been exposed already by the prologue: assumptions about authority, about cultural setting and the limits of the story, its boundary. The reader's role in 'creating' the world of the text and the latter's self-conscious invocation of certain textual conventions through which the reader's engagement is sought, combine to suggest that this is a text which wears its existence on its sleeve. As readers of Bilgewater we are bound to admit our complicity in the narrative.

The displacement of the narrating 'I' from the frame to the inner narrative has taken the reader with it. While we were still reading the prologue we were but spectators, looking in, waiting for our chance to take our place, seeing what that place might be. But as interlocutors, as partners of the 'I', we move into the inner narrative, knowing what we do and loving it: we are trapped by our narrative desire. Marigold Bilgewater Green seems to speak directly to the reader from the page. She tells the story of things which have already occurred, and the reader and narrator are complicit in their surveillance of the subject of narration, which is, of course, Bilgewater herself.

The prologue opens on the candidate's desire to know what to do. Her body language is expressive: she

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'crossed her legs first one way and then the other' and then she wonders about crossing them at all (p.9). She wonders whether to get up, whether she will be offered a cigarette, a sherry. This is her final interview; at the second she was asked if she had any questions. She had, but did not voice them. They were to do with why she was there at all, whether she would want to go to Cambridge even if they invited her, whether any of the people interviewing her have 'run mad for love? Considered suicide? Cried in the cinema? Clung to somebody in a bed?' (p.9). These wondering provide wide-ranging possibilities for narrative development, for telling about a life. The candidate seems bemused: what is she doing there at all, what do the people before her represent, should she cross her legs?

This bafflement finds a ready response in the reading subject, who must connect the prologue to the inner narrative. 'Eternally extended toward the desire of something else - of metonymy', the slippage of the signified from beneath the signifier forces the reading subject onwards, just as narrative itself is impelled. Whatever meanings the reader ascribes to the candidate's uncertainties their excess of signification, what the text does not say, ensures the reader's interest and investment. The impulsion of the chain legs, cigarette, sherry, motive, love, suicide, sexual intercourse, carries the reader forward into Bilgewater's narrative, upon waves of explicit and implicit signification in which the text's and reader's narratives combine.

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As readers we are complicit in the story of a life: we will help to create Bilgewater herself from the representative fragments in a text. And they can be no more than fragments: an hour or so of our time stands for at least 34 years. How shall we extrapolate Bilgewater from these fleeting and incomplete descriptions and conversations? And what will we assemble: a metonymic account of a totality? Or a set of disparate moments which, conventionally, we group under the signifier 'Bilgewater' and hail as a self, a subject? If we create a totality then we have been engaged in a humanist recuperation of the subject or self over time. If the latter, though, we will supervise a discursive formation called Bilgewater, a creation constituted in a dynamic and dialogic relation to other social formations: other 'characters', other institutions and practices.

If this will be our part as readers, how shall we play it? We will not be given a completely free hand: as far as casting goes, certain features of Bilgewater and other characters are handed over to us, so that we can begin our work of filling in: she has red hair, she is intelligent, she is motherless. We cannot avoid making these part of our picture. We learn that her intelligence is of an academic, bookish kind. She is also elitist, something of a snob. She says she is ugly: but we know that a boy called Terrapin thinks she is beautiful (and we know this before she does); we presume that another boy, called Boakes, thinks so too. If we see how it is that we know these things, then some of the tactics which the text employs to ensure we play our part will be revealed. And besides this some things which the text does not manage to say may well come to light.
Macherey claims that texts always display disparities in which the ideologies present to the text may be disclosed. What we must explain is not that ‘false simplicity which derives from the apparent unity of its meaning, but the presence of a relation, or an opposition’; this will point to a ‘conflict of meaning’. This conflict ‘reveals the inscription of an otherness in the work’ and it is through this that the work maintains a relationship with what is at its margins, which is ideology, as we learned earlier.

The marked frame is clearly the site of such an ‘inscription of otherness’. So, too, are other textual ambiguities. One of these is irony. The narrative ‘now’, for instance, is presumed to relate to the prologue which provides, so it seems, a secure reference point for the historical moment. However when the reader encounters the epilogue it becomes plain that the narrative is, in fact, historic. The first ‘I’ narrator is not Bilgewater herself, but the daughter of Tom Terrapin, a boy whom Bilgewater loved. The person who conducts the interview is Bilgewater herself, first woman principal of Calus.

The reader quite naturally assumes that Bilgewater narrating as ‘I’, and the candidate met in the prologue who is also an ‘I’, are identical. And this assumption remains intact throughout the whole of the inner narrative. But no more than six lines of the epilogue have gone by before the reader is disabused. The inner narrative is not only told from a different perspective, but is in fact the story of a someone other than the girl.

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1 Macherey, p.75.
2 Macherey, p.80.
who is the focus of the epilogue and prologue; although linked, the two stories are distinct.

This is a very interesting situation. Bilgewater's story, taken on face value, has been imbued with authenticity by a prologue which, from the vantage point of the epilogue, seems to have framed, set-up, the reader as well as Bilgewater herself. A set of expectations were created by the prologue and inner narrative, but they are by no means confirmed in the text's ending. What this textual device implies about Bilgewater's narration of herself is of the first importance. As we shall see, her certainties and her presuppositions are called into question by it, as is her project of subjectivity.

The story which Bilgewater tells is about the few weeks preceding her attempt at the Cambridge entrance examination. Her narrative is enlivened by recounting moments from the past and illustrations of stereotypical behaviour which, taken together, enrich the reader's understanding of Bilgewater's 'current' state of mind and response to events and people.

At the time now narrated, for instance, Marigold (Bilgewater) Green is thirteen:

I was utterly content with the content of being in the right place at the right time. I, Marigold Green, a figure set in a picture, an equation on a page, a note in a bit of music, nontransposable, irreplaceable. Ugly, quaint and square lay I, happy and at home where I belonged. Sleepily and happily I watched the boy with the flute - it was nice ordinary Boakes - walk mazily though the
lettuces, beneath me and across the lawn.

'BILGEWATER.'

I jumped so my chin cracked down on the window ledge.

I swivelled my eyes, grabbed my glasses and stuck them on my face.

'FILTHY BILGEWATER.'

I turned my face and saw the boy Terrapin hanging out of a window. He was twelve then, a new boy, but he had made himself felt from the moment he arrived last September. Even though he was quite close – the dormitory sticking out at right-angles from the Private Side and looking down at our garden too – I couldn’t mistake him. He has a voice, prematurely breaking, like a rookery.

'BILGEWATER! FILTHY BILGEWATER! WATCHING US UNDRESSING!' (p.29)

In this passage maximum use is made of the ambiguity of past tense, which is conventionally taken to be the 'present' of realistic narration. The narration moves seamlessly between introspection ('I was utterly content'), description ('a figure properly set in a picture') and direct discourse ('BILGEWATER'). The untagged direct discourse invokes the narrative present; Bilgewater inhabits her past for a moment, but then reminds the reader of temporality: 'twelve then, a new boy'. The presumed present moment 'now' is transformed into 'then'.

The way a text deals with time and proposes time to be within its world-model is critically important to the text as a whole and in its representation of character, as
earlier discussions have shown. Within their structure, texts imply a fabula, a sequence of events (or 'story') which take place in 'real' (everyday) time. In turn, the fabula is organized and presented as the narrative, sjuzet, in question.\(^{10}\) In fiction both fabula and sjuzet may be invented, but precisely the same condensation applies to our narrations of 'true' events. We may ask a child what its day was like at school: in the reply a sjuzet is constructed which the listener might criticize by asking the child to cut a long story short. The narrative of Bilgewater spans at least 34 years; some arrangement of time and event is clearly necessary if this story is to be told in brief. Here, the narratives of many years are collapsed into the space of a few weeks, and, in terms of the reader's time, a few hours.

Narrative selects. What it selects and how it presents its selection is neither a neutral nor a transparent activity. In selecting its narrative time the sjuzet intersects with the reader's own time, embroiders a basic plot, proposes a world-model and subtly interprets that world-model (and fabula). Bilgewater's narrated moment is ambiguous: not only is there a question of when is 'now' in terms of the sjuzet but also in the time (period) of narration. Is the narrating Bilgewater only a few days, hours, older than the narrated one, or years? She narrates from another time, and the narrated 'self' is framed: not only by the structural framing of prologue and epilogue but by the boundary of another self, which self, in turn, narrates an even younger child.

\(^{10}\) This terminology comes from the earlier Russian Formalists, and has been adapted by Genette, in his Narrative Discourse, as the distinction between récit (sjuzet) and histoire (fabula).
The reader has been set up by the frame, deluded into thinking that the text is engaging with time and space in a fairly ordinary way, and that it is simply taking advantage of literary conventions to tell the story of a life already lived as if it were being lived in the here-and-now. However the break between prologue and inner narrative is significant: it is a break in time and space. The two stories and times are merely contiguous within the narrative, joined by a slippage of signification. There is a juxtaposition, a connection by way of metonymy, of difference.

Linked to the text’s structural ironies are Bilgewater’s explicit ones. When she sees the headmaster’s wife and Jack Rose (who is head boy, and Bilgewater’s idol) coming out of the local lover’s lane (or bush, in this case), she reports it in this way:

What I discovered now was a surge of excitement and distaste and interest and misery and curiosity and a sort of envy about something...I didn’t understand and did not want to. No I wasn’t. I was seeing something I had always understood and wanted to understand better. (p.38)

De Man distinguishes between simple comedy and le comique absolu, which is irony.11 A simple sense of comedy is a matter of intersubjectivity: someone laughs at someone else (or themselves). Irony, in distinction, designates a relationship between two things which are essentially different. This difference, which can be one

of superiority as between intersubjectivities, indicates 'the distance constitutive of all acts of reflection. Superiority and inferiority then become merely spatial metaphors to indicate a discontinuity and a plurality of levels within a subject that comes to know itself by an increasing differentiation from what it is not.'

In *Bilgewater* the reader is presented with a character who narrates herself and proceeds to do so in an ironic way. 'No I wasn't', in the passage immediately above, creates a distance between two aspects of that self or subjectivity: this is a movement of dedoublment or duplication in which the narrator reflects upon her own response and distances herself from it. De Man's discussion allows this to be taken further: in creating an ironic distance between these two aspects of the self, the proposition is made that the self encompasses essentially different aspects.

We can interpret Bilgewater's ironies as representing 'a plurality of levels' within one continuous subjectivity or take this dedoublment as evidence of discrete disparate moments linked together only by the imposition of a unifying signifier, a proper name. Judging which of these is indicated can only be done by examining the sort of existence which Bilgewater is afforded by the text and by the reader; these need not be the same.

This brief example shows Bilgewater's reassessment of herself as almost instantaneous: 'What I discovered now...No I wasn't.' For the moment, we can leave aside the question of what this might imply about present to one's self, and ask instead what this irony means in terms

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13 De Man, p.213.
of the relationship of reader to narrator. This may become a little clearer if we look at more extreme examples; extreme, that is, in terms of their ironic distance between narrator and narrated self.

Here Bilgewater is describing her father’s friends, colleagues at the school. They are mostly older than he. The foremost of them, Uncle Edmund Hastings-Benson, served his country in the First World War. Bilgewater admires him:

It seems to me that Uncle Edmund Hastings-Benson has served his country well if someone twenty, thirty years on can say ‘D’you remember him?’ and roar and laugh. Such a man is an immortal, a god come down. In fact let me state boldly that if I had to choose between Hastings-Benson and a god come down, full ankle deep in lilies of the vale (Keats, Paula) it would be Hastings-Benson for me every time. I love him. We understand each other. He is far from dead yet. (pp.15-16)

But people at the school laugh at him, because he is always falling in love. His first love was apparently Bilgewater’s own mother, who died in childbirth. But ‘in fact however I don’t believe my mother loved Uncle Edmund at all — or just as everybody does’ and as Bilgewater herself does (p.16). Her father has kept his dead wife’s photograph by his bed ‘for all these seventeen years’ and ‘has never looked at another woman’ (p.16).

Uncle Edmund’s love is somewhat like an adolescent’s: ‘on and on he goes — first it’s the girl in the chemist in
the town, then it's the new woman on school dinners, then it's the terrible 'cellist they got in for the school orchestra'; none of these loves last for full seventeen years, clearly (p.16). It seems likely that none of them bear fruit at all. However, having weathered the storms of Uncle Edmund's passions, Bilgewater feels herself able to say:

Thus I have been no stranger to love, isolated though my life has been. The derangement love seems to cause has actually made me value isolation more as term has followed term.

And I love the holidays. (p.17)

Bilgewater loves her Uncle Hastings-Benson because he understands her. He loves numerous unsuitable or unattainable women; Bilgewater's father loved his wife. And Bilgewater loves the holidays too. We shall soon learn that Bilgewater also loves, serially, boys called Rose, Terrapin and Boakes as well as Paula, who has brought her up and taught her Keats among other things.

Love clearly means different things in each case. Values private and public are at work in this example of heterology. What particular value Bilgewater ascribes to each of her uses 'love' is not of the first importance for our discussion. Rather it is the juxtaposition of these different values which claims our attention. Bilgewater has described her knowledge of love with care, viewing her elderly Uncle with amusement and tolerance, her father with due respect, and her own feelings with slight smugness (loving Uncle H.B. because they 'understand' each

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13 Heterology is Bakhtin's term for diversity of language. We shall return to this point later.
other). This achievement culminates in self-congratulation: she is 'no stranger to love'. She finally crowns all the work she has done by saying that she loves the holidays.

So what are we to make of 'And I love the holidays'? The passage comes very early in the text, when Bilgewater is bringing us up to date with her life. In the first two chapters movement between the recent past, distant past and the presumed narrative present is recurrent and generally unmarked. It seems likely that 'And I love the holidays' is a comment from the here-and-now Bilgewater. But it is not certain. She continues: 'Let me describe how it is with father and me in the school holidays' (p.17). Is it holiday time now? It turns out that it is not. The description is of some other time, some other 'now'. The importance of all this is that the reader, in attempting to locate a place in the text from which to engage with it, is forced either to take a stand within the narrative (here I am and here I stay; this is now and that is then) or move within it, taking up a place in the historic past or the current present, whatever the case may be. Bilgewater has made it clear that we, as readers, ought to stay with the narrative 'now' because it is only from this position, the place of the present-time narrator, that we can take part in the irony held out to us. We can only look back at the younger Bilgewater through the older Bilgewater's eyes. The eye-witness frames the younger 'I', and the reader is part of, implicated in, this framing. We know that such security will not sustain the reader's position through the shock of the epilogue. But for the moment we must let this greater irony pass.
The simple existence of a character presumes time, but the type of temporality involved is variable. A character in a realist novel, for instance, can be claimed to be 'developed' or 'developing, a metaphoric description which connects not only to the idea of temporality as progressive but also as (possibly) evolutionary. The notion of progress itself implies a linear causal chain. The convergence of linearity and continuity provides a firm foundation for the realist character.

When a character is implicated in a continuous, linear causal chain his or her existence is based on anterior authority. Since the arrow of time is proposed as moving forwards only, its passage can be marked; effect, in other words, follows cause. A discontinuous or disorganized notion of temporality, where gaps in time are unaccounted for in the fabula itself (that is, where cause and effect, or linear time, cannot be implied) enables a different type of plot and character formation from that produced by a continuous, progressive temporality. Discrepant ordering implied from the sjuzet (effect preceding cause, cause producing no effect and so on) implies a different sense of lapsed time, for the fabula as well as the sjuzet. Passing time, chronological time, is linear and diachronic. Time which stands still, goes backwards, or repeats, cannot imply a chronological fabula. Synchronic time, the continuous present, can strictly speaking show no evolution or causality.

This is not to suggest that disordered narratives (flashback, flashforward) imply non-chronological time. Indeed, this narrative re-ordering of time need be nothing more (or less) than a series of timeless moments ordered to provide an account, a reading, of some character or event. As such they represent a redemption of time (or a
consumption) aimed towards a project, a history. This is one of narrative’s functions; literally to make sense. A fabula implicating time which truly stands still, or reverses, must be ‘fantastic’ in Todorov’s sense, for readers of today at least.14

Historic time is the time of continuity, of chronos. Kairos, fulfilled time, is essentially teleological in nature, in that its end is not only achieved, but the significance of that end is always present to it. This is, in fact, ‘untimely’ time, intemporal time.15

It seems, intuitively, that chronos is the time of the realistic novel. After all, we readers live in chronos, passing time. But as Kermode makes clear, modern man’s way of ‘living’ in passing time is such that the time of moment-to-moment needs to be imbued with significance. We ‘live’, it seems, not from moment-to-moment as passing time but from kairos to kairos: time no more, significant, endless, timeless times. The reader recuperates chronos from kairos; an odd activity because, of course, such a recuperation raises our expectations of what chronos might be: an endless succession of timeless moments, of heart- and time-stopping occasions. Such is the ‘realism’ of much ‘realistic’ fiction.

We can see this process at work in Bilgewater. By and large, she reflects kairos. That is how 34 years are squeezed into a few hours of reading time. And we shall

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14 See Todorov, The Fantastic, and the previous chapter.

see that this time without time is not merely implied in the text but actually made explicit. The three most important episodes in the book share this sense of timeless.

In each case the events are removed from the day-to-day: all encounters are situated against a background of Bilgewater's resistance to certain elements of the social and expose her reaction to enforced association with them. The first episode concerns a school dance, the second a weekend away from home, the third an outing. In the first she refuses to go to the dance since, in a break with tradition, this is to be held on the local pier. The pier is represented as rundown and tawdry and as a place in which Bilgewater had already undergone a social trauma:

Most of the pavilion is on dry land but at the back towards the stage the boards beneath your feet grow cold and you can look down between the cracks and see the sea whitening rhythmically beneath you. When I was a small child I once went to a horrible fancy-dress dance there and sat alone for hours on a tip-up red velvet seat round the side of the ball room, glaring through my glasses at all the fairies and clowns, decked out myself in whatever it was the Paula had found for me at the last minute, speaking to no one. All that I really knew of the pier was the hell of that evening and the terrors of the final parade: that and the cracks with the sea underneath, and the great tumult of the band. (p.93)
She also indicates her distress at the public nature of the proposed dance:

'Good heavens - Awful people -' I thought of Aileen Sykes and Beryl. They were the sort. Bare mid-riffs. Purple lips. Someone once told me that Beryl's mother worked there at the ticket office - eating biscuits and knitting. A wave of loyalty to ancient St Wilfrid's flooded over me.

'This'll be a private dance,' I said, 'I don't see the pier being the place for a private dance.' (p.94)

In the end she goes, taken by Terrapin: he takes her not to the dance, but to the pier itself: 'I don't mean to the dance, fool. Let's go to the pier. Get a coat' (p.99). However, she loses sight of him and, alone, begins a series of surreal adventures. On approaching the ticket kiosk which looks like 'an upright coffin or a box a doll might arrive in for a birthday...It was a mummy-case but there was no mummy inside it' she finds a fat, dirty old woman, who seems to be stuck inside (p.100). Horrified, she goes for help and returns with her idol Jack Rose, only to find the old woman gone. Jack himself is slightly drunk and Bilgewater notices that he has small eyes and hot, heavy hands. She staggers from this encounter to the ballroom itself but flees from the sight of her friends and family dancing - from what she sees as the world 'run mad' (p.103). She runs, with her hands outstretched, to an emergency exit. Upon gaining the outside she goes to a roped off area beyond which the pier's decay is actual. She is rejoined by Terrapin, who encourages her down an iron spiral staircase which is only precariously attached to the pier. They look at the rise
and fall of the sea; she is enchanted, but afraid. She leaves him. On regaining the deck they are interrupted by Jack Rose, who destroys the staircase.

In this dreamlike sequence, where characters present themselves and disappear only to reappear later in unexplained circumstances (why does Terrapin suddenly appear, when a moment before he was dancing with someone else; why does Rose leave the dance and arrive at the end of the pier?) Bilgewater is confronted by symbols of sexuality (the pier itself, the womb-like structure with the woman stuck horribly in it, the sea), with symbols of death and decay (mummy-cases, coffins, the collapsing pier) and with a stairway, a beautiful, tempting connection which is also potentially destructive, all of which attract and repel her.

She has been forced to face the combination of her father's school (and her home), 'ancient St Wilfrid's', and the awful Aileen Sykes; what is worse is that she seems to be the only person who finds this odd.

I saw Paula with her hair bobbing like Africa and Mrs Gathering in a great deal of dark silk, Uncle HB at arm's length and in ecstasy with Grace, faces, faces — Miss Bex — Miss Bex — revolving in a long red pinafore — and Aileen Sykes pressed cheek to cheek against — oh no! oh no! Cheek to skin against Terrapin. (p.103)

More than the Aileen Sykeses of this world have combined with St Wilfrid's here. Miss Bex is Bilgewater's English teacher, a person who at this stage in the text still doubts her pupil's intelligence. Miss Bex not only lacks perspicacity but she is unpleasant to look at; she and
Bilgewater have never liked each other. Paula, Bilgewater’s adored mother-substitute, whirls about in the same place as Mrs Gathering, the headmaster’s wife, who is ‘like someone you’ve vaguely heard about in a rather bad book’ (p.36). Uncle HB is being unsuitably transfixed by the beautiful Grace and Terrapin (who brought Bilgewater to the pier and deserted her) dances with awful Aileen.

‘Private’ is an elastic term in Bilgewater’s vocabulary. The part of the school House where she lives in seclusion with her father is called the ‘Private Side’; when it comes to a confrontation with the wider world the school itself is ‘private’: this is a ‘private’ dance, or should be. But what she faces when she enters the ballroom is ‘awful’ Aileen Sykes dancing with Terrapin, check to check. No wonder she runs away; people are dancing on her preconceptions. More to the point, they show that they are hers alone.

For Bilgewater, this is a timeless moment because it cannot find a place within the everyday. It has the quality of a nightmare; logic fails, particularly Bilgewater’s logic; her ‘nice, ordinary’ ordering of things.

Again the sea raised itself up and charged. Again it went for us, snarled, grabbed, passed by. Again it broke behind us.

‘Terrapin — why —?’

‘It’s wonderful,’ he said, ‘I love it.’

‘Terrapin, I’m frightened.’

‘Frightened. Frightened. Always frightened. Go on then.’
He let me go and I fled up the stairs and crawled up on to the swinging metal floor of the pier above. He followed and stood beside me. 'Bilge,' he said, 'Marigold.' (p.104)

Similar themes are present in the second episode, in which Bilgewater has gone to spend a weekend at the Roses'. He and his parents overeat and overdrink in Bilgewater's opinion; behave, in fact, in a manner which matches their appearance. They all have tiny eyes and red faces. The implication is that they would be more at home in a farmyard; the Roses' name is an irony. Bilgewater also discovers Rose and Grace (a further irony, since although she is beautiful, Grace lacks virtue) 'rolling about together in silence on the floor.' (p.126) His home is described:

Over the front door - it was a detached house with a semi-circular asphalt drive - was a big white glass cube, the sort that lights up at night and had DENTIST printed on it in black letters...Above the door were two windows side by side with a joint black balcony, all curlicues. The house was made of white lavatory brick and on either side of the front door was an identical mustard-coloured conifer. Two ever-mustards. The symmetry of everything was so marked that one felt there was a mirror about somewhere, a very cheap, clear mirror without powers of enhancement and there was a deadness and silence over the house that added to the unreality. I had never
seen a building that struck such a chill.
(p.114)

Unreality is linked to deadness and achieves a mirroring which reflects nothing of Bilgewater, which has no power to enhance or enchant: a symmetry which reflects itself reflecting itself endlessly. At this house made of 'lavatory brick' she endures a drunken (but beautifully cooked) dinner and a morning drinks party. Bilgewater runs away, lowering herself over the curlicued balcony. She finds herself at Terrapin's house, which she has reached by an extraordinary route.

The old woman who was stuck in the kiosk at the pier appears on the bus which takes Bilgewater to the Roses'. They sit together, to Bilgewater's dismay. The fat, dirty old woman says that she lives at Marston Hall, and that Bilgewater should call on her if she ever needs help. Bilgewater's response is repulsion: 'I thought not in a million years, not for fire, flood, pestilence or famine would I go near such a person as you ever, ever, ever' (p.113). However, in her flight from the Roses' she forgets that she has no money, and has to get off the bus at Marston Bungalow. Mrs Deering is her only recourse so she looks for her in the dark and the rain. She stumbles across grand but dilapidated gates and finds herself before a great, decaying mansion.

When Bilgewater knocks at the door of the great dark house Terrapin, to her amazement, opens it. The house is in glorious decomposition: a Grinling Gibbons staircase ascends past great empty rooms, and earlier Terrapins gaze down from niches upon the pair as they go up to a small tower room in which Terrapin lives. In this turret room Terrapin tells her about his family: about his mother, an
aristocrat and his father, a pierrot. Terrapin is reassessed:

He stood looking at me very seriously indeed, his fair hair hanging down, his cheek-bones gaunt, his eyes round and large and blue. I noticed how tall he was, the immense length of his legs in black velvetish trousers, his long thin top half in a white roll-top jersey and I thought again, he is like a clown. A very distinguished, marvellous clown.

There was something else about him, too, which I found difficult to admit because it was an archaism, a sort of borrowed standard, the sort of thing that my dearest Uncle Edmund HB or silly Puffy Coleman or pathetic Mrs Gathering might have said. He looked a gent. (p. 143)

Bilgewater tells him she loves him: their tête-à-tête is interrupted by Mrs Deering and once again Bilgewater runs away.

The similarities in the episodes are marked: each occurs in extraordinary circumstances and each concerns an epiphany, to which Mrs Deering acts the midwife. Bilgewater's father actually calls her 'Mother Gamp' later (p.179). But the images and symbols are distinct. The Roses' house, of 'lavatory brick', is cold and dead: with its carefully discreet and neutral decoration it contains a form of reproduction from which Bilgewater turns in distaste, from which she leaps, as it were, denying even the usual method of entry and exit as she lowers herself from the balcony. The Roses' house represents static
reproduction, the repetition of clones. It is an end-
point of self-reproducing sameness.

Tom Terrapin’s house on the other hand is beautiful
but decayed; the turret in which Terrapin lives is
dangerous, cracked and crumbling. The images are of
luxuriant life; the house itself and Terrapin’s story are
romantic, if not gothic. The decaying abundance and
opulence of the Gibbons staircase, the statues and
paintings evidence of a long and rich inheritance, the
sable coat with which Terrapin covers her (it was his
grandmother’s) all speak of another ending. Terrapin’s
line is dying, worn away by weather, time, and over-
fruitfulness.

Bilgewater has lost a love in Rose and found one in
Terrapin. Both experiences are undeniably sexual and
dangerous; wonderful but frightening. The final timeless
episode is quite different. Bilgewater returns to the
Roses’ house, but summons Uncle H.B. to fetch her. He
does, and they spend the day with ‘nice, ordinary’ Roakes
and his father, the vicar of a church near to the Roses’.
In recounting the day she says of it:

These events were all usual. Other people
all around us were doing the same things.
Yet the memory of them doesn’t come up
with a name for what went on. It was
just a series of things that were
important and beautiful and namelessly
good, an experience proof against
nostalgia, proof against the distortions
of time. An experience one is the better
for having had even when the brain grows
soft and slow and can’t remember whether
it has just locked the door or was just about to do so. (p.169)

The ancient cathedral seems to Bilgewater to be a part of the natural world: the wind blows through it as if it were a forest. But it is a tamed forest filled with pools of light and the voices of choir-boys. All is calm and fruitful order, unlike the tumbling splendour and cracked tower of Terrapin's house, the awful chaotic surge of the sea at the pier or the deadening repetition of the Roses'. The experience speaks this difference: it is 'proof against nostalgia', protected from subornment by romance. Bilgewater is saying loud and clear that for her romance and fruitless repetition is delusion and disorder but that reason and fruitful progress is 'namelessly good'.

This last moment of kairos is not a nightmare, it is 'proof against the distortions of time', worth remembering and capable of remembrance even when one is too old to remember to turn the gas off. It is a moment so right, so good, that it will stand the test of chronos and remain sharp and clear in the light of day, in the logic of day, when the other moments have long faded into vague and disturbing memories. This is a moment which should be caught like a fly in amber, and what is more, will be: it is 'proof against nostalgia': this is true. So this moment is the one which the narrator wants us, as readers, to make our own. We must prefer this to the others, judge them by its standards, and find them wanting. This is a moment in which kairos is made over, as much as it can be, into chronos. The descriptions of Bilgewater's day are given with the sort/detail we have come to expect. Certain features and events are foregrounded: the lunch,
for example, is a paradigmatic festive meal; evensong is sung in a pool of light enclosed by and accentuating the darkness of the great cathedral, the choir-boys wear archaic clothing and sing, angelically, into the stone forest.

This moment is memorable, and supersedes the other moments of kairos. It is, like the others, narrated in a style which effaces heterology and imposes one authoritative discourse upon all the others which Bilgewater has impersonated. The values here are undoubted: Bilgewater does not love any of these things, but expresses their importance by failing to name them explicitly: they are so important that they are 'namelessly good'. This final moment superimposes itself upon passing time, reforms and informs it. It is 'proof against nostalgia': it will remain fruitful, informing chronos. This moment is projected into an endless future, Bilgewater's future. It will remain with her, the same but different, lighting chronos as the pool of light in the cathedral lit its seemingly endless darkness. It will be a continuing thread in Bilgewater's life, as permanent but different as each evensong, every festive meal is a fruitful repetition. The past can resonate with the future as the choir-boys make Elizabethan clothing contemporary.

Nameless good may not seem to be much of an advance on romance. But ideology's name, like Jahweh's, cannot be spoken: to be nameless is to be unsignified. The Hebrews were warned against making graven images, and Bilgewater wisely continues to obey the injunction. But certain of her preferences betray her.
Clues to Bilgewater’s nameless standards, which crystallize in this moment of kairos, are scattered throughout the text. For her the ‘ordinarily nasty’ is goblins and devils (p.159). Although she is the child of misfortune, motherless, this actually makes her ‘princess-like and rather quaint’ (p.11). Her father is ‘memorable and eccentric’ and ‘is certainly William the Silent’ (p.12). In spite of his silence he is ‘amazed to hear of new masters with sweaters and fizzy hair cuts who smoke in class and have trouble keeping discipline’ (pp.12-13). Bookes, too, is ‘nice’ and ‘ordinary’ (p.29).

Ordinary to Bilgewater, perhaps. Is this ordinary for the reader? Bilgewater presents herself as ugly and odd; oddly dressed, oddly parented, oddly loving. But here is Bilgewater describing Paula, her mother-substitute:

She’s lovely, Paula. She has a grand straight back joining on to a long, duchess-like neck and a whoosh of hair scooped into a silky high bundle with a pin... Paula has a voice like Far from the Madding Crowd — beautiful. ‘There’s my duck,’ ‘That’s my lover.’ To show you the full marvellousness of Paula when she says, ‘That’s my lover’ to any of the boys who’s in her sick room I’ve never heard of one who sniggered.

Paula’s deep funny burry voice goes with her rosy cheeks and bright eyes and hurtling feet. She is always running and usually towards you. ‘Oh for a beaker full of the warm South,’ always makes me think of Paula, and I told her so the first time she read it to me when I was
about eleven. I was a very late reader
and it was an effort even at eleven to
sit down and read for long so Paula used
to read to me. I wish she did so still.
‘Warm south,’ says Paula, ‘Wish I
wurr an’ not in this God-forsaken hoole.’ (p.26)

Certain assumptions are made about readership:
‘Paula has a voice like Far from the Madding Crowd’: the
text’s implied reader would recognize at once that Paula’s
accent is a Dorset (in Hardy’s fiction Wessex) one. The
quotation from Keats (‘Oh for a beaker of the warm South’) is
juxtaposed with Paula’s own demotic: ‘That’s my
lover’.

Bakhtin distinguishes between language (the code) and
its utterance, discourse. Discourse is ‘interindividual’
and is linked to the ‘world of values, unknown to
language’. Language is the raw material which enables
signification but, as we have seen, an understanding of
what this signification intends is dependent upon context.
We know what value, what meaning to put upon the word
‘rose’ only when we know how to place it within a
discourse. According to Bakhtin all languages, such as
English or French, carry within them types of languages
belonging to, say, a profession, an institution (schools,
science, the state itself), age, class, and familiarity:
families have their own language, specified within their
group. He calls diversity of language heterology.17

16 Todorov, Bakhtin, p.53.

17 The discussion which follows is solely concerned
with prose. Bakhtin makes different points about poetic
language. See especially ‘Discourse in the Novel’ in
'Alien words' are the words of another language, and we know that 'language' here refers to a system of signification which enables discourse. Alien words can come from a different national language-group but within the novel are more generally those from another lexicon within the language-group of the text. In *Bilgewater* for example we see instances of dialect given as alien words. These words are twice alienated, in fact, because they are represented phonetically as well as being separated syntactically from other representations of speech.

Paula's speech is interesting in this respect. She and the headmaster's wife are the only characters in the novel whose speech patterns are embellished with phonetic spellings. The story is set in the north of England, in Yorkshire, but the dialect of this area is not taken to be the 'received' spoken language of the book. This is *Bilgewater*, taking part in a game of chess with her father:

'Cor luv a duck,' I said to father, 'you're a blummin' genius!' (I talked North.)

'William,' said HB, 'I wish you'd stop this.'

'Hmmm?' said father.

'This vulgarity, Bilge's vulgarity.'

'I'm not vulgar.'

'My dear child, you are now and then. Very vulgar. As an old friend, a

Dialogic Imagination, pp. 259-422.

10 Bakhtin, p. 277.
privileged friend, who has known you since you were—'

'Hey,' I said, picking up a horse.
'---she would not have cared for it.'
'Who wouldn't?' said father, blinking.
'Daisy', said HR, meaning mother and dropping his eyes. 'Daisy would not have cared for Hilge saying 'blummin' genius.'

(p.58)

This tells us that Bilgewater 'talks North'; unlike her father, her (dead) mother, and the other teachers at the school. 'Talking north', by and large though, is not worth commenting on: everyone does it (except Paula, Mrs Gathering, Grace Gathering, all the masters at the school, her own father and, presumably, all, or at least most, of the boys). Her 'talking North' is, in fact, paradigmatically Cockney. 'Cor, luv a duck' is a piece of Dr Higgins's 'kerbstone English'.

North' then, seems to be not so much an accent or dialect but a way of talking which is 'vulgar': that is, common.

What is the purpose of marking this discourse as common? When Bilgewater says that she 'talked North' is this a thing of the past for her? Did she talk North when she played chess with her father, but cease to do so at some time between that moment and the moment of narration, whenever that is? Bilgewater certainly does not see herself as common: here she is discussing the Gatherings (the headmaster and his wife) with Paula:

'Not at name 'ere,' says Paula often,

\[10\] Bernard Shaw, Pygmalion (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1985) p.27.
'thoase Gatherin's. They're Southerners.'

'Well what about you?'

'They're different. Different again from me.'

'How?'

Paula thumped the iron about and turned it flat side up and gazed intently at it as if it knew the answer. The silver triangle was scorched all over with rusty stripes where she had burned things.

'You'll burn your face.'

She moved the iron nearer to her cheek, country brown and red though it had seen little but cold Yorkshire weather for years.

'I don't know roightly,' she said.

'It's what used to be called County. Before that it was Gentry.'

'Gentry's a bit ancient,' I said, 'and I don't like County. It's not right to say County.'

'You mean it's not county to say County. Don't you come this Marxism—we're-all-one with me.'

'No—I don't mean that,' I said. 'But it's only people who think they are less than County who talk about County. I'm not less than Mrs Gathering.' (p.36)

Bilgewater's own accent opens up the matter of what is the 'received' language of the book: what is 'ordinary' here. That is, not 'county', not 'vulgar', not the 'funny old-fashioned Oxford' (p.170) of Uncle Edmund Hastings-Benson but Bilgewater's own special argot, an
amalgam of her academic background and regional accent (and lexicon) not thought to be a dialect.

This says a great deal. Paula's dialect is charming, like its user. It is combined with a 'deep funny burry' voice and the goodness of the countryside (p.20). Paula comes from the 'warm South', a non-existent land, like Hardy's Wessex. Just as a social space is created between the 'Private side' and the boys' side of Green's House, and then between the school itself and the outside world, so the 'warm South' is placed within a geography which imposes upon the objective map of Britain Bilgewater's own fictionalized account. Paula's difference, symbolized by her accent and ruddy complexion, is privileged. Talking North is vulgar, talking Wessex is not. And the distinction lies here: Wessex, like the warm South, is a fantastic world which cannot be accurately mapped. It is drawn into Bilgewater's nameless good by virtue of the fact that it cannot be pinpointed, it escapes particularization, its significations slipping from beneath attempts to place it.

Mrs Gathering, on the other hand, is County:


Her voice is distinct from Uncle HB's old-fashioned officer's voice, which is a mixture of Oxford, public school and the professional upper middle class as it existed before 1914. Uncle HB is unmarried and retains
the nobility and innocence supposed to be typical of the generation of young Englishmen who went to be slaughtered in France, an ideological account which promotes the idea of a society thought to have existed in Britain before the First World War, in which gentlemen and everyone else existed in an unspecified but organic relation. Such a society produced a flowering which was never harvested or tested since it met an untimely end in the fields of Flanders. Mrs Gathering's speech is contemporary; it may not be County to say County, but people do: and in County tones, too. This is the point of Bilgewater's remark: she is claiming a position vis-à-vis Mrs Gathering which is not inferior nor superior but neither does it suspend the necessity for making such judgements. After all, it is in Terrapin's favour that he looks a 'gent'.

Bilgewater's ironies have established a bond between reader and narrator, an agreement about the preferred view of proceedings. One of these has gone almost unnoticed so far. Bilgewater is clever. More importantly, she lives in and is surrounded by an institution which reproduces a system which values cleverness, promotes it, and takes for granted that advantages will accrue to those who can show that they 'belong' to this elite. This 'cleverness', it ought to be said at once, is not only an intellectual attribute but is part of a specific knowledge system whose credentials have surfaced throughout Bilgewater's narrative. She belongs to the long line of the syllabus: the 'accepted' poets, the 'accepted' religion, the 'accepted' norms and standards by which 'scholarship' will be judged.

It is interesting to note that she is specifically prepared for her entrance into this privileged world not by her own Comprehensive day school (non-elite, mixed sex,
and non-fee-paying, full of awful people like Aileen Sykes) but by her father and the masters at the school in which she lives. In fact her teacher at the comprehensive school thinks it rather ludicrous that she should attempt Cambridge entrance. The inference is all too clear: Comprehensive school pupils may not assume that a place, let alone a scholarship, awaits them in Cambridge. But Mr Green's pupils are used to the idea, and discard it only if they, in spite of everything, turn out to be too dim.

Bilgewater's intelligence is her yardstick:

Or perhaps I had not thought, not thought at all about anything since Monday, only felt; and the bit of thought or what Paula calls headwork that had occurred down in the study had restored me to myself again or at least to some sort of inner self-respect.

(p.59)

Headwork and thought are important; here Bilgewater is touching base. At this moment she is reassessing her response to Grace Gathering's return. Later Grace attempts to 'help' Bilgewater to fit in with the sorts of things which the girls at the Comprehensive do and like. For instance, Grace takes her a chainstore to buy clothes to replace the rather odd collection which Paula provides. But although Bilgewater enjoys Grace's attentions, and glories briefly in a new hairdo and clothes, in the end these turn out to be vulgar. Terrapin, for instance, reproves her. 'She'll make a mess of you' is all he can find to say about the new, smartened up Bilgewater. When he says he liked her before she replies 'First I'd heard of it.' He winces; Bilgewater is 'reminded of Uncle HB when he said that I was vulgar' (p.87).
This may seem a far cry from headwork, but it is in fact part of a comprehensive system of preferences and cultural signals. It is, after all, perfectly all right to look good. Paula has a certain knack: 'whatever she wears looks expensive' (p.20) and expensive here means superior, since Paula is directly compared to 'pork butchers' wives in polyester and earrings' who have presumably spent large sums on looking like 'Christmas trees' (p.20).

Bilgewater defines her 'ordinary' carefully and clearly. 'These events were all usual. Other people all around us were doing the same things,' she says of the day spent at Durham (p.169). Not, of course, that for everyone else these were necessarily moments of kairos. But for the group who spent the day together the ordinary was extraordinary. Boakes's father says that it has been "A heavenly day" (p.169). It is heavenly, eternal, 'proof against nostalgia' because it confirms Bilgewater's ordinary.

At the end of Bilgewater's narrative all the threads are gathered together. 'You're in, you're in. If there are Further Interviews they are thinking — ah. Hum — in terms of an Award. A Scholarship. You too, Boakes,' Bill Green tells them (p.197). Upon this wonderful piece of news Paula flings herself into Bill Green's arms and Bilgewater announces that they will get married. Bilgewater and Boakes have just learned that Rose has run away with Mrs Gathering, and Terrapin with Grace. That only leaves the two who are about to achieve an Award or Scholarship. They will go down for their interviews together, Boakes says. 'And to my great astonishment I
found that I agreed to this, with a very particular sort of excitement', Bilgewater concludes (p.197).

It is a stylized closure, in which all of Bilgewater's terrors and disturbances are packed away, out of sight and, by implication, out of mind for ever. It seems that Bilgewater's namelessly good has triumphed over the evils she was able to name: the deadly repetition of the Roses', the virtueless Grace, the decadence of Terrapin. And all this has worked out through the sympathetic actions of an imponderable destiny, the same sort of motivation which Bilgewater encountered in her moments of kairos. It is a destiny which leaves Bilgewater with Boakes, a narrative reworking of ideology which ensures that the school, the church, reason, and fruitful repetition survive in the end to justify Bilgewater's past for her.

And at this moment, when the inner narrative has reached its climax and Bilgewater seems about to walk into future with Boakes, happily fulfilling her destiny (some of which the reader thinks is known: the candidate wondering whether to cross her legs or not), the reader encounters the epilogue. Here is the candidate, wondering what to do. But this is not Bilgewater at all. The candidate is Terrapin's and Grace's child.

Just as Miss Terrapin used to see Bilgewater's name 'in letters of gold every morning in prayers' (p.199) on the comprehensive school's Honours Board, so the reader is forced to turn back and gaze at the portrait of Bilgewater, captured by its frame. It is a portrait in which the reader has been implicated as a speaking subject, as we have seen. The reader is the interlocutor of the 'I' narrator and is therefore 'you', another 'I'.
Whatever it is we see, we have in large part created it. But our certainties are thrown into confusion. Bilgewater is not the person we thought we knew: or is she? After such an intense and close association the distancing of the frame is something of a shock. Not only Bilgewater but her interlocutor, the reader, is framed, becomes an object.

Where do we stand? Can we, as readers, still gaze with her at all her earlier selves, allow ourselves to be drawn into her point of view, making it our own, or must we now take up a position from within the frame, and scrutinize her from its perspective? It is Miss Terrapin who sits, wondering whether or not to cross her legs, wondering whether she wants to go to Cambridge or not, in the bleak and brutal afternoon of the book’s opening. It is Miss Terrapin’s ‘I’ narration which is emboldened by her narrator’s introduction and assimilation. It is by virtue of Miss Terrapin that we were able to jump, all unaware, straight into Bilgewater’s world.

In the epilogue, Miss Terrapin sees that Bilgewater is ‘saddish’. Terrapin’s daughter decides not to take a scholarship, even if one is offered. She will go to a flat in the Earls Court Road, and live instead with Grace. Terrapin still lives in his crumbling house, which has become a theatre. Lady Boakes hesitates in the quadrangle, asks about the tower: is it still there? She asks Miss Terrapin to tell her father that she’s ‘sorry, About the tower’ which was ‘always unsafe’ (p.200).

But this is more than a touch of tristesse. Bilgewater is undone; what she insisted upon as ordinary, as desirable, as so usual as to be taken for granted is precisely what Miss Terrapin turns away from. She is
rejecting assumptions about an intellectual life which Bilgewater took for granted, from ideas of what is socially proper (she will 'shack up with mother in the Earls Court Road'), from the solemnity and cold oldness of it all (p.200). This is not just, or even, a generation gap. Although Miss Terrapin has only five pages in which to develop her particular distances and personal preferences, they are part of a structural opposition which profoundly increases their force.

The frame is not Bilgewater's story in a different guise, nor does it provide an authoritative commentary upon it. The narrator makes no comment upon the Bilgewater the reader now encounters. We only have Miss Terrapin's response to Bilgewater to go on, and what does she know? She is only eighteen, a candidate. And yet what she feels about Bilgewater, that she is 'saddish', that she wears 'a good fur coat' and that so far as Miss Terrapin can imagine Bilgewater 'has never done anything silly in her life', cannot fail to affect the reader (p.199,200). Because we also learn that 'Father was absolutely crazy' about Bilgewater, and that Miss Terrapin has, according to Lady Boakes, 'your father's cheekbones' and 'your mother's charm' (p.199). She also has Grace's 'curious pink-gold hair' (p.198). What price Bilgewater's certainties now?

Who is this person who walks the courtyard, slightly sadly, with Miss Terrapin? Bilgewater had decided for headwork, for the world she knew, the one she defined as ordinary. It was clear that this was only one of many worlds and that she had been offered at least three others: the worlds of Grace, Rose, and Terrapin. These were all bundled away in the last scramble for certainty which immediately preceded Bilgewater's own self-
realization. Bilgewater's elaborate representations of the 'ordinary' created in distinction from what is not ordinary and nice (Aileen Sykes, Miss Bex, Mrs Deering, the Gatherings, Rose and even, it has to be said, Terrapin) are evidence enough that she is hard at work creating a personal frame, filling in or out the word 'Bilgewater'. She cuts a swathe through linguistic and social forms; turning away from the deadening uniformity of the Roses, the morbid overabundance of the Terrapins and the vulgarity and dirt of the Sykes and Deerings. Instead she displays her solidarity with her father and the institution which, to her, is private as well as public: the school. Rose and Terrapin are reduced to extravagant caricatures of each other. Opposing Rose's deadening uniformity is Terrapin's equally deadly over-ripeness.

Bilgewater is frightened. She cannot stay on the staircase which leads down to the open sea, nor can she risk herself up in the tower which touches the open sky. Bilgewater runs away to what she knows. Boakes is really non-existent. He is Bilgewater; at least that part of Bilgewater which is her father, and the 'private' side of her self which includes a whole array of things linguistic and social. Bilgewater was always already going to 'choose' him, because she is him.

Being frightened is also refusing. Bilgewater cannot and will not be other than she is. What this is has been mapped out for her by the past, and she is sufficiently self-aware to be able to recognize the incorporation of certain parts of the past into her future. Bits of Uncle H.B. and Paula are forever Bilgewater and so are other things which perhaps she does not see. One of these is that she never had a choice at all, not really. 'Headwork'
saw to that: this word represents not only cognition as an activity but a way of looking at an individual: one in which thought and its institutions constitute the idea of a person. Someone to whom 'headwork' and all that this represents is constitutive cannot choose to leave it behind. This would not be choice; it would be suicide.

Bilgewater's particular selfhood is achieved satisfactorily in the inner narrative, which does not pretend that everything is plain. On the contrary, its ambiguities, its constant framing of a younger Bilgewater by an older, make it clear that there are certain links in the chain of understanding which must be taken on trust, in the light of the conclusion. The inner narrative provides this character in an 'acceptably unresolvable'²⁰ form, which relies heavily upon textual conventions, and thus upon its readers. But the epilogue proves that these solutions are provisional, not only from Miss Terrapin's point of view, but perhaps also from Bilgewater's. Miss Terrapin is obviously good at headwork, too, but it is not leading her in Bilgewater's way. She seems to be making a choice 'Shall I come here? Would I like it after all?' (p.10). She stares across at Bilgewater from the frame, putting Bilgewater's not-said into words, throwing them into the whirlpool of uncertainty and ambiguity which surround Bilgewater's inner narrative.

²⁰ This is Eagleton's term. He claims that a problem and its solution are given together in a text, as alternative procedures through which the text works upon its ideology. In this sense, the text is an answer to its own question, putting to itself only those problems which it can answer, or leave unanswered without further disturbing its own terms of reference. The text casts its materials so that they may be resolved, or remain 'acceptably unresolvable'. See Criticism and Ideology, p. 87-88.
The conclusion which Bilgewater presents in her narrative links her disparate moments together, recuperating them into the representation of a completed, humanist subject in which an essence or central core exists, identical with the subject and inseparable from it. Bilgewater's headwork is the emblem of her essence and the place from which her subjectivity can be created, within the institutional framework of church, school, class, and state.

Miss Terrapin says that she has 'decided' (p. 200). But as readers we are now wary. We have heard this before. The text's internal dialogism, echoed in the social languages or discourses which Bilgewater exposes to the reader's gaze, is concerned with heterogeneous world views. Bilgewater's account of her own name dramatizes the difficulties of accounting for one's self: she is Bilgewater Marigold Daisy Mary-gold Day's-eye Green. And although she has a 'true' and 'christened' name, this is an ironic nomination: it is not true at all, not by her standards, anyway. Bilgewater the character slips out from beneath all these names, not one of which confirms her.

The frame interrogates Bilgewater's certainties not only from the standpoint of Miss Terrapin, but from the authoritative narrator's. Miss Terrapin gazes at Bilgewater as one character to another; the narrator authorizes them both, framing their stories with the all-encompassing language of narration. The distance achieved by this strategy disperses Bilgewater's account of herself into fragments. A greater irony than Bilgewater's is at work and the reader finally steps back to scrutinize her subjectivity from the one unassailable vantage point offered by the text, the narrator's.
From this view Bilgewater's recuperated moments, brought together so neatly in her conclusion, disperse once more. Bilgewater's is a subjectivity constituted by the social and constantly adapting, creating its constitution. This creation is discursive, and importantly, for Bilgewater, denies the possibility of an inner, unchangeable, essence.

Bilgewater's self-narration created her subjectivity, placing all her discursive moments in a recuperation which looked like the project of a centered self. It seemed that kairos could be transformed into chronos if only the right timeless moment was grasped, and made a talisman for a lifetime. But Bilgewater's subjectivity cannot be placed or fixed, spatially or temporally. This subject is not confined by any fixed point, any proper name, although it can answer to many. The subject which Bilgewater represents is decentered, moving along the signifying chain of language, constantly regrouping among the 'environment of alien words'.

Bilgewater's 'nameless good', far from providing a core of personhood, was the set of material practices which constituted her subjectivity. It was hence unspeakable, both by Bilgewater and the text. But the existence of these practices, whose traces are found in Bilgewater's ordinary, was the site of the text's internal dialogue. Bilgewater represented within her own discourse a hybrid of languages: dialect, talking 'North', Uncle H.B.'s 'funny old-fashioned Oxford' and the unremarkable language of her father and everyone else at the school. Each of these languages was metonymic of a world view. Bilgewater sifted through these, discarding those which were not suitable and embodying those which were matter of
fact and ordinary. Ordinary for her, and for her
interlocutor, the reader. The fact of social
constitution, so engagingly displayed in Bilgewater's own
narrative of others, is hidden from Bilgewater herself.
She thinks her constitution is natural, as organic as
headwork.

It is the belief that headwork and reason are somehow
natural, outside social constitution, which the frame
disputes. The assumption that Bilgewater has provided an
account of a recuperable selfhood which affirms the
reader's own (for who has created Bilgewater and completed
the project but the reader?) is undermined by the frame,
the work of a narrator to whom Bilgewater's discourse
itself is alien. The narrator, so briefly encountered in
the prologue, is engaged in a dialogue with Bilgewater's
subjectivity. The narrator is not entirely given up to
either Bilgewater's or Miss Terrapin's account of how
things are; both discourses are distanced; Bilgewater's
by the frame and Miss Terrapin's by Bilgewater's. Both
are, after all, characters with no especial authorial
guarantee.

What the narrator has achieved by means of these
alien languages is a controlled account of a decentered
subject, produced against the background of a very
different form, the humanist, centered one. From the
vantage point of the narrator the reader can see that
Bilgewater's account is flawed, and from Bilgewater's
point of view we can see that Miss Terrapin's, brief
though it is, is equally doubtful.

There is no real conclusion possible for Bilgewater
as a character: she will go on, changing and changing
because 'The erratic and devious presence of the
unconscious, without which the position of the subject cannot be understood, insists on heterogeneity and contradiction within the subject itself. Bilgewater's 'headwork' cannot save her, nor can the frightening possibilities of change be arrested by applying a conventional conclusion; in a world which still values constancy and reifies the individual as a singular, essential monad, Bilgewater strives not to make the point that this, too, is a form, a convention.

Chapter Five

EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES: THE MOUSE AND HIS CHILD

'Where are we?' the mouse child asked his father. His voice was tiny in the stillness of the night.
'I don't know,' the father answered.
'What are we, Papa?'
'I don't know. We must wait and see.'

Hoban's story begins in a snowy street. A tramp looks through the window of a toyshop and sees a grand dolls' house, and some wind-up toys parading before it. As he watches a new toy is taken from a box and wound up. It is a mouse and child; they circle in a dance on the counter-top. When the sales assistant sees him, the tramp draws back from the window. Out on the snowy pavement he imitates the action of the toy mice.

While they are still in the toyshop the mouse-child develops the idea that he lacks and needs a family. He is told that he will be cast out from the warmth and security of the shop, to go into the wide world.

The child remembered the bitter wind that had blown in through the door, and the great staring face of the tramp at the window with the grey winter sky behind him. Now that sky was a silent darkness.

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beyond the street lamp and the white flakes falling. The dolls' house was bright and warm; the teapot gleamed upon the dazzling cloth. 'I don't want to go out into the world,' he said. (p.16)

The child cries, and an elephant sings him a lullaby in which a mother is mentioned. The child's lack is crystallized: although he does not know what the word 'mama' means, he knew at once that he needed one badly' (p.17). This crucial episode repays careful attention.

The mouse and his child are intensely ignorant. They do not know where they are or what they are. But they do know that winds are bitter, and can distinguish inside the shop from outside, dark from light and the appearance of heat from the appearance of cold. What is foregrounded is not their gradual (or perhaps immediate) awareness of these phenomena but their relational, social poverty.

The pair come into the world replete with language, with signifiers, but without the experience to link these to signifieds. Their use of language is at first abstract, as remote from concrete reference to the real as they are from 'real' mice. The child hears the word 'mama' and knows at once that he needs one, whatever it is. This 'knowledge' is an awakening to the power of the Symbolic without which the mouse child is empty of meaning, unable to situate himself within the linguistic and social structures which make themselves felt by him as soon as he becomes aware.² His first remarks, at the head of this chapter, make this plain: in asking where he is and what he is he seeks to locate himself.

² This is Lacan's Symbolic, see my Chapter 1.
Language, as discourse, creates needs which the toys must strive to meet; it shapes what the mouse and his child can be. In submitting to the signifier 'mama' the mouse child accedes to the mediation of language, which re-expresses his needs as desires, returning them to him in new forms. He wants to know where and who he is; this need is displaced and replayed as a desire for a mama, so far, an empty sign. It is a memorable and poignant moment. The signifier 'mama' which, for the reader, is rich in signification, is for the mouse-child just another word. But like all other words he needs it, needs it badly, so that he can say who and where he is. Even though the sign is, for the moment, empty, he has no recourse other than to grapple with it and somehow make it his own, even as it fashions him.

Later, after the mice have spent some years away from the shop, the tramp finds them in a dustbin where they have been thrown away. He mends them as best he can; they now walk in a straight line rather than circling around. When he leaves them on a bridge he tells them to 'Be tramps' (p.22). Through this fiat the tramp shapes the toys anew. It is a moment in which the power of discourse to initiate, to set events in motion, is made abundantly clear.

The toys are found on the bridge where the tramp has left them. They are discovered by Manny Rat who has a small empire at the dump and intends to use the toys as part of a team of wind-up helpers. They are sent out to assist in a bank-robbery, which fails. They seize the opportunity of escape.
The mice and a fortune-telling frog, who assists them, set out on their next adventures. This setting-out marks the end of a major sequence. The mouse and his child have lived the circumscribed life of toy mice, have been discarded and remade. Their remaking is also a reorientation; with a new physical form they break out of the circle of their former life. Instead of the endless repetitions of mechanical circling they can now walk away, and progress in a straight line.

This sequence, the first of three such structural repetitions, introduces themes which will resonate throughout the work. Foremost among these is repetition itself. Remaking or resurrection, natural cycles, dogs of various kinds and mechanical movement recur in the text; even the mice themselves are double. Signification is the second major theme and the process through which signifier and signified are linked is scrutinised. The child's appropriation of the word 'mama' illustrates one of the ways in which a connection between word and object is achieved. Thirdly, the reshaping of the mice explores the theme of subjectivity. The mice, resurrected, are truly remade. Their altered physical aspect enables them to engage in a journey, a quest as they call it, which would otherwise have proved an impossibility. But they appear to be the same in other respects: they think as they did before, they retain memories of earlier experiences.

This apparent continuity in the subjectivity of the mice can be taken as an indication that the toys' 'self', their essence, either mental or physical, carries over from remaking to remaking. Alternatively, their identity may consist in their relations with others, so that they are the same because they continue in the positions (father, son; toys, animals) which they inhabited before.
These three themes, repetition, signification and the question of subjectivity, create the fabric upon which Hoban’s text embroiders.

Between their first and second remaking the toy mice experience the life of animals. They join an experimental theatre company (the Caws of Art) and are later used as machinery by a muskrat. All the while Manny Rat is on their track, and finds them just as they are about to finish the muskrat’s tree-felling project. The rat hastens its end and unwittingly spins the mouse and his child off into a pond. Here they meet a philosophical turtle, and a creature who will, in her turn, undergo a metamorphosis. They eventually surface, helped by the aquatic form of the dragonfly and a greedy fish, who swallows their bait. The muskrat and the turtle seem to be a ‘natural’ extension of the animal world with which the toys became embroiled when they were found by Manny Rat. But a subtle change in their status vis-à-vis that ‘natural’ world has taken place, a quiet shift in emphasis which is very important for their future development.

When the mouse and his child first set out with the frog they encounter a war in which shrews are fighting for territory. The frog and the toy mice are taken for rations. Among others captured are some wood mice. The mouse child talks to a shrew drummer-boy, and learns what a territory is. When battle commences, the toys see a chance of escape. The frog places the dead shrew’s drum round the neck of the child; the father exhorts the wood mice to follow him and the child cries ‘Onward, mice!’ (p.56). The child, in taking the drum, appropriates a symbol from the natural world of the shrews and, at once, is able to align himself with the creatures which he merely represents: the mice. In future, although he will
retain advantages which come from being made of tin (he feels no physical pain, no cold, no hunger), his relationships with 'real' animals begin to approach parity. The line between the real and the unreal, the natural and the manufactured, wavers.

Soon the question of the difference between a real animal, Manny Rat, and the two toy mice will be posed more directly. During the performance of the Caws of Art, in which the mouse and his child are caught up, the audience sets upon the live cast. Manny Rat is waiting in the wings, and the windups, who are on stage in an effort to draw the audience's fire, see him. The father, extemporizing, includes Manny Rat in the action. He is cast as a villain. Manny is pulled onto the stage by the interested spectators and he finds himself forced to take up the part which the father has sketched out for him. In this role he is mobbed by the audience.

'Unhand me!' cried the rat, and improvising desperately, he crept onstage. 'I, Banker Ratsneak, have come here to collect a debt long overdue!' he wailed. 'I will have justice!'

'Villain!' screamed the crowd.
'Territory stealer!'
'Tremendous talent, that rat,' said the field-mouse critic to his wife. 'How well he plays the villain! I've never seen a character I detested more thoroughly!' The rest of the spectators, all of whom shared, uncritically, the same emotion, hissed and booed the hapless rat. (p.74)
In adopting a role, Manny Rat becomes, for a moment, a representation himself and loses the advantage of reality. For a short time he and the toy mice are the same: Manny's singularity dissolves and he stands for, signifies a type, in this case a villain, in the same way that the mouse and his child signify mice. The toy mice escape once more.

The distinction between representing a thing and being a thing is one which will come under increasing pressure as the story unfolds. In its early formulations the text does discriminate. Only animals have proper names, the mark of singling out, of nomination. Some of them do not: Frog, for instance, or Muskrat. These seem to be animals who have taken up a place outside their natural habitat: Frog wanders about wearing a glove, with no other frogs in sight. Muskrat is deformed and a figure of fun. They can both be thought of as marginal to their societies in the way that the Tramp is to his; as representing it by defining it in the way that a circle defines the space within it. Manny, on the other hand, is fully complicit in his society, indistinguishable from other rats in rat-ness and yet clearly differentiated. He is threatened only when he loses this place, this grounding, and becomes a representation. Rather than being someone he only signifies someone: a villain. His very existence is threatened.

The instability of identity is illustrated tellingly when the mouse and his child have attained their own territory and Manny has been beaten and shamed. They were not unlike him, he realized for the first time; almost they were tin caricatures of himself. In their long exposure to the weather, moss had rooted
in the crevices of their tin, and now it covered them like soft green fur. Manny Rat laughed inwardly. Perhaps they were becoming animals, and he, once the most powerful animal in the dump would turn into a toy. After all, why not? Had not their roles been totally reversed? Has (§c) not the hunted become the hunters, the losers winners? (p.166)

Extraordinary little creatures, these toys. In framing the world of toys they isolate what is toy from what is not; they encircle toys. But they have been hailed as tramps and cannot fall back within the undifferentiated circle of 'toys'. They are toy and not-toy, standing athwart the boundary between the two, facing both ways, looking over each other's shoulder, past each other. If they are toys and not-toys how, in future, is the distinction to be made? What toy is inside the circle they create with their framing? What is the essential, the intrinsic toy? And if they are standing astride a boundary do they not frame the not-toy too?

This is a dilemma which they literally embody. They are each made of two matched halves, joined together with little tags. They face each other. The father contains clockwork, the child nothing at all. Their external shape and their internal form are continuous, their outside and inside are the same thing, inseparable. Their hollowness is an aspect of their inside; they are not there, they are in the inside/outside. They are the frame.
But what do they frame? At each remaking the mice are literally restructured, put together again in a way which Humpty Dumpty might envy. When they are taken apart they cease to exist; the child 'returned to himself', we are told, when the Frog reconstituted him after he had fallen from the clutches of a hawk (p. 131). Their recurrent creation is one in a series of repetitions which another item of tin manufacture echoes.

Manny Rat is a bricoleur. He repairs windups so that they can serve him and saves the clockwork from those which are beyond repair so that he can reuse it. He keeps the bits and pieces in an old tin which once held dogfood. There is a label on this tin:

BONZO Dog Food said the white letters on the orange label, and below the name was a picture of a little black-and-white spotted dog, walking on his hind legs and wearing a chef's cap and an apron. The dog carried a tray on which there was another can of BONZO Dog Food, on the label of which another little black-and-white spotted dog, exactly the same but much smaller, was walking on his hind legs and carrying a tray on which there was another can of BONZO Dog Food, on the label of which another little black-and-white spotted dog, exactly the same but much smaller, was walking on his hind legs and carrying a tray on which there was another can of BONZO Dog Food, and so on until the dogs become too small for the eye to follow. (p. 30)
In the light of this, it hardly seems co-incidental that the dog which, earlier, follows the tramp after seeing his dance in the snow, is little and black and white. Later, when Manny Rat makes some armour for himself he concocts it from BONZO cans. Muskrat has a BONZO tin which he also uses as a receptacle for odds and ends of cast-off manufactures, and when the mouse and his child find themselves at the bottom of the pond, the son, gazing over his father’s shoulder, is brought face to face with: 'a tin can that stood upright, half buried in the mud' (p.108). This is another BONZO tin.

Manny’s original spare-parts tin reappears at the end of the book. Its contents are turned against him and the little repeating dog becomes the sign, like an inn-sign, set up above the house which is the windups’ territory. They call their home ‘The Last Visible Dog’.

These dogs, growing smaller as they recede into the distance, facing ever ahead, are distanced, put into perspective, framed, by another doggy presence. When the mouse and his child first arrive at Manny Rat’s residence they come to rest on a slope. The child sees the sky for the first time:

Standing as he was on uneven ground, the child was tilted at such an angle that he too saw the Dog Star, beyond his father’s shoulder. He had never looked up at the sky before; indeed, he had as yet seen little of the earth, and even that little was more frightening than he had imagined. At first the icy glitter of the far-off star was terrifying to him; he sensed a distance so vast as to reduce him to nothing. But as he looked and
looked upon that steady burning he was
comforted a little; if he was nothing, he
thought, so also was this rat and all the
dump. (p.28)

Sirius, the dog star, shines in the sky above the
pond, above the dump, above the mice, their friends, and
all their doings. The star, called by a name which links
him with the dogs on the label, reappears twice more,
abstracted from the scene, serene in the heavens above.

The narrator’s overarching perspective which includes
the tramp, the toyshop and the dog star situates the mouse
and his child, their world and those they meet within a
wider scope. The shrews, who so valiantly form ranks to
fight for their territory, are merely “all lined up in
rows, ever so neat” (p.57), for their predators, the
weasels. When the pair have, ‘smiling pleasantly’ (p.57),
killed all the shrews they are in turn killed by an owl.
All these animals claim the territory in which they
operate; territories enfolding, enframing each other.
The owl
...flew on, and the earth slid back below
him, silver in the moonlight. Over the
Meadow Mutual Hoard and Trust Company he
flew, and the fields beyond the woods;
over the rubbish-fire beacons of the dump
and the windups in the beer-can avenue;
over the rats’ midway where the carousel
played its cracked waltz; over new
rubbish hills, and over the charred ruin
of a dolls’ house with its mansard roof
smashed, its chimneys toppled, its ladies
and its gentlemen long gone. (pp.57–58).
Within their small world the mouse and his child are also bricoleurs. They re-sort, reassemble and put to novel use the ideas that come their way. When the mouse and his child are confined to the bottom of the pond the child, as we have seen, faces a BONZO tin. As the turtle indicates:

'Infinity,' said Serpentina with a proprietary air. 'There's no end to it. There comes a time when each of us must contemplate it.' He struck at the empty water two or three times for emphasis.

'My son is only a child,' said the father. 'Let me do it.'

'One can't begin too young,' said Serpentina. 'The child is father to the mouse. Note well,' he said, his voice resounding in the depths: 'an endlessness of little dogs, receding through progressive diminution to a revelation of the ultimate truth.' (p.109)

This exceedingly wise creature adds, a little later, that 'Each of us must journey through the dogs, beyond the dots, and to the truth, alone' (p.110).

The mouse child contemplates these mysterious dogs through the spring and into summer. On an especially still day, when the water is clear, he finally sees that the dogs give way to dots, and that beyond them is nothing, at least nothing that admits representation. Miss Mudd chews the label away from the tin and there, beyond the last visible dog, on the other side of nothing, is the reflection of the child himself.
He had never seen himself before, but he recognised his father, and therefore knew himself. 'Ah,' he said, 'there's nothing on the other side of nothing but us.'
(p.116)

The gaze of the mouse and his child has been upon the dogs, ever repeating. The dogs have not gazed back, of course. They are even further along the chain of representation than the mouse and his child are themselves. Indeed, the dogs stretch on to an infinity of representation, unstoppable, unstopped. But the mouse and his child make something of it all. Within limits they arbitrarily choose the dogs as the signifiers of their search for self-winding or knowledge. Within limits, because the theme of the last visible dog is introduced to them by others. This signifier of theirs is common property, just as the signifiers of language are the common property of all language-users. But they are free to harness it to their special needs, and they do.

The turning point for the mouse and his child comes when the child sees his own reflection, which actually replaces the last visible dog. In that moment he sees himself and completes the circuit of exchange which will enable him to become a separate entity, independent of his father.\(^3\) Their particular repetition is closed off at

\(^3\) I am not suggesting that this text is an allegory of Lacan's theory. The similarities, however, are striking. The child begins life in a dual relationship with his father (who is also mother, here). Their 'oneness' is physical as well as symbolic. From the moment that the child sees himself in the tin (and this is his first sight of himself) he changes, takes his life into his own hands, as it were. This sighting in the tin, which is like Lacan's mirror-stage, marks the child's
this moment; very soon they are physically parted and are never rejoined.  

It is in the instant when the child sees himself in the tin can that he comes to the conclusion that 'Nobody can get us out of here but us' (p.116). And this is the first occasion that he could have thought such a thing; until he saw himself he was in a state of total dependence: physically, upon his father and, in terms of language, upon the meanings of others. He was cast into language without the means of engaging with it: it nominated his desires without providing him with a means of satisfying them. 'He had no idea what a mama might be, but he knew at once that he needed one badly' (p.17). The little dogs seem to have fulfilled their promise, a 'revelation of the ultimate truth'. Or have they?

What appears to have been revealed is that what is found at the fullest extent of infinity is one's self. This seems plausible enough until it is recalled that the idea of a self, of an identity, is an open question in the text. Beyond the last visible dog lies: a role? A relational position? An essence? Or is all this delusion: does someone or something which may not or cannot be represented, exist beyond the Last Visible Dog?

What Serpentina offered the mouse and his child, in his discourse upon philosophy, was a way of interpreting accession to the symbolic and the splitting into 'me' and 'I'. Now the child's self is situated elsewhere, in the ideal-I, the other. He thus completes the linguistic circuit, which moves from self to other and back to self.

* We must presume that the child sees himself over his father's shoulder. He must actually 'recognize' his father and himself at the same moment, since he has never seen the back of his father, either.
or of representing the image before them both. The little
dogs recede into the distance, following what seems to be
a linear progression, away from a known starting-point.
Infinitely repeating, they draw a line from their
beginning to their interminably postponed end. The Mouse
child, upon learning that he was beyond the last visible
dog, turns at once from philosophy to action. But the
connection between the theory he has learned and the
practice it seems to give rise to is obscure. Some light
can be cast on this by an earlier episode in which the
causal connections between theory and practice were
rehearsed in a different setting.

The Muskrat is devoted to pure thought; he has gone
beyond the limits of 'mere mechanical invention' (p.83).
But he discovers, to his dismay, that his muskrat pupils
want to be beavers when they grow up. Beavers 'do things'
(p.84). The muskrat casts around for something
appropriate to do, and applies himself to the problem of
how to fell a tree. He engages with thought by sending
the mouse and his child on circuits of his room; they are
pacing for him, something he can no longer do for himself,
since he lost a leg in a trap. The perambulation of the
mice enables him to construct a piece of pure thought:
'Tooth\times Gnaw\times Time\times Time\times Tree equals Tree-
fall'. This is refined as 'XT = TR' (p.89).

The muskrat doesfell a tree; he harnesses the
clockwork toys to an axe. What is in question here is the
relationship of abstract thought, embodied in a quasi-
mathematical form (an embellishment repeated in
Serpentina's quasi-philosophical thinking) to action. The
muskrat works it out, and represents his thought with a
formula. What he then actually, practically, does is in a
uncertain relationship to this abstraction. He thinks
that it was all enabled by his 'pure thought'. But in fact the triumph was achieved by bricolage, which, so far as the reader knows, is achieved by less abstract forms of cognition. Indeed, Manny Rat will say later, when he is on the verge of achieving the self-winding so longed-for by the toy mice: 'vere are fings vat simply cannot be figured out' (p.165). (Manny speaks like this because he has, by this stage, had his teeth knocked out by the aggressive mice, who thus illustrate their full accession to the Symbolic.)

Muskrat has achieved his thought by a means which caricatures the pacing scholar, for whom it is presumed that thought and physical activity are bound together in an organic relation. Unable to pace himself, Muskrat abstracts this function: the toys pace for him. The result is a working illustration of the mind/body distinction. This is not merely a point about the philosophical status of Muskrat's behaviour. If his actions, and the mouse-child's, are not directly attributable to pure thought it does not follow that there is no connection at all. What it does mean, though, is that the logic which joins thought to action is not one whose path can be easily traced and recovered. Linear,

"The role of the symbolic is the social and cultural realization of man and the normalization of his sexual and aggressive instincts; but it therefore also has the effect of alienating him. It is here that the origin of human aggression is to be sought. Obliged to fashion himself with reference to and in rivalry with the other, obliged to wait for recognition from or judgment by the other, man is naturally inclined to a whole range of aggressive behaviour, from envy, morbid jealousy and real aggression to mortal negation of self or other." Anika Lemaire, Jacques Lacan, translated David Macey (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p.81. For 'man' here we can read 'mice'.}
reasoned argument will not always avail: what is at work here is ungrounded repetition.

This is not obvious to the Muskrat, nor to the mice. It is for the narrator, standing outside the story and peering in, to report. And beyond the narrator, the reader, who must interpret (though this last point, about interpretation, is not one we can discuss just yet). The last visible dog and the Muskrat’s pure thought are framed by a wider knowledge which can see the hawk circling against the sun, the star shining down on the dump and the tramp on his lonely road, walking with his dog.

By the end of the book, the mouse and his child have achieved self-winding. They have fought for and achieved a territory, and they have created a family. This family crosses the boundaries between toy and animal; it includes a reformed Manny Rat, who has himself returned from death. The ending recapitulates inter-related themes we distinguished in the beginning: repetition, signification and subjectivity. Now they can be set within the frame of the completed text; the tramp returns and looks in upon the mouse family in their home, as he once looked in upon them at the shop. But everything he looks at now is transformed; the same, yet different.

Sameness and difference appear to be mutually exclusive terms. At least, when we say that the mouse family are the same but different it seems plausible that it is some disposition of the mice which is the ‘same’, that there is something inherent in the nature of the mice which is repeated in all their manifestations. But need this be sameness; could it be difference?
There are two forms of repetition. One is grounded: repetition is remarked because something which is intrinsically similar occurs, repeating its originator. In this way the tramp's (real) dog is repeated in the little dogs on the tin, which are repeated by the dog star which follows at the heel of Orion. The other form is ungrounded: an element and its repetition are part of a chain of signification which itself constitutes that repetition. For example, the Muskrat thinks that there is an intrinsic similarity between the thought encapsulated in his formula and his action in harnessing the mouse and his child to the axe. Actually he is mistaken, as the reader knows. The repetition here is ungrounded, constituted by the chain of signification: the connection lies in the Muskrat's nomination of the action as the signified of the formula, which thus becomes a signifier.

The ungrounded repetition which the mice enjoy is not sameness. The toy mice frame an empty inside. What they are is skin-deep; and their skin is manufactured: an artifact of society, of the social. There is no self to them, no inside, other than this. Each of their returns from de-formation and consequent reshaping entails a new identity which, although it seems to be continuous with their previous existence, is in fact a new beginning.

They have no proper name. A name, as we saw in Bilgewater, is a unifying sign. Once labelled, like Manny Rat, one achieves an existential stability, threatened only when this nomination is dissolved. The distinction

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* The third example, the dog star, is an extension of the first form of repetition. It is grounded by virtue of the fact that the basis of similarity on which the metaphor relies can be recuperated: the star repeats a dog by following Orion's footsteps. The little dogs, on the other hand, are icons of the 'real' dog.
between being and representing, between certain animals
and the mindups, begins to yield another layer of meaning.
Proper names indicate a specific signified; common names
do not: which represents the subject?

We have come full circle (a metaphor difficult to
avoid in this text) to the question of subjectivity
itself, with which we began this chapter. Where are we?
What are we? The question is framed in terms of spatial
location, as if what we are is inevitably linked with
where we are. The text maps out its interrogations
through circles, boundaries, repetitions, frames and
linear progressions. They come down to this: what is the
difference between inside and outside, between the centre
and the circle? Is where we are and what we are a
repetition of something that has gone before, to which we
owe our origins: if we follow the boundary, and complete
the circle, will we see our beginnings and will this, by
showing us where we are also tell us what we are? Or are
we repeating in a frame of reference in which difference
and not identity is the ground of our being: are we
traces of traces, is the frame empty?

The little repeating dogs will help to make the
distinction concrete. The dogs may be walking away in a
straight line, from a fixed reference point, in a linear
progression, discrete and discontinuous. Or they may be
little clones. These alternatives epitomize opposing ways
of representing the world and the subject.

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7 For a discussion of 'trace' see Jacques Derrida,
 Positions, translated Alan Bass (Chicago, University of
If the dog are clones, like nesting Russian dolls, they imply a theory of generation very like embodiment: the progenitor bears within itself the blueprint for all future descendants. This is a tempting interpretation, which echoes the text's repetitions and framings and embodies familiar ideas from the work's general ideology. It implies the possibility of recovering origins and provides for an essential core of identity with the originator. It does allow for change, but not for total metamorphosis. This allows the mice to remain the same in spite of their changing form, by assuming that they have an essential identity.

As for their progenitor they are, after all, anthropomorphic. They represent, in changed form, their human originator. The tramp himself will do as a representative of this entity, and their relation to him is well established. When he sets them on their new path, he interpellates them and confirms them as members of society. 'Be tramps', he says. And this is the final word. When he sees them in their territory, surrounded by their family, he tells them to 'Be happy' (p.184). It is a satisfying closure. The mice have arrived. They have broken out of one circle and formed another, in which they will now repeat endlessly.


* This is Eagleton's term for the dominant ideological formation, called 'general' by him to distinguish it from the more specific aesthetic one, of which the literary is part. The 'general' ideology is constituted by a set of discourses about values and beliefs which, realized in material conditions, affect the relations of subjects to their social conditions. See Criticism and Ideology, p.54.
The implications for the human subject are clear. The view is theological, the pattern a diachronic series of endless repetitions. The further away from the origin you go, the clearer the pattern becomes. It is all beheld and held in the eye of the narrator, and ultimately, God.

Yet their originator, the tramp, does not confirm them with an indisputable signifier, a proper name. They are still open to the motion of signification: be tramps; be happy. Both terms need definition, placement in a wider scheme. The mouse and his child, at the centre of the narrator’s gaze, frame nothing except mechanical parts. What they are is located at the interface of their inside/outside. They make the point, in their very being, that it is the frame which constitutes. And this leads the subject in a different direction altogether.

Within the categories available to them of toys, windups, father, son, tramp, the mouse and his child are free to be whom they please. They have no filiation except to each other, no expectations are placed upon them socially or genetically, except for the tramp’s indeterminate interpellation. Each of their resurrections marks the appearance of radical change. Their final resurrection is a total metamorphosis which the text glosses over: they are separated from each other and their physical presence is permanently altered. Their continuity is, at this moment, exceedingly tenuous. If there is no distinction between their outside and their inside then they are indeed created totally different creatures by their separation. Their repetitions must cease; they can no longer continue as they were, the chain is broken once and for all. And yet they persist. Is this another illusion?
It is illusory only if continuity and repetition are assumed to be grounded in sameness. But, as we have seen, this is not the only possible way in which something (or someone) may repeat. Rather than ensuring a repetition of identity and sameness, the mouse and his child describe within their bodies and their lives a difference and discontinuity. Like the link between Muskrat's theory and practice, the gap between the three separate lives of the mouse and his child is closed by signification. The mouse and his child are endowed with continuity by the sets of relations in which they are embedded: these relations create them as continuous entities by making them the locus of certain significations. And these 'relations' are made flesh in the uncles, the mama and sister which the mouse child provides for himself. He provides them by virtue of being part of the chain: they are mama, sister, uncle, because he is child, nephew, brother.

He and his father are signifiers in constant motion, like the tramp. The latter is a boundary and a margin for his society. He lives out and embodies this relation in his constant temporal and spatial movement: he tramps the margins which define him at the same time as he defines them. And the continual motion of the mouse and his child is embodied in self-winding: they have, so long as their clockwork is engaged, perpetual motion. Never in the same place, always in movement, they exemplify signification itself.

This creates interesting possibilities for subjectivity. A subject constantly in motion may indicate that a discontinuous, decentered subjectivity is in prospect. But although the text refuses to provide a proper name for the mouse and his child they are still
presumed to be continuous. And their nomination, though
generalized, becomes almost specific by virtue of its
functional appropriateness. The mouse and his child are,
after all, the fairy-tale heroes. The frog is their
adjvant or helper, as are the bittern and the kingfisher.
They are personifications of roles, and hardly need names.

The Mouse and his Child is a marvellous text: toys
and animals do not, in reality, speak and adopt human
social norms. The marvellous here is situated within a
realistic frame which provides a familiar territory for
the readers; expectations carry over from it to the world
of the toys and animals. But the norms which are invoked
by this frame are repeated as abstractions and differences
in the marvellous text. So, for example, the reader is
unable to recuperate conventional representations of
scientific procedure from Muskrat’s behaviour. His theory
(formula) does not account for the effect (treefall) which
he ‘achieves’ by ‘applying’ it. The mouse and his child
repeat the point. Their self-winding is proposed to be a
result of their thinking; in fact, the connections of
their specific thought to their action are as uncertain as
Muskrat’s.

The textual process by which the reader’s realistic
expectations are disabused is illustrated by the little
dogs. The tramp’s ‘real’ dog is repeated as an icon by
the dogs on the BONZO tin, an artifact of the marvellous.
The toy mice take up the image on the label as a symbol of
their self-winding. In order to confirm their logic the
reader is first required to link the real dog with its
representations on the label of dog food. Then the concept
self-winding must be installed in the same place as the
sign dog, so that the idea ‘dog’ falls out of the picture
altogether.
But while the reader completes this signifying chain, the mice themselves have been framed or contextualized; another set of significations is in place. For the reader also knows that the mice never achieve independence; they continue to rely utterly and always upon the support and help of their 'relatives'; upon their place in a series of relations. In the place of 'self-winding' the reader, but not the mice, installs the idea of inter-dependence.

The way in which the reader has been enabled to do this is instructive. First the reader assumes the viewpoint of the mice, in which the movement from dog to self-winding is made explicit. However, the assumptions of the mice about self-winding are put in perspective from time to time as the reader draws back from the text, in the company of the narrator.

The book opens in external focalization: 'The tramp was big and squarely built' (p.11), moves to the tramp's position to describe the mice on their first appearance 'He put his face close to the windows, and looking past the toys displayed there, peered into the shop' (p.11) then to the saleslady's who 'looking up as she wound the toy again, saw the tramp's whiskered, staring, face' (p.13), finally returning to the external view in which the tramp is observed to imitate the mice: 'Then, with his big broken shoes printing his footsteps in the fresh snow he solemnly danced in a circle, swinging his empty arms up and down' (p.13).10

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10 For an account of focalization see Genette, Narrative Discourse and Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, translated Christine van Boheemen (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985).
The narrator is clearly not the same as either the tramp or the saleslady, nor is he identical with the mouse and his child or any other character in the novel. In the narrator’s eyes all are equal, including the dog star which, however, is observed to exist beyond the confines of the marvellous narrative. The star is distanced not only by its physical position but also through its associations with the other dogs in the story. Its name suggests a close link between it and them, but in practice none of the characters in the text makes this connection. Only the narrator and the reader can do so.

This potential signification, denied to any of the characters, marks a complicity between the narrator and reader which makes possible the development of an independent interpretation of Muskrat’s formula, Serpentina’s deep thinking and the self-winding of the mouse and his child. What is missing from the sign ‘dog star’ is precisely the connection between it as a sign and the signifiers which denote it. There it is, circling away in the sky. None of the characters in the book knows its name — only the narrator or the reader can complete the circuit, if completion is deemed possible or desirable.

From the narrator’s point of view it would seem that this is not necessarily a consummation to be wished. The dog star floats above the tangle of significations of the characters, teasingly close but incomprehensibly far. The connections with it and the toys, animals and the tramp are never made explicit. The dog star belongs to another system of resemblances, and its place within the metaphoric framework of the text is made more remote, not less, by the repetition of the sign ‘dog’. It is an
unmotivated sign whose purpose within and connections to the world of the mouse and his child are uncertain.

The tramp acts out this indecision. He speaks the last words in the text but they are left hanging on the page, unconfirmed, unratiﬁed by the authoritative narrator. The circuit opened by the narration when the tramp was described entering the town is incomplete; the frames ripple outward, unstopped, unstoppable. The tramp’s incomplete last word, unﬁnished by the ﬁnal boundary marking him off from his narrator, is a frame which the reader must close in the narrator’s absence. And in order to close this frame, possibilities must be made actual or expelled; they must attain the status of signiﬁed or remain at the level of signiﬁer. This is a choice, for signiﬁed or signiﬁer, which the text itself consistently refuses. Can the reader remain uncommitted, or is this struggle played out on the ground where the reader stands?

By following the maze of frames, in re-interpreting the Muskrat’s scientiﬁc method and standing back from the self-winding of the mouse and his child, the reader has become the site of the story’s focus. What the mouse and his child make of all the little dogs on the label, what the tramp makes of the mouse and his child, and what the narrator makes of it all is ﬁnally a matter for the reader to decide. None of these, not the toy characters, nor their narrator, give an account of themselves in which the line from cause to effect, from thought to deed, can be reliably traced. The reader, who has now become the arbiter, must make a choice. But what if the choice cannot, actually, be made? Or, to put it another way, what if continuity and discontinuity are not so much opposites as repetitions within difference?
It is a possibility which cannot be discounted. The mice embody a frame, but for them the distinction between inside and outside has no meaning. They are the margin, and that is all there is. With them, a major step has been taken in the constitution of the subject. Rules about inside and outside, about belonging and not belonging are laid aside. If we are all on the margins then there is nothing inside, and no one inside. Relationship is now everything, depending not upon exclusion and inclusion but rather sameness, based upon difference: we are the same because we are different, which is to turn the world upside down. From the detritus of the old world, the rubbish-dump of the known, comes the new subject.

In their resurrections the mouse and his child are opaquely similar, to use a phrase of Benjamin's, to their former incarnation.\textsuperscript{11} Each instance of their life repeats the other but not, in spite of appearances, through identity. They are repeatedly utterly changed. The ground of their repetition is difference, based not on copies but on simulacra or phantasms.\textsuperscript{12} If they are not continuous, if they are but simulacra, where are they? They appear as signifiers in a chain of relations, as margins, as circuits: these answers, which are the only ones the text can give, place the mouse and his child always somewhere else. Where is the margin in which they

\textsuperscript{11} This phrase, from Walter Benjamin's 'The Image of Proust' is quoted by J. Hillis Miller in his Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982), p.6.

\textsuperscript{12} These terms are from Gilles Deleuze's Logique de sens, quoted in Hillis Miller (1982), p.6.
are located? How do we ascertain its status? Where, in the signifying chain, may we locate them?

In fact, the subject represented by the mouse and his child is not really there at all in the text which bears their name. They are unrepresentable, to use Lyotard’s term. Instead of the subject, what is present is a trace of a form, a lost outline or project of subjectivity. Theirs is a subjectivity in search of a name and form; a postmodern one which ‘searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.’

Since the mouse and his child are unable to present this sort of subjectivity we must ask of the text whether it exists at all, anywhere. We have already sketched the outline of a reply in saying that it is the reader who must close the frames and make something of the text. And in attempting this same way must be found of dealing with the gaps which have constantly opened within the narrative’s structure. That this closure need not entail the creation of a unified perspective is clear from the text’s own disavowals. The omniscient narrator, perfectly placed to impose a viewpoint upon the text in which all the fragments, frames and repetitions are drawn together, turns away from this completion. The narrator, like the characters, is open to the reader’s interpretation; the transcendent view of the toys, the dump and the dog star is itself open to contextualization.

The mouse and his child are created by the word of man, not God. Their social creation is an effect of language itself; they are later remade by the word of an

13 Lyotard, p.81.
individual man, the tramp. These two creations by a human word mark the position of the reader in the text: because it is the reader, not the omniscient narrator, not a God, who must perform the text and authorize it.

Closing the gaps in the text, the spaces between the frames, is an activity which includes the mice themselves. The mice are frames, and their subjectivity, their selfhood, is made and broken again and again. Since the reader is the entity through whom gaps are closed then the mice themselves rely upon the reading subject for their existence. They cohere because the reader says so, and the reader says so because the subjectivity in question is not, in the final analysis, the fictional one of the mice but the real one of the reader.

It is the reader who has been moving through the text, taking up the positions offered and inhabiting the spaces made available. The reader has authorized it all, bringing into the marvellous world of the toys and animals the expectations from the real world which are the essential concomitant of the marvellous. And it is the reader who has created a subjectivity for the mice, each time that they have reappeared. They serve to allow the reader to impersonate them, a familiar function for toys and animals, who have long served as an impartial and forgiving mirror for the human subject. As toys

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representing animals and as animals representing human subjects, the mice are especially attractive, granting the reader's narcissistic wish-fulfillment full rein. It is surely not coincidental that the objects which represent the subject here are those of infancy, which hint at a possibility of regression to a pre-Oedipal stage of completeness.

Some of the curious 'characteristics' of the text now begin to fall into place. The mouse and his child are not humans at all but what is more important, they are not strictly speaking recuperable as coherent individuals; only Manny Rat whose name now seems pointed, provides a continuous, autonomous subjectivity replete with a society and other trappings of a 'realist' character. The mouse and his child approach Federman's 'creatures of the new fiction' who:

...will be as changeable, as unstable, as illusory, as nameless, as unnameable, as fraudulent, as unpredictable as the discourse that makes them. This does not mean, however, that they will be mere puppets. On the contrary their being will be more genuine, more complex, more true-to-life in fact, because they will not appear to be simply what they are; they will be what they are: word-beings.\(^{15}\)

This takes the mice and their story further than they actually go, but the portents are in place. However, this

\(^{15}\) Raymond Federman, 'Surfiction - Four Propositions in forms of an Introduction' quoted in Docherty (1983), p.120-121.
poses a further question. If the subjectivity in the text is changeable, unstable, illusory and so on, what is Manny Rat doing there at all?

He can only be accounted for in relation to the mice. They put to the question many of the taken-for-granted of fictional human character. Change, for example, is presumed to be possible for beings in books. Gradgrind realizes how wrong he has been at the end of Hard Times, and, by taking thought, changes himself. Davis points out the ideology underlying this about-face:

As part of the general ideology of middle-class individualism, the idea that the subject might be formed from social forces and that change might have to come about through social change is by and large absent from novels. Change is always seen as effected by the individual. In a novel like Hard Times only personal moral changes will bring about the amelioration of factory conditions. The family problems of Louisa and Tom will bring about the change in their father that will help solve the problems of the working class in Manchester.\(^{16}\)

But the changes which the mice undergo are not at all like Mr Gradgrind's. To begin with, it is made perfectly clear that their thought has had little or nothing to do with the changes which actually take place in their lives. In fact, the reverse seems closer to the truth of the matter: they are able to be, and to do, because their

\(^{16}\) Davis, p.119.
physical self (which is, we recall, the same as their mental self: they have no inside distinct from their outside) is discontinuous. They do not change because they are not the same mice at all.

The reader is able to come to this unusual conclusion by way of various strategies of which Muskrat’s quasi-mathematical ‘thought’ is a good example. Even though it is not possible to recuperate real-world perceptions of cause and effect to Muskrat’s science the reader must, all the same, close the gap between the real world and the world of the text. But the text gives no advice about how this should be done except to point out that it must be done. This ‘pointing-out’ is a function of the frames. The perspective of the marvellous characters such as Muskrat is never allowed to overtake the text as a whole but is gently contextualized, as we have seen. Yet narrative coherence requires that these aporias be glossed over or otherwise closed: this operation, as we now know, falls to the reader. In this way the reader’s own world, mimetically implied in the narratorial frame, is never left aside nor is it fully integrated into the marvellous.

It comes to this: even Manny Rat does not change in the way of Gradgrind. He, too, is made a new person. He comes back to life from death and such returns, in this text, are not to a transfiguration of a former state but to a totally new and different existence. So even ‘Manny’, closer to the traditional idea of ‘character’ than the unnamed mice, defies the sort of continuity and development through individual change which is an accepted feature of realist fiction.

What sort of reader, what sort of subjectivity, can authorize this text? The idea of an autonomous, unified
self must be abandoned. Instead, the reading subject must give itself up to a hopeful fragmentation in which echoes from the older subjectivities may still resound. So the idea of mother, say, is abstracted from its cultural matrix and refurbished, made over into a role which satisfies because it is called for by the individual subject, who needs it, even if he doesn’t know what it is. In the place of autonomy the reader must install a subjectivity created by the social and by language and, what is more, a subjectivity which is culturally specific as language itself is. In other words, ‘character’ as specified in fiction does not articulate an essential human nature but rather a historically and culturally specific subjectivity.

Hoban’s text adopts a guardedly hopeful position about subjectivity, as romantic in its way as Pearce’s attempt to reconcile incommensurable forms of subjectivity. It suggests that out of the rubble of past cultural forms and the rubbish tips of lost dreams, people can create a new world and a new way of being for themselves. If they are prepared to die to the old ways, and keep moving, they can inherit a world in which the ‘relation’ involved in the word ‘mama’ is new.

So the questions about subjectivity with which we began this study are no longer apposite. While Minnow on the Say attempts to reconcile two forms of subjectivity The House and his Child elaborates a subjectivity which stakes out a different place for the subject. In it such distinctions as inside and outside, margin and centre are, although central to the project of the subject, no longer deemed fundamental and fixed. This is not the continuous subject, but neither is it the subject in process, the decentered subject whom Bilgewater exemplified.
The decentered subject attempts to place itself within a social framework, exterior to itself. As we have seen, Bilgewater attempts to find a place within a set of institutions and discourses which constitute her social world. Her subjectivity consists precisely in her attempts to come to terms with these social forms. But the Mouse and his Child illustrate something new, a subjectivity which remakes and reuses residues from preceding forms, a bricolage which Manny Rat would understand well. The subject of The Mouse and His Child is radically abstracted from its social setting, in contrast to the eponymous heroine of Bilgewater, who although de-centered and in process, is nevertheless trying to find a place for herself within a stable cultural framework. She is moving within a setting which, relative to her, is static and enables individual subjects to locate themselves within it. Hoban's subjects, on the other hand, are creating their society as they go. They are in a state of dialogue with it: it fashions them as they fashion it. Breaking down the old boundaries and changing cultural expectations is a prospect not unfamiliar in the late twentieth century.

This subjectivity is also, in the end, a gendered one. Not because the mice themselves are gendered in a sexual sense. They and their family represent a parody of sexual relations, in which an elephant is mother to a mouse. The text claims that subjectivity itself is non-gendered; this is the meaning of an elephant mama and a seal sister, both made of tin. Gender for these toys is strictly social and not biological; how otherwise can an elephant and a mouse 'marry'? And it is the subjectivity of these tin creatures, not that of living animals, which triumphs. The child mouse wants a mama, but has no idea
of what this is. And it turns out to be a social category which anyone can fill. The text is very clear about this, and equally certain about biology. Whatever men and women are, whatever the subject is, it has very little to do with sexual attributes. The mouse and his child create a family, their final bricolage, and in doing so interpellate their new relations, robbing the living ones of any claim to distinction. There is now no difference at all between being and seeming.

But this ideology is repeatedly confronted with the language of the text which continues to nominate sexual categories no matter how the work’s themes busily disavow them. The subject is always in language. We know ourselves through our use of, among other things, pronouns. It is only the third person in language which is gendered: he, she. But, as we know, is only through the third person, through the other, that we are able to enter into discourse, to make language work for us, at all. So far as The Mouse and his Child’s ideology is concerned, the female is unspeakable, the actually unrepresentable Otherness. The subject in Hoban’s text must, like all subjects, define itself against an other, who might, theoretically, be of either sex. But the dependence of the text upon language itself ensures that the other is female, the person excluded by the nature of language itself.

Anatomical difference ‘comes to figure sexual difference’ and the ‘phallus thus indicates the reduction of difference to an instance of visible perceptions, a seeming value’. The role of language in fixing ‘seeming values’ is clear; we know what a rose is because of what

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17 Mitchell and Rose, p.42.
it is not, as much as what it is. The text cannot avoid the fact of differentiation in language, the distinction between positive and negative.

And it is clear that male is positive. Within the family which the mouse and his child create, mama is barely present but father, self-winding and separate, triumphs. The poor elephant can never hope to install the signifier mama with much credibility, to the advantage of the ideology projecting a non-gendered subject. But the toy father very successfully inhabits his role. This and others, such as adventurer, fighter, provider, wise ruler, are not shared with the elephant or the seal or any other living female animal. It seems that for all the text's determination to make one ideological point, it cannot avoid making another, quite opposite one, at the same time. Even when a father's sexual difference is actually non-existent, as is the case with the mouse, he is positive to the female's negative. The mouse may not be male in the biological sense, but is most certainly so in terms of the Symbolic. And it is this which matters, after all, because it is the ground of subjectivity itself.

We can safely leave the last word on this text to the implied author. The reader is encouraged to identify this person with the tramp. It is the tramp who provides the reader's vantage-point, who stands aside to let the reader peer into the window of the toyshop, over his shoulder. And at the text's end, the tramp reappears, to remind the reader of the distance proper for the reading. Which is not actually the tramp's at all, but the implied author's, the one who can see the tramp on the road, the star circling in the sky and the little house whose windows shine out into the dump.
Hoban's tramp or hobo underscores the points the text makes about representing and being: about the work of the word, the signifier. Up pops Hoboman, to show how far we, the readers, have come with him. Behind us, far behind now, a godlike narrator showed us a snowy street. And soon we were asked to engage our world with the text's, in order that it could speak. This is not a new feature of fiction but it is generally naturalized, in the way of ideologies. Here, though, our activities have been revealed, made plain and, more than that, our work in the interstices of the text has been embodied in frames, and the mice.

So rather than maligning the narrator as unwilling to finish the job, we recognize instead that the fictional conventions which we have attempted to force upon the text are themselves the subject of scrutiny. The implied author himself, that mysterious absent figure, obtrudes into his text, in one move fictionalizing himself and claiming the text as 'real'. Real, that is, in the sense that the words on this page are real: they are true signs, brought to life in the reading. They have constructed the text we have read and its implied author appears to make the point that the world created by them and the 'real' world which he and the reader inhabit can be confused. We lend this created world our own lived experience, but this is not a one-way traffic. It will, if we do not take care, come into ours too.
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