

Innocence and Experience:
Figuring the Child in the Fiction of A. L. Barker

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Abstract

This thesis considers the dialectic of innocence and experience in the fiction of A.L. Barker (1918-2002). It is about her preoccupation with the relation between these states, which I argue is best understood through the figure of the child. Alluding to and critiquing Romantic, Victorian, psychoanalytic and modernist narratives of childhood and registering their influence on ideas about the child in mid-twentieth-century culture, Barker's fiction troubles dominant assumptions about what different identities of age entail, meaning that her *oeuvre* should be read as a 'genealogy' of age. I argue that the central question of Barker's work is if, and how, the child can be written. She wrestles with this question for over thirty years, writing and rewriting the child figure in a number of alternative, innovative forms: the short story, the 'articulated novel' and the retropulsive text. In each case she is preoccupied with the ways in which the child mirrors or intertwines with other categories of age that are constructed in opposition to adult identity.

The thesis recognises the significance of the child figure in mid-twentieth-century literature and highlights age as a crucial (though under-used) critical concept for reading modernist and after-modernist texts. In this way it contributes to recent literary debates concerning childhood and modernism and also takes part in discussions of age in Childhood Studies and in the newly-emerging field of Age Studies, which recognises age to be an attribute of identity as significant as gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, and so on. The thesis makes a distinct contribution to literary studies by providing the first introduction to Barker's work and writing life, based not only on in-depth analyses of her published texts but also on extensive archival research undertaken at the A.L. Barker archive at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 5 |
| Abbreviations | 6 |
| Introduction: Figuring the Child | 7 |
| Chapter One, Innocence and Experience: (Re)Writing the Child at Mid-Century | 35 |
| <i>I. Innocence and Experience</i> | 37 |
| <i>II. The Romantic Child</i> | 39 |
| <i>III. Blake's Dichotomous Child</i> | 42 |
| <i>IV. Wordsworth and the Victorian Child</i> | 45 |
| <i>V. The Dickensian Child and the Condition of England</i> | 49 |
| <i>VI. The Savage Child and the Colonial Subject</i> | 52 |
| <i>VII. Henry James and the Limits of Innocence</i> | 55 |
| <i>VIII. The Short Story and The Child</i> | 60 |
| <i>IX. The Short Story, Modernism and Adolescence</i> | 62 |
| <i>X. The Modernist Child</i> | 65 |
| <i>XI. The Child at Mid-Century</i> | 69 |
| Chapter Two, "Could I say I was possessed?": The Uncanny Child in 'The Iconoclasts', 'Domini' and <i>The Gooseboy</i> | 73 |
| <i>I. 'The Child is Father of the Man'</i> | 75 |
| <i>II. 'The Iconoclasts'</i> | 82 |
| <i>III. 'Domini'</i> | 92 |

| | | |
|--|---|------------|
| IV. | <i>The Gooseboy</i> | 101 |
| Chapter Three, (Dis)articulations: Language, Power and ‘Age Inversion’ in Barker’s Articulated Fiction of the 1960s | | 112 |
| I. | <i>Silence</i> | 114 |
| II. | <i>Articulation</i> | 123 |
| III. | <i>Disarticulation</i> | 127 |
| IV. | <i>Age Inversion</i> | 139 |
| Chapter Four, The Old Woman, The Adolescent Girl and Masculinity in Barker’s ‘Ghost Stories’ | | 149 |
| I. | <i>The Old Woman and Masculinity</i> | 151 |
| II. | <i>Knowing</i> | 161 |
| III. | <i>The Ghostly Adolescent Girl</i> | 166 |
| IV. | <i>‘Charley’ and ‘Dora’</i> | 174 |
| V. | <i>The Ghostliness of Age</i> | 181 |
| Chapter Five, Age, Place, Past time and Form in <i>The Haunt</i> | | 187 |
| I. | <i>Age and Place</i> | 191 |
| II. | <i>Haunted Places</i> | 198 |
| III. | <i>The Lingering Child</i> | 206 |
| IV. | <i>‘The Inconsistent Texts of Ageing’</i> | 212 |
| Conclusion | | 223 |
| Bibliography | | 230 |

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Abbreviations

HRHRC The A.L. Barker Archive at the Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

Introduction: Figuring the Child

I.

In *Life Stories* (1981) A.L. Barker wrote about a childhood expedition to the home of her mother's employer in the affluent south London suburb of Lawrie Park. Barker's most vivid memory of the visit is the moment when, left alone in the kitchen while her mother cleaned, and only six years old, she turned on the tap in the door of the oven range and watched the water flow across the red tiled floor. 'I admired the way the water clarified every crack and scrupulously filled every hollow', she remembers.¹ Barker reimagines the episode in her novel, *A Heavy Feather* (1978) from the perspective of Almayer Jenkins: '[the water] magnified every crack, every grain. [...] It is water I remember as my eye of childhood, a vision crystal clear and scrupulous. I like to think I saw everything like that. It is sentimentality, of course, for I had learned already to look without seeing.'² Through the metaphor of the 'eye of childhood', the passage evokes ideas about the child's freshness of perception even as it dismisses them as sentimental. By suggesting that experience already clouds Almayer's vision, the novel questions Romantic conceptions of the fresh, 'innocent' gaze of the child, akin to that of the first humans or Adam in Eden. But Barker does not dismiss entirely the idea of a special clarity of childhood perception. Instead, the image of the 'eye of childhood' foregrounds not just the duality but the ambiguity of the child in her work.

It also serves as a powerful metaphor for the way in which Barker's fiction compels the reader to view the world through the lens of childhood. Like the water, which clarifies and magnifies the cracks in the kitchen floor, the 'eye of childhood' in Barker's fiction illuminates the fault lines in constructions of innocence and

1 A.L. Barker, *Life Stories*, 1981 (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 15.

2 Barker, *A Heavy Feather* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 17. The reference is to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1606): "[t]is the eye of childhood/that fears a painted devil'. See: William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, A. R. Braunmuller, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.2.57-58.

experience in the literature and culture of the twentieth century. It does this by reworking and repurposing conceptions of childhood innocence and experience in modernist, Victorian and Romantic literature. Her fiction thereby creates a historiographical account of these states and their relation to childhood – a genealogy of age according to A.L. Barker.

Barker's concern with the child is perhaps typical of an author who began writing in the 1930s. Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973), Rosamund Lehman (1901-1990), William Golding (1911-1993), Elizabeth Taylor (1912-1975), Angus Wilson (1913-1991), Muriel Spark (1918-2006), and Doris Lessing (1919-2013), among others, all wrote about children. Because Barker's fiction so often alludes to, borrows from, and reworks the writing of others it is difficult to distinguish a distinctive 'Barkeresque' child. My argument is not that Barker conceives the child in a completely different way to her peers. Like Bowen, Barker critically revisits the Jamesian child; like Wilson, she pairs children with the elderly; and her writing features a 'feral' child like those in Lessing's work. Barker is also influenced by writers of the previous generation, learning about the dangers of innocence in the writing of Rebecca West (a great admirer of Barker's work) and consulting James Joyce's fiction for a model of the rejection of the Romantic epiphany.³ What makes Barker stand out is the intensity of her gaze on the child and the sheer variety of the children she imagines in her writing. Her fiction thinks critically about the tendency to understand childhood in terms of dichotomy, recognising the ways in which this restricts and burdens the child, and insisting instead on its ambiguity.

Considering that the child figure regularly appears in the work of British twentieth-century writers, there is remarkably little critical scholarship on the representation of childhood in twentieth century British literature for adults. While much has been written about the figure of the child in Romantic and Victorian texts⁴

³ Barker wrote to West in 1980 to ask if she might dedicate *Life Stories* to her. Her letter reads: 'To me, as to many people, you are our greatest living writer. I have known it since my ignorant 'teens when I first read Black Lamb, Grey Falcon. It has been a matter of great pride and consolation to me that you have noticed my work and often gone out of your way to commend it to others. I suspect it was your influence which procured for me a fellowship of the Royal Society of Literature, an acknowledgement which means more to me than any award or literary prize.' See: Barker, letter to Rebecca West, 6th June 1980, box 11, folder 1, HRHRC.

⁴ For studies of childhood in Romantic and Victorian literature see especially: James Kincaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); Claudia

– and about representations of childhood in nineteenth and twentieth century Children’s literature⁵ – literary critics rarely pay close and sustained attention to how British writers of the twentieth century wrote the child. The lack of criticism about childhood and modernism is particularly surprising given the importance of the child to modernist literature. Paul March-Russell argues that ‘the child acted as a catalyst for many of the Modernist debates that surrounded identity’, noting that although modernist critics frequently explore ideas of identity ‘the role of the child has rarely been examined.’⁶ Critical examinations of childhood in the fiction of this period are usually confined to the final section of a book that offers a broad chronological survey of childhood, for example, Peter Coveney’s famous study, *Poor Monkey* (1957).⁷ Sometimes essays about twentieth-century British literary children feature alongside pieces on the representation of the child in film and popular culture within the pages of interdisciplinary edited collections.⁸ While these books provide useful new theoretical perspectives, their broad Anglo-American focus does not allow for a sustained examination of the child in British twentieth-century literature. On the whole, when literary critics writing about the period *do* show an interest in childhood, the ‘theme’ appears as just one of a number of preoccupations in a more general study. While it is likely that a critical account of the work of one of the

Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012); Robert Pattison, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1978); Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930* (London: Virago, 1995). Steedman’s book does venture into the twentieth-century but its cut-off date is 1930.

5 Studies of children’s literature fall outside the scope of this project, which exclusively focuses on fiction for adult readers.

6 Paul March-Russell, ‘Baby Tuckoo Among the Grown-Ups: Modernism and Childhood in the Interwar Period’, in Adrienne E. Gavin, ed., *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 196-211, p. 196.

7 Peter Coveney’s *Poor Monkey* was reprinted and revised as *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society: A Study of the Theme in English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967). This study uses the later book throughout. Richard Locke’s study is also worth mentioning here, although it is largely focused on nineteenth century British and twentieth-century American literature: Richard Locke, *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). For edited collections see: Gavin, ed., *The Child in British Literature*.

8 See, for example: Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, eds., *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Karen J. Renner, ed., *The ‘Evil Child’ in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

aforementioned mid-century writers will take account of her writing about children, the child will rarely be the sole focus of the book.⁹

Barker's fiction, however, demands to be read in the light of the figure of the child. Nineteen of the thirty short stories she published between 1947 and 1964 are about children (more than this feature a child). The child figure lingers at the margins of her 1960s novels, returning to the foreground in her short fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, and in her 1987 novel, *The Gooseboy*. In her final novel, *The Haunt* (1999), written when she was in her eighties, Barker in a sense comes full circle, returning to and developing the re-writing of the Romantic child she began in her debut collection, *Innocents: Variations on a Theme* (1947). The importance of the child to her work means that studying her fiction necessitates an examination of childhood. To write an introduction to Barker's work without exploring the figure of the child seems impossible. So it is no surprise that all of the few pieces of literary criticism about Barker's fiction address her preoccupation with childhood (I discuss this later). My thesis will not only provide the first full-length study of Barker's work and life, but will also offer the first sustained examination of the child in the fiction of an individual twentieth-century writer since 1991. The two main parts of the thesis (Barker's fiction and the history of the child) work together. Barker's writing illuminates the child in twentieth-century literature and culture and allows us to see the history of the child figure more clearly, and in a new way. At the same time, understanding the history of childhood innocence and experience and the changing figure of the child gives us a 'lens' through which we can read Barker's writing. The third part of the thesis concerns Barker's life. Her preoccupation with the child figure seems appropriate considering that she, like the child, resists being known. I begin the section that follows by examining Barker's careful representation of her own childhood. What interests me is that Barker's biography, like her fiction, is characterised by a tension between being known and remaining secret.

⁹ To my knowledge, the only exception to this which may be termed 'recent' is: Carol Sklenicka, *D.H. Lawrence and the Child* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

II.

A.L. Barker did not believe her childhood to be interesting. 'Readers were accustomed and entitled to lives that were rich and/or strange,' she writes in *Life Stories*. 'I had no compulsion to write about the events in my life, most of them were only too predictable.'¹⁰ Barker's certainty that her life is 'predictable' and thus not eventful enough to merit a standard autobiographical work is telling, suggesting either a lack of confidence, a desire to self-efface, or both of these at once. Also of interest is Barker's sense that readers are 'accustomed and entitled to' particular kind of lives: 'there was the consumer to consider'¹¹ This raises the question of what we expect from a writer's childhood (a degree of richness and strangeness?) and gives an insight into Barker's sense of her work, and by implication her life, as a product for consumption. Significantly, Barker's declaration that she 'had no compulsion to write about the events in [her] life' appears to be contradicted by a statement on the same page of *Life Stories*: '[w]hen I realised that I wanted to write something about myself and my writing I was dismayed.'¹² It seems that Barker wants to write about herself and her writing but she doesn't want to write about the events in her life. This tension between being known and remaining secret permeates her writing life, and perhaps explains the unusual form of *Life Stories*, which Jane Gardam describes as 'a curious book of anecdotes about herself slotted between passages from her work'.¹³ Barker's sense of 'dismay' at wanting to write about herself merits further attention. Her anxiety stems from the idea of '[a]ll those pages, x-hundreds, it could be x-thousands, peppered with I's'.¹⁴ Bearing in mind that by this point Barker was in her early sixties, a Royal Society of Literature Fellow, an Arvon tutor, a member of PEN, and had written a novel shortlisted for the Booker Prize, her reticence is surprising. It seems appropriate that she would want to write about herself at this point in her life, after so many achievements.

¹⁰ Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jane Gardam, 'Introduction', in Barker, *Submerged: Selected Stories* (London: Virago Press, 2002), pp. vii-xiv, p. xi.

¹⁴ Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 9.

Barker's inhibition about revealing herself on paper started at an early age: 'When, for the first time, something I had written appeared in print I hid it. Seeing my thoughts on a page was humiliating. One of two courses was open to me: I should have to destroy whatever I wrote, or I should have to write like someone else. I wanted nothing of myself on paper.'¹⁵ This desire for privacy comes across in Barker's writing.¹⁶ In a review of *A Source of Embarrassment* (1974) Isabel Quigly writes of 'the almost impenetrable inner world of A. L. Barker' and notes Barker's 'quiet reputation for sharpness, precision, perfect finish'.¹⁷ Reviewing the same novel, Anthony Thwaite describes Barker as a 'delicate, muted novelist' who 'writes in a witty undertone, stylish, oblique, with a sense of claws beneath the surface [...] like a 1970s Jane Austen'.¹⁸ But, Thwaite adds, 'even [Barker's] broadest comedy is 'civilised' in a fastidious, slightly debilitated way'.¹⁹ Both Quigly and Thwaite make a distinction between the surface of Barker's writing and what lies beneath. Quigly observes the 'sharpness' and 'precision' of Barker's writing but suggest that her 'perfect finish' does not allow the reader access to her 'impenetrable inner world'. Thwaite notes Barker's style and humour but, through his use of 'fastidious' and 'debilitated', also registers his sense that she is restraining herself, suppressing her 'claws' with her 'civilised' humour. Both reviewers put emphasis on the 'quiet', 'muted' quality of her prose. Barker's writing, like her writing life, is characterised by a tension between concealing and revealing.

Although Barker describes her life as 'predictable' her early years were unusual considering her profession. Most of the mid-century writers I mentioned earlier were from middle- or upper- class backgrounds and, although working-class writers were more common in the post-war period, female working-class writers were more unusual than male ones. In the section of *Life Stories* in which she recalls

15 Ibid, p. 55.

16 Incidentally, Barker's desire for privacy may be related to her preference for the short story, which she felt was a more private, personal form than the novel. 'It's very private, the short story', she writes, meaning that reactions towards short stories differ a lot from one person to the next and, if a story is rejected, 'It is very much a question of what that particular editor feels [...] what makes them tick'. See: Barker, draft of *Life Stories* (undated), box 8, folder 6, HRHRC.

17 Isabel Quigly, 'Entwined Enchantment' (review of *A Source of Embarrassment*), in the *Financial Times*, 21st March 1974, p. 15, box 5, folder 6, HRHRC.

18 Anthony Thwaite, 'Chapters of Accidents' (review of *A Source of Embarrassment*), in *The Observer*, 24th March 1974, box 5, folder 6, HRHRC.

19 Ibid.

her experience with the tap and the water, Barker lists the staff at the house where her mother worked: 'a nurse, a cook, a house-maid and a gardener, and my mother to do the rough cleaning'.²⁰ This reminds the reader of the still-rigid class hierarchies of British society in the early 1920s and emphasises her parents', and her own, place within them. Barker was highly aware of her social class. Remembering her secondary schooling at a girls' grammar school, she writes: 'I felt mandatory, the pip put in to show that the jam was made with real fruit.'²¹ Unlike her mother and her aunts, who 'all had self-sufficiency and were happy about themselves', Barker felt that she did not fit in, either at home or at school.²² *Life Stories* gives a sense of an insecure, unconfident young woman who doesn't know her place in the world: 'I had got a scholarship on a mistaken estimate of my abilities. [...] I was at that school, that stronghold of knowledge and wisdom and the future, under false pretences. The Authorities had been grossly deceived. When I left [...] I imagined them saying: 'We won't be caught like that again.'²³ In the chapters that follow, one of the arguments I draw on about childhood is that it is culturally constructed and inflected by race, gender, sexuality, and class. The last of these is relevant to Barker. Her childhood does not fit in with the idealised Victorian narratives of a middle-class childhood which still inform discourses of childhood in the 1930s and 1940s. Perhaps this is why Barker didn't think her childhood interesting or worthy of a reader's interest.

In her 1990 introduction to Elizabeth Taylor's *Hester Lilly* (1954) Barker writes that: '[Taylor] was serious and professional about her work, but never one to enjoy giving interviews and putting herself about. She regarded her private life as her own; what she chose to give of it to the world she transmuted into fiction.'²⁴ Barker might be writing of herself. The archive shows that she too avoided 'putting herself about', preferring to remain at home in Carshalton Beeches, Surrey and steer clear of the social events that were an inevitable part of the London literary scene: 'I know you hate coming up to London unnecessarily,' writes Barker's editor, Nora Smallwood in

20 Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 12.

21 Ibid., p. 57.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p.98.

24 Barker, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Taylor, *Hester Lilly* (London: Virago, 1990), pp. vii-xiii, p. ix.

1951, 'but next time you have to come up do suggest yourself for lunch'.²⁵ John Carter, the manager of Scribner's London rare book business, also notes Barker's absence from the capital, though in a rather less tactful way than Smallwood: '[W]hat are you up to?' he wonders, 'I never see you'.²⁶

London didn't appeal for several reasons. An intensely private person from a young age, Barker was very careful to restrict what she revealed about herself and disliked being, or seeming to be, out of control. In spring 1948, soon after the success of *Innocents*, Barker attended a party at the West-London home of Carter and his wife, Ernestine. Having been taken ill at the party, Barker was afterwards anxious about her behaviour, and sent an apology to the Carters. Her letter prompted an affectionate response from Ernestine:

Thank you for a beautiful apology for nothing at all. Please, please don't be ashamed. All that happened is that you got rather pale (v. becoming), + just [?]ful enough to make us fight for the chance to look after you – which you didn't need at all – as one working woman to another, I know how easy it is to get [buzzed?] on a drink or 2 after no lunch or tea + please believe that your behaviour compared to mine on such occasions should be a source of pride not embarrassment. Come + see us soon again.²⁷

Appalled by the idea that Ernestine and John thought she had been drunk, Barker wrote to Smallwood, who did her best to reassure her friend. 'My dear Pat,' she replied, '[t]he thing that's worrying the three of us here dreadfully is that you should think back on your collapse on Tuesday with such horror. We all of us knew, good though the Carter cocktails were, that they weren't the cause of your feeling so rotten.'²⁸ Such an acute concern about how people perceived her must have played a part in Barker's position on the margins of the London literary scene.

Social class and lack of confidence are other likely factors. Barker was not well-off and she worked full-time so there were practical and financial reasons for her absence from the capital (I discuss these in detail at the start of chapter three).

25 Nora Smallwood, letter to Barker, 18th April 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

26 John Carter, letter to Barker, 17th April 1952, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

27 Ernestine Carter, undated letter to Barker (c. April 1948), box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

28 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 30th April 1948, box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

Most of the literary people Barker was socialising with were from upper- or middle-class backgrounds so perhaps she felt about the London literary scene the way she felt about her grammar school, 'the pip put in' to show that the jam was real. Barker's lack of confidence in herself is well-documented. In 1951 Smallwood wrote to Barker thanking her for her recent letter: 'For a distinguished Prize winner your modesty is unequalled. And never have I met a more self-critical writer.'²⁹ Another incident that shows Barker's lack of confidence is recounted in her piece about her travels in France in 1948, where she stayed with Smallwood's friends, the le Cours, in Montaigne's chateau. She writes: 'One afternoon I was requested to present myself on the terrace at Montaigne where 'some gentlemen from the Academie Française' were to take tea with Madame le Cour. Mention was made of Monsieur Maurois..... I panicked and hid in the woods'.³⁰ Barker's self-confidence and belief in her writing improved as she got older but, as we saw earlier, even when she was in her sixties she was still 'dismayed' by the idea of writing about herself.

III.

Discussing the novel, 1945-1950, the writer P. H. Newby remarks on the 'extraordinary' amount of fiction about childhood that emerged during this period.³¹ In *The Novel Since 1939* (1946) Henry Reed argues that the interest in childhood began during the war. For Reed, Gill Plain observes, 'perhaps the most potent thematic preoccupation of the war years was the trope of childhood. Novelists retreated *en masse* [...] to the remembered childhoods of the Edwardian or interwar period [...] distancing themselves from current conflicts'.³² Also writing in 1946, Rosamond Lehmann remarks that: '[f]or the present most novelists are likely to turn back to the time when, the place where they knew where they were [...] They will look to their youth'.³³ For Barker childhood does not function as a period of stability

29 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 20th June 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

30 Barker, undated typescript entitled 'Year One of the Somerset Maugham Award', pp. 3-4, box 13, folder 10, HRHRC.

31 P. H. Newby, *The Novel 1945-1950* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1951), p. 8.

32 Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 25-26. See also: Henry Reed, *The Novel Since 1939* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1946).

33 Rosamond Lehmann, 'The Future of the Novel?', *Britain Today*, June 1946, quoted in Randall

or a place where she 'knew where [she] was'. As I have suggested, Barker's childhood is marked by not knowing her place and not fitting in. Newby's suggestion is that the life experience of younger writers such as Barker 'could be divided into two halves: childhood and adolescence on the one hand and war on the other'.³⁴ Again, this was not quite the case for Barker. It is true that her twenty-first birthday on 13th April 1939 was less than a month after Germany's invasion of Bohemia and Moravia, but by this point she had already been working full-time for five years, since she left school at sixteen, and had had some experience of adult life between adolescence and war.

The preoccupation with childhood at mid-century noted by Newby, Reed and Lehmann is also registered by Elizabeth Bowen. In 'The Bend Back' (1950), Bowen writes of society's 'disrelish for and uneasiness in the present'.³⁵ Her suggestion is that mid-twentieth-century society is estranged from the present due to its focus on the past and she notes people's inability to come to terms with and enjoy the present.³⁶ This preoccupation with the past (what Bowen calls 'the better days') necessarily involves representations of childhood. Bowen draws attention to 'the multiplication, in almost every country, every language, of books about childhood written for grown-ups', proposing that '[t]he semi-mystical topography of childhood seems to be universal'.³⁷ Bowen argues that in childhood people perceive 'emotional simplicity – rebellions perhaps, but (we think) no conflicts. And, framing the whole picture, we see security'.³⁸ It is important to note that Bowen herself did not see childhood as secure and in her fiction writes about 'the self-deceiving myth of childhood innocence'.³⁹ For Bowen, the mid-century unease with the present manifests itself as a longing for the past and makes adults child-like. She argues: 'Now, after a second war, with its excoriations, grinding impersonality, obliteration of so many tracks and landmarks, heart and imagination once more demand to be

Stevenson, *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth-century Novel in Britain* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), p. 80.

34 Newby, *The Novel 1945-1950*, p. 8.

35 Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Bend Back', 1950, in Hermione Lee, ed., *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (Virago: London, 1986), pp. 54-60, p. 59.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., p. 55.

38 Ibid.

39 March-Russell, 'Baby Tuckoo Among the Grown-Ups', p. 204.

satisfied – to be fed, stabilised, reassured, taught'.⁴⁰ Bowen's personification of the heart and mind of the mid-century adult imagines him or her to be a needy and anxious child.

More recent literary criticism about the child in the fiction of this period has focused particularly on wartime. For example, Lyndsey Stonebridge identifies a turn to child analysis in 1940s Britain and argues that the figure of the child in the psychoanalysis of this period became both a figure of anxiety and a starting point for understanding the ways in which people reacted to anxiety in times of war. For mid-century psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, as for Freud, Stonebridge argues, the war-induced separation between mothers and their children generated anxiety but this anxiety was productive and essential for the formation of the ego.⁴¹ Similarly, N. H. Reeve argues that the preoccupation with childhood at mid-century may be explained by wartime experience:

Perhaps that sense of a perplexingly excessive immediacy may itself have fed into the preoccupations with childhood – childhood not just as a symbol for whatever has been torn away or cast adrift, but as a condition of being and responding in which event, idea and sensation are only dimly distinguishable, a condition which certain contemporary traumas can appear to revive.⁴²

Reeve's description recollects Bowen's portrayal of childhood representing adults' 'better days' from which they have been cut off, and recalls her idea of the mid-century-adult as a traumatised child. His suggestion that childhood is 'a condition of being and responding' to the overwhelming and incomprehensible nature of war is similar to Stonebridge's argument that the psychic trials of the infant 'become a sort of working metaphor for the anxiety of trying to imagine a world at war'.⁴³ For Reeve, wartime is a 'second childhood', a 'problematic breach in the continuity of the self'

40 Bowen, 'The Bend Back', p. 55.

41 Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 20, 23.

42 N. H. Reeve, 'The Girl on a Swing: Childhood and Writing in the 1940s', in Marina MacKay and Stonebridge, eds., *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 88-98, pp. 92-3.

43 Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety*, p. 33.

that may be either 'a loss or a liberation'.⁴⁴ Both Reeve and Stonebridge, then, make a link between the experience of being a child and the experience of 'being' in wartime.

But the focus at mid-century was not just on the child; it was on the adolescent, the old person and the colonial subject as well. In 1950 Barker received a letter from a magazine editor asking for a story, on one condition: '[d]o you mind if I ask you to avoid children and old ladies? I say this because I seem to be fated to have this subject chosen by nearly every author at the moment.'⁴⁵ This focus on the so-called 'book end' generations suggests that what is at stake in the period is the redefining of the 'mainstream' Western adult self.⁴⁶ There is a crisis of national and adult identity at mid-century which manifests itself in a preoccupation with origins, and thus with the child. At the same time, the crisis aimed to resolve itself via the shoring up of the identity categories against which mainstream adult identity is defined. So I want to add a further idea to Reeve's two explanations of the mid-century preoccupation with childhood. As well as the child being 'a symbol for whatever has been torn away or cast adrift' and childhood as 'a condition of being', I propose that the child in mid-century fiction is a figure that represents human nature, 'the father of the man'. And because the quality of human nature is called into question so forcefully in the post-war period, the question of what a child is – and subsequently, what a human is – becomes one that is being asked with new purpose.

Representations of the child appear so frequently in mid-century literature precisely because the child figure is able to hold contradiction and thus speaks to the contradictory nature of being at that particular historical moment. The child figure that emerges from the adult imagination on to the pages of post-war fiction is either barbaric or a victim of the barbarism of society. The interest in childhood as a symbol

44 Reeve, 'The Girl on a Swing', p. 94.

45 Ruth Jordan, editor of *Woman and Beauty*, letter to Barker, 7th June 1950, box 8, folder 8, HRHC.

46 I use the term 'adult' in the thesis to refer to a person against whom the age categories 'child', 'adolescent' and 'old' person are defined. It is in opposition to these latter categories that what I will call 'mainstream' adult identity is constructed. This presents a problem of definition. It is not always possible to pin-point an exact age at which people become adults, or an age when adults cease to be referred to as such and are seen as 'old' or 'elderly'. Ideas of what constitutes an adult or a child or an old person change over time and geographically, and from one individual to another. I do not attempt to resolve this definitional difficulty because my main concern is Barker's representation of the ways that age as an identity category resists (legal, biological, social, historical, etc.) attempts to pin it down.

of human nature and cultural origins is signalled by, to give a few examples, a renewed focus on social anthropology, an 'anthropological turn' in literature and culture and concern about England's decline as a colonial 'Motherland' to its 'children'.⁴⁷ In mid-century fiction there are role reversals or age inversions, with infantilised adults and precocious children who dominate them. There are pairings, in which adult and child are doubled and their relationship examined. And in the subtext of much of this fiction a question appears to be being asked: if war makes children of adults then what kind of creatures do children become? One answer to this question is that in tandem with the intense focus on and regulation of children in British society and culture, the child in mid-century fiction becomes ever more strange and uncanny.

As a figure that exposes and holds contradiction, the child also speaks to questions of literary categorisation, canonicity and fictional form. Like the fiction of many mid-century writers, Barker's work is difficult to classify and this is one reason why it has been overlooked. Barker's backwards-focus, another mid-century characteristic, means that her writing has been read as conventional and preoccupied with the past, with not much to say about its own historical moment. A good example of this kind of critical view may be found in A. S. Byatt's 1992 introduction to Barker's Booker-shortlisted novel, *John Brown's Body* (1969):

Anyone who struggled to find the right word, or correct a cadence, or shape a narrative must admire Barker's passionate accuracy. She writes for the sake of the English language, though her subject is never its inadequacies and pitfalls, which is part of her distance from most major writing of our time. [...]

You mightn't put her on a reading list for *The Novel Today* (though you might for a course in writing) because she represents no trend, attacks no large social issues, opens no existential anxieties. You couldn't form a cult around her novels; they aren't cosy or cliquish; they are idiosyncratic and quietly estranged from the common. Because of a kind of inhuman and uncomfortable brightness in her

47 For a detailed discussion of the 'anthropological turn' in mid-century culture see: Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 1-22.

perception I think of her in the company of Walter de la Mare, but that may be misleading.⁴⁸

Byatt clearly appreciates *John Brown's Body*, declaring it to be 'an extraordinary novel' and wondering 'why [Barker] isn't more widely read'.⁴⁹ However, despite her admiration of the novel, Byatt's characterisation of Barker's *oeuvre* doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Byatt insists that Barker's work is not part of a 'trend' and does not follow most modern writers in dealing with 'social issues' or 'existential anxieties'. But reading Barker's 1960s fiction closely, as I do in chapter three, one cannot help but be struck by her concern, in *The Joy Ride and After*, for example, with familial and social disarticulation. Byatt's assertion that Barker 'writes for the sake of the English language' and would be useful on the reading list of a course in writing characterises Barker as a 'writer's writer', an expert craftsman but a minor novelist because she does not engage with 'social issues' or language and is thus 'distance[d] from most major writing of our time'.

Byatt's reading of Barker's work as minor is representative of a misunderstanding of mid-century fiction as a whole. Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge point out that the fiction of this period is often viewed as 'domestic and domesticated', noted for its parochialism, and branded as 'a conservative literature of retreat'.⁵⁰ Despite the publication of numerous revisionary works since the 1990s, the idea of mid-century fiction as insular has persisted.⁵¹ The period of insularity has been extended as far as the 1970s; for example, in an article on Ian McEwan for *The Observer*, Robert McCrum writes:

48 A. S. Byatt, 'Introduction', in Barker, *A Case Examined, John Brown's Body and The Gooseboy*, omnibus edn. (London: Vintage, 1992), pp. 2-6, p. 2.

49, *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 2.

50 MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, pp. 1-16, pp. 1-2.

51 See, for example: MacKay and Stonebridge, eds., *British Fiction After Modernism*; Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*; Reeve and Rod Mengham, eds., *The Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jenny Hartley, *Millions Like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Virago, 1997); Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kristin Bluemel, ed. *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); and Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

In 1970 [...] an Englishman's world was a different place from what it is today. Ted Heath was PM; Europe was divided between East and West; the Beatles had just released 'Let It Be'. English fiction looked different, too: insular, frozen, and spinsterish.

When the 1970 Booker prize winner, *The Elected Member* by Bernice Rubens, was short-listed with Al Barker [sic], Elizabeth Bowen, Iris Murdoch and William Trevor, the house of English fiction looked like a shabby, suburban Edwardian rectory. If you wanted to find energy or originality, you had to go down the road to the pub. There, in an upstairs room, you might find contemporary playwrights at work: Pinter in his prime, or the young sans-culottes like Christopher Hampton, Trevor Griffiths and David Hare. New fiction was in the hands of the middle-aged. To the children of the Second World War and its aftermath, English culture was irrelevant and boring.⁵²

McCrum's statement that mid-fiction is 'irrelevant' and lacking in energy or originality is typical of the view that the mid-century novel was in crisis and, as Malcolm Bradbury put it, 'No Longer Novel'.⁵³ In addition, McCrum's use of the word 'Edwardian' supports the point made above about the backwards-focus of mid-century fiction and how this outlook has contributed to a misreading of the fiction of the period. The most salient aspect of McCrum's critique, however, is the way in which he genders 'English fiction' as 'spinsterish'. The book of Barker's to which McCrum refers is *John Brown's Body* (1969), a novel about an agoraphobic young wife's sexual obsession with a neighbour she believes to be the acquitted murderer, John Brown. Hardly 'spinsterish' or 'Edwardian'. McCrum's misreading of Barker's fiction recalls the sexist fiction of, and critical response to, the so-called 'Angry Young Men' by assuming that women's fiction is conservative and lacking in energy (an idea I discuss in chapter four).

For Nick Turner, 'novelists who do not foreground issues such as race, gender and class, or embrace post-modernism, are not seen as worthy of being written

52 Robert McCrum, 'The Story of his Life', in *The Observer*, Sunday 23rd January 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/23/fiction.ianmcewan> [accessed 17th February 2015].

53 This is Malcolm Bradbury's title for his chapter on the period 1945-1960 in *The Modern British Novel* (1993), quoted in MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, p. 1.

about'; he adds: '[t]his can explain A. L. Barker's marginalization'.⁵⁴ Turner's statement is a little simplistic. Barker's fiction does foreground class, gender and race, embracing postmodernist ways of thought but critics have not perceived this in her work (as we see with Byatt) because they notice her writing style first. So it is not that Barker is overlooked because she does not foreground questions of marginalisation, but that critics have overlooked Barker because they have missed these elements in her work. They focus on her style and miss the substance. As Ronald Blythe shrewdly observes: '[Barker's] composed and formal writing blandly obscures her edgy intention until the moment of its finest effect.'⁵⁵

Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge emphasise the ways in which mid-century fiction does not easily fit into categories established in relation to other literary periods (for example, realism and experimentalism) and requires its own critical vocabulary.⁵⁶ They note that mid-century writing tends to be claimed either as late modernism or early postmodernism and suggest that the fiction of this period responds to being considered 'precisely as mid-century fiction'.⁵⁷ In light of these ideas, Byatt's description of Barker's work is again useful in demonstrating how critics have misread mid-century writing. Byatt's second paragraph, for example, is characterised by negative lexis: 'mightn't', 'couldn't', the repetition of 'no'. Barker's writing is defined here not so much by what it is, as by what it is not. Furthermore, the vocabulary Byatt does choose to describe Barker's prose, words such as 'distance', 'idiosyncratic', 'estranged', 'inhuman', and 'uncomfortable', suggest that Byatt is unable to place Barker's work. The only positive comparison made is with Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), a writer best known for his supernatural short stories. What is 'uncomfortable' about Barker's work, then, is that it does not fit into Byatt's categorisation of 'The Novel Today' and cannot be placed (by Byatt) within the 'major writing' of the twentieth century.

54 Nick Turner, *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), pp. 7-8.

55 Ronald Blythe, 'Empire Man' (review of *A Source of Embarrassment*), in *The Listener*, 21st March 1974, p. 381, box 5, folder 6, HRHRC.

56 MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, pp. 3, 4, 9.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

This sense of unplaceability and in-betweenness characterises mid-century fiction, and Barker's *oeuvre* in particular. As a literary-historical category that is hard to place and seems always to be in between one thing and another (modernism and postmodernism, realism and experimentalism) mid-century fiction is like the figure of the child. Critics attempt to pin it down but it resists definition and categorisation, is characterised by ambiguity and marginality, and is poised between states or in suspension. The concept of liminality is useful here. In *The Rites of Passage* (1909) Arnold Van Gennep proposed that these ceremonies include a transitional or liminal stage between a person's ritual separation from one state and their incorporation into the next.⁵⁸ In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Victor Turner developed and modified Van Gennep's theory, emphasising the ambiguity of 'threshold people' and arguing that they 'elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space'.⁵⁹ For Turner, a threshold person is 'in and out of time', in between the future and the past, in a moment when normal life is suspended.⁶⁰ The term liminality, then, not only denotes the idea of marginality (which is significant for many mid-century writers including Barker). It also suggests a moment of temporal suspension or a discontinuity. This is important to an understanding of mid-century fiction. Turner's notion of threshold people being both 'in and out of time' speaks to an idea voiced by several mid-century writers, including Bowen, that the period during and immediately after the Second World War was in some way difficult or even impossible to represent because people felt suspended, estranged or adrift from their historical moment. As George Orwell puts it in 'Inside the Whale' (1940), the production of any major literature is impossible 'until the world has shaken itself into its new shape'.⁶¹ The general consensus is that this settling took some time. MacKay and Stonebridge, for example, propose that 'the post-war sensibility violently sheds its historical and ideological skins in 1968'.⁶²

58 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 1909 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 11.

59 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 1969 (Rutgers: Aldine, 2008), p. 95.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

61 George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', (online edition), http://orwell.ru/library/essays/whale/english/e_itw [accessed 5th June 2015]. The essay was first published in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London, 1940).

62 MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, p. 3.

Other accounts argue that the legacy of the Second World War loomed large in Britain for at least three decades, citing economic crises and the threat of the Cold War as reasons to extend the 'post war' era until the mid-1970s.⁶³

If we read the British mid-century – the period from the early 1930s to the late 1960s – as a liminal era, a moment of suspension and ambiguity, then we gain a greater understanding of the preoccupation with the child during this period. The child is used to look forward and to look back when people are unable to 'be' in the present. The child registers and holds the social and political contradictions of this historical moment and also its literary complexities. Literature is backwards-looking with an eye on new forms, realist and experimental. There is a hybridity of genres and forms, with writers making new fiction out of what has come before. This backwards- and forwards- focus relates to the preoccupation with the child. The child also speaks to the marginality of mid-century fiction which, like the child, may be thought of in relation to oppositions such as inside and outside, and mainstream and marginal. MacKay and Stonebridge tell the story of 'how the English literary 'centre' [...] ceased to understand itself as central'.⁶⁴ They argue that 'the most paradoxical – but also the most symptomatic – dimension of British culture after modernism is the way that its writers of central significance so relentlessly and wilfully positioned themselves on the outside'.⁶⁵

Of course, Barker is not (yet) considered to be 'of central significance' but she does purposefully position herself on the margins, self-marginalising through the form, style and content of her work, and choosing to live on the margins of the literary centre. The meanings of marginality are twofold. The first is to do with importance: the marginal lacks significance; the second concerns geography: the marginal is near a limit. Barker is marginal in both these senses. She writes both short stories and novels, literary fiction and genre fiction. She begins writing at mid-century: the era after modernism but before postmodernism. She is at once

63 For example, Keith Middlemas uses 1974 as the start date of 'the new regime'; James Mayall and Cornelia Navari propose that the post war era is over by 1975. See: Middlemas, *Power, Competition, and the State, volume III. The end of the postwar era: Britain since 1974* (London: MacMillan, 1986); Mayall and Navari, eds., *The End of the Post-war Era: Documents on Great-power Relations, 1968-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

64 MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, p. 10.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

connected with the London literary scene and distanced from it. None of her novels are set in London and she didn't want to spend time there. Indeed, her geographical situation is representative of her literary position. Not only is Barker's fiction itself marginal, it is interested in liminal figures: children, older people, those on the margins of society. Finally, the liminal preoccupations of her writing relate to her own position as a mid-century adult, part of the generation discussed by Bowen and Newby.

So the various applications of the idea of liminality and marginality I discuss above and in the rest of the thesis relate both to the sense of unplaceability and in-between-ness of Barker herself and to how this study of her work might inform future discussions of mid-century fiction. There has been a recent critical trend towards the recuperation of neglected mid-century British writers. MacKay and Stonebridge argue that the revaluation of the fiction of this period in relation to its cultural history shows how close study of the work of non-canonical figures disrupts accepted narratives about what happened to British fiction at this time. The crucial word is 'disrupts' in the sense that a marginal, non-canonical figure such as Barker has a haunting effect on the centre. Forms of writing relegated to a marginal position will not stay beyond the margins; what is excluded and repressed always returns. These ideas will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, which argues that Barker's ghost stories help us understand her position as both a marginal and a mainstream writer.

IV.

Innocence and experience: one cancels out the other; they merge, they invert, they infiltrate, they transmute, they are permeable states, and they permeate each other. A.L. Barker⁶⁶

Earlier I proposed that the metaphor of the 'eye of childhood' makes clear the importance of the child in Barker's fiction. But while a consideration of the child figure particularly illuminates the ways in which ideas of innocence and experience

⁶⁶ Barker, typescript of Arvon Foundation tutorial, 1984, p.1, box 3, folder 13, HRHRC.

function in Barker's writing, the child cannot be separated from the adult, the adolescent and the old person. Her work shows that these age categories are constructed against and in relation to one another, and often understood through the symbol of the child. So Barker's *oeuvre* is as much about the adult as it is about the child. It asks how adults have created the child at particular moments in British literature and history and what these different constructions of childhood reveal about adult anxieties and preoccupations. Barker's fiction recognises that age defines us in ways that are connected to but also distinct from other aspects of identity such as gender, race, sexual orientation or social class. Her writing is a part of the twentieth-century fascination with age but at the same time it responds critically to the tendency to think about age and other attributes of identity in oppositional terms. It calls into question dualisms such as innocence/experience, young/old, child/adult, emphasising that these ideas are 'permeable states' that do not exist in static isolation but are dependent on one another, 'merging', 'inverting' and 'infiltrating' in dialectical relationships.

In 1986 Barker wrote to her friend, the psychologist Charlotte Wolff, about Wolff's book, *Magnus Hirschfeld*: 'I do so agree when you point out that the 'complex meaning of youth and age should exercise sociologists [...]' It should indeed!'⁶⁷ As well as emphasising that for Barker youth and age are always intertwined, her comment shows that she considers the complex attributes of categories of age to be ideas that require analysis. For Barker, writing the figure of the child is a way of conducting this analysis. In her fiction the child is a deconstructive figure that draws attention to the instability within and between age categories, in turn exposing what Barker calls 'the terrible arbitrariness of age'.⁶⁸ Age is arbitrary in the sense that identities of age are imposed on people by their culture. And while these ageing identities and the systems to which they belong appear to be 'natural' and ordered (or naturally ordered), in fact they are often inconsistent and unstable, changing according to different historical and geographical cultures and individual beliefs and experiences. Because of Barker's sense of the complexities of age and the child as a

67 Barker, letter to Charlotte Wolff re. *Magnus Hirschfeld*, p. 1, 6th August 1986, box 13, folder 13, HRHRC.

68 Barker, 'Introduction' to *Hester Lilly*, p. xii.

figure that deconstructs or ‘queers’ age by drawing attention to its arbitrariness I want to read her fiction in the light of Age Studies and queer theory.

The still-emerging field of ‘Age Studies’ or ‘Aging Studies’ emphasises that ageing is not a process that should be solely associated with older people.⁶⁹ Devoney Looser, for instance, points out that age is not something that only ‘the old’ possess and ageing is something we are all doing all the time from cradle to grave.⁷⁰ Research in the field has called attention to the connections that can be made between the social positions of the ‘book end’ generations: the very young and the very old. Since 1945 these age categories have been subject to increasingly protective and restrictive regulation by the British government. Dominant twentieth- and twenty first- century narratives emphasise the idea that what is at stake in the protection of children and the elderly is the humanity of adult society. This kind of view is exemplified in a speech to Senate given by the American politician, Hubert Humphrey, in which he argues that ‘[t]he ultimate test of a society’s humanity is its treatment of the oldest and the youngest members’.⁷¹ Age studies theorists are interested in the ways in which the book end generations are marginalised in society despite governmental claims to the contrary. Peter Hopkins and Rachel Pain, for example, argue that ‘[b]oth older and young people inhabit the social-chronological margins [...] and in Western societies are stereotyped as economically dependent, physically less able and socially excluded’.⁷² As I discuss in chapter three, Barker’s

69 There remains some dispute within the field about which term to use. Devoney Looser discusses the relative merits of both terms in the journal, *Age, Culture, Humanities*. Although I agree with the idea that ‘Aging Studies’ better implies the constructedness of categories of age, I will use the term ‘Age Studies’ in the thesis to avoid the complication of the disparity between the UK and US spellings of the word ‘ageing’. See Looser, ‘Age and Aging Studies, From Cradle to Grave’ in *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1, 2014 (online edition). <http://ageculturehumanities.org/WP/age-and-aging-studies-from-cradle-to-grave/> [accessed 22nd May 2015].

70 Looser, ‘Age and Aging Studies’.

71 Hubert Humphrey, speech to senate. Quoted in Gunhild O. Hagestad, ‘The Book-ends: Emerging Perspectives on Children and Old People’ in Chiara Saraceno, ed., *Families, Ageing and Social Policy: Intergenerational Solidarity in European Welfare States* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008), pp. 20-37, p. 25.

72 Peter Hopkins and Rachel Pain, ‘Geographies of age: thinking relationally’, in *Area*, 39 (3, 2007), pp. 287-294, p. 288. It is worth noting that the field of Age Studies itself is marginal. Sylvia Henneberg argues that ‘age studies [...] is a subcategory of the humanities that is still not securely established. Instead, it hovers on the brink of extinction with only the suspiciously lingering label of “emerging field” to keep it alive’. See: Sylvia Henneberg, *The Creative Crone: Aging and the Poetry of May Sarton and Adrienne Rich* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), p. 1.

writing stages the disarticulation of intergenerational relationships and inverts adult and child roles in order to consider the tensions of the Welfare State as 'parent' in mid-century Britain. Her fiction represents the ways in which adulthood defines itself against what it is not, so that childhood and old age must be dependent for adults to remain dominant.

The idea of adult self-definition taking place by way of the marginalisation of other age groups speaks to concepts of self and other in gender, race, disability, post-colonial and sexuality studies. Writing in the first issue of the *Age Studies* journal, *Age, Culture, Humanities*, Looser highlights the connections between age and other identity categories, arguing that:

We must continue to seek out the ways that the meanings and practices of age and aging changed from decade to decade, generation to generation, or century to century. We must do so in conversation with the other categories of identity that have become central to our work in the humanities, particularly in cultural studies: gender, race, class, nation, and sexuality among them.⁷³

The thesis recognises the interrelation Looser describes. One example of how age relates to other identity categories, again taken from chapter three, is the way in which Barker's 1960s fiction becomes increasingly concerned with the representation of childhood and old age in relation to the marginalisation of the (non-white) colonial subject. Historically, this figure has been characterised as child-like but this characterisation became particularly significant after the Second World War due to decolonisation. In chapter one I show that the child and the colonial subject are linked due to their longstanding association in the child/savage parallel. Barker's deconstructive child figure overturns the oppositions on which this parallel is based and also destabilises the terms used to define categories of sexuality, class and gender.

The dismantling of sexual categorisations in sexuality studies and queer theory has aided my understanding of how the dialectic of innocence and experience and the child/adult opposition function in Barker's work. The central proposition of

⁷³ Looser, 'Age and Aging Studies'.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's influential study, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) is that the heterosexual/homosexual opposition, which she calls a 'master term' of the twentieth century, is characterised by ambiguity and instability:

[C]ategories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions – heterosexual/homosexual, in this case – actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A.⁷⁴

This technique may be applied to the analysis of categories of adult (A) and child (B) in the thesis. Term B is subordinated to term A. This may be seen in the associations made with a child's physical size, in family hierarchies, in educational institutions, in terms of legal agency; children are for the most part physically, emotionally and financially dependent on adults. But term A is dependent on term B. As I will show, much twentieth century thought has emphasised the extent to which the formation of adult identity depends on childhood experience. The child is positioned as the key to unlocking the adult self; the child one once was shapes the adult one becomes. So term B is internal to term A. At the same time, the meaning of 'adult' is defined against the meaning of 'child'; what is adult is what is *not* childish, *not* child-like. So term B is external to term A.

Term B, then, is at once internal and external to term A. As in Kosofsky Sedgwick's account, this results in a fundamental instability in the adult/child opposition. Further, the privileging of youth over age (which, as Looser noted earlier, is synonymous with old age) means that childhood is prized as 'the best time' of people's lives and youth is associated with health, beauty, fun, and so on. So term B is valorised over term A. However, the dependence of the meaning of term A on term

74 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 11, 9-10.

B and the valorisation of term B has resulted in the further subordination of term B. The idealisation of childhood has led to the restriction of what ‘the child’ and ‘childhood’ can or should mean. The resistance of adults to the strangeness of the child suggests that the regulation of children is less about the protection of ‘real’ children and more about the preservation of certain ideas of the nation, the family, the adult, the self which depend on the meaning of the child being static and fixed as innocent, unknowing, and so on. Kathryn Bond Stockton suggests this when she notes that ‘even conservative Americans who trumpet family values juxtapose their children with “homosexuals.” Of course, they do so in order to oppose them to each other [...] Yet by doing so, they make the concept of homosexuality central to the meaning of the children they embrace’.⁷⁵ Homosexuality, darkness, evil, madness, strangeness – all of these qualities must be eradicated from the category of ‘child’ in order for it to play its part in the preservation of the oppositions on which Western culture is based.

Sexuality studies and queer theory recognise the child as a ‘queer’ figure that resists and disrupts classification. The figure of the child ‘queers’ conceptions of age in a sociological sense by deviating from the narrow idea of what ‘the child’ is and should be offered by dominant cultural narratives about childhood. The child is also queer because it makes a person other to herself and disrupts temporality: the child is what one once was and no longer is but one’s childhood never really goes away. Bond Stockton argues that ‘from the standpoint of “normal” adults [the child] is always queer’ but that the gay child in particular brings into view some central problems with Anglo-American ideas of growing up.⁷⁶ She draws attention to what she calls ‘the gay child’s “backward birth”, by which she means that because children are not permitted to be sexual (though all children are presumed to be heterosexual) the gay child is only ever ‘gay’ in retrospect.⁷⁷ Because of this ‘backward birthing’, Bond Stockton argues, ‘the gay child makes us perceive the queer temporalities haunting all children’ and reveals how the child is always other to ‘normal’ adult

75 Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 3.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

77 *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

identity.⁷⁸ Ideas of the 'queer temporalities' that haunt the figure of the child, and its position as other to adult identity are essential to an understanding of Barker's *oeuvre*. Her writing engages with Sigmund Freud's theory of infantile sexuality, which figures the child as the unconscious, and thus the origin of primitive, aggressive and sexual impulses and desires. Staging Freud's ideas about repression, latency and return, Barker's fiction considers the ways in which childhood always returns and thus defines adult experience. As I will show in chapter two, in Barker's writing the child figure is uncanny: familiar and strange, present and absent, known and unknown. Reading Barker's fiction in the light of Freud's ideas about childhood, and ideas of the child in the work of later psychoanalysts such as Melanie Klein, I sketch out the ways in which the queer child is a figure that haunts twentieth-century Britain.

Barker's dialectical view of innocence and experience, which are 'permeable states [that] permeate each other', puts emphasis on the disruption of chronology and hierarchies of age. In her fiction innocence acts upon experience as well as vice versa, meaning that chronological accounts of 'development' and growth are called into question. Bond Stockton argues that the idea of the 'backward birth' of the gay child requires an alternative to the notion of vertical growth. In contrast to the idea of 'growing up', which she argues 'may be a short-sighted, limited rendering of human growth', Bond Stockton proposes the idea of "'growing sideways" [which] suggests that the width of a person's experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing "adults" and "children" into lateral contact of surprising sorts'.⁷⁹ The suggestion is that the assumed differences between adults and children, often based on solely on biological growth, are problematic and unsustainable. What happens, for example, when the child becomes physically larger than the adult? (Chapter four explores the representation of the adolescent as an unformed, liminal and dangerous figure.) Categories of age should be viewed as interdependent rather than hierarchical and oppositional; they are fluid in the sense that ideas of childhood are not only associated with people who might legally, medically or culturally be called children. Growing, changing, perpetually in motion,

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

the figure of the child in Barker's fiction refuses to be pinned down as either innocent or experienced, past or present, known or unknown. It deconstructs categorisations of age and insists on the plurality of meaning. The queer child in Barker's fiction exposes the queerness of ageing identity.

V.

In the chapters that follow I trace the cracks in constructions of innocence and experience that are exposed by Barker's fiction. My overall argument is that Barker's refiguration of the child is both thematic and formal and necessarily involves the reconceptualisation of associated categories of age, such as adolescence, old age and adulthood. Barker's reworkings of innocence and experience are written in a variety of alternative forms – the short story, the articulated novel, the ghost story and the 'retropulsive text' – and her interest in the links between different categories of age may be seen in the formal structure of her writing.

Chapter One considers the figure of the Romantic child that Barker inherited when she began to write in the 1940s, carrying out a broadly chronological survey beginning in the 1790s. It maps out the ways in which people have thought about the figure of the Romantic child at particular historical moments, always keeping in mind the idea that constructions of childhood are restricted by adult needs and desires. Rather than attempting an exhaustive survey of the Romantic child, I concentrate on moments when ideas of childhood innocence and experience are challenged and disrupted, or reinforced: the origins of the Romantic child; Blake's dichotomous child; the influence of Wordsworth's divine child on the Victorians; the challenge posed to the 'innocent' child by the ideas of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud; Henry James's critique of innocence; the symbolism of the dichotomous modernist child; and the ways in which this recalls the duality of the child in Romantic literature. I also consider the relationships between the child, the short story and modernism, arguing that, for Barker, the short story is a form that is able to hold contradiction. An understanding of these historical moments is essential to my later explorations of Barker's genealogy of age, which rewrites the Romantic child in the light of new configurations of childhood and innocence and experience in the 1940s.

These configurations are the focus of Chapter Two, which begins by analysing the child as a figure that is both 'close' and 'closed' in two of Barker's early short stories. After establishing the dominant narratives of childhood in 1940s intellectual and popular culture, I turn to 'The Iconoclasts' (1947) and 'Domini' (1949), arguing that Barker's stories dramatise Freudian theory. Through their staging of psychoanalytic ideas about children Barker's stories resist the objectification of the child in psychological, psychoanalytic and anthropological models of childhood and put emphasis on the ways in which the child is figured as 'other' to adult identity. Finally, responding to Barker's contention that every writer has only 'one basic theme', I analyse a later book, *The Gooseboy* (1987), arguing that the novel critiques the objectification of childhood in popular journalism in the late-twentieth century.

In Chapter Three I build on ideas of the child as figure against which adult society defines itself, considering the inversion of adult and child roles in Barker's fiction of the 1960s. I argue that the gap or silence in Barker's writing career should be read as a period in which she was developing her 'articulated novels', *The Joy-Ride and After* (1963) and *The Middling* (1967). In these books domestic failures of articulation, shown through 'bad talk' and inappropriate verbal articulations, signal a failure of articulation on a wider scale: the disarticulation of British citizens from one another and from the state as a result of the legacies of the war and decolonisation. Age inversion in these texts signals familial and social instability and expresses Barker's misgivings about the relations between state and citizen in 1960s Britain.

Just as Barker's consideration of post-war inequality is inflected with ideas of innocence and experience, so too is her examination of marginal female sexuality and masculine identity. In Chapter Four I argue that Barker's 'ghost stories', 'View in a Long Mirror' (c.1952), 'Charley' (1989), and 'Element of Doubt' (1987), are concerned with the ghostliness of age. The representation of aged and adolescent female sexuality in these stories challenges the conventional gendering of sexual knowledge. But while Barker's ghostly female adolescents resist definition, disrupting the male desire to know, the representation of the adolescent girl as unformed and incomplete speaks to the ideas that the fragmentary female is necessary for the construction of male identity and that psychoanalytic ideas of female adolescence *require* the adolescent girl to be unstable and incomplete. For

Barker, the ghost story is an ideal form in which to explore the ways that age may be liminal, abject and ghostly.

Chapter Five builds on ideas about the ghostliness of age, considering age, place, past time and form in Barker's final novel, *The Haunt* (1999). I propose that the language of age is one of place and that childhood and old age are spatially represented as other to adult identity. *The Haunt* troubles the idea that child and adult, past and present can be separated, using Barker's notion of 'retropulsion' to stage the ways in which the primitive, infantile unconscious haunts the 'civilized' conscious mind. Through its engagement with Wordsworth's *Prelude*, *The Haunt* undermines both the idealised child and the conception of an 'ideal' old age. Conversely, the novel calls into question the assumed connections between old age, physical immobility and mental stasis, emphasising the importance of intergenerational relationships. Its overlapping and intertwining stories, created as Barker converted the book to a novel, produce a non-teleological, non-'progress' narrative which is better able to convey ageing experience than a conventional novel of old age.

Chapter One

Innocence and Experience: (Re)Writing the Child at Mid-Century

The period of the inconsequence of the child was over and in a playbox way the new requirements were being met. A scaled-down world had been provided, with its own morals and mores [...]

[...] The limits were rigidly defined, but not definable. Nobody put them into words. They were like the markings on a tennis-court and to play the ball outside was to lose not just a point, but the game. As I found out, Children were supposed not to know about sex or murder or disease or drugs or vice. They were allowed fibbing, thieving, cheating and sprained ankles. They were protected, especially from themselves. The result was a small world, simple, scanty, and free from nightmare. Dark feelings and disreputable thoughts, being ignored, went away, at any rate for the people who wrote the stories. [...]

Oddly, or perhaps ordinarily enough, the girls' fiction-writers were all men. They used female pen-names: Linda had been in the Navy, Marjorie was a lapsed parson, Susan was a night-porter, Deirdre an antiquarian bookseller. One of the most popular serials was the work of cab-driver who could outdrink anyone in Fleet Street.

Barker, *Life Stories*¹

A.L. Barker's description of the period during the late 1930s when she worked in the department of juvenile fiction at the Amalgamated Press illustrates many of the preoccupations of this chapter. She notes the fictionality of children, and that the writing of the child is done by adults, significantly by men. The idea of childhood as a cultural category created by adults is by now well established. Barker's image of the fictional world of childhood as a tennis court on which one might accidentally 'play the ball outside' the lines registers the arbitrariness of the limits of 'the child'. The rules at the Amalgamated Press restricting how children could be portrayed signal both commercial pressure, and a lack of imagination. Barker recognises the commercial nature of this enterprise, and reveals an awareness of several different strands of restriction and control: writers, editors, publishers, and parents are all involved in producing 'the child'. Her description of the recycling and repeating of

1 Barker, *Life Stories*, pp. 143-145.

stories, which was justified by the fact that the children who read the 1920s versions were 'in the Forces' by the first years of the war, indicates the limited ability of adults to envision children.¹ Children from one generation to the next are not permitted to evolve and develop, not because they do not but because adults cannot imagine them doing so. Barker's humorous characterisation of the male writers posing as girls suggests an element of playful imaginativeness in adult writings of the child. But this is undercut, first, by the modern connotations of men pretending to be little girls and, second, by the restrictiveness of this process of 'child' creation, which produces a regulated childhood world that is 'scanty, and free from nightmare'.

Childhood, always defined against and by what it is not – sex, experience, death, age, nightmare, darkness – is empty and, suggests Barker, insufficient. And it is not for children (or not only for children) that this fictional childhood is created. Elements that do not belong in childhood, darkness and disreputability, are written out and disappear, if not for children themselves, writes Barker, then 'for the people who wrote the stories'. This adult refusal to acknowledge the 'darkness' of children, their multi-dimensional nature, shows how the limits of 'the child' are in turn set by the limits of the adult writer's imagination. James R. Kincaid notes the restrictiveness of adult imaginings when he writes that 'the child is the perceptual frame we have available to us for fitting in just about anything we choose – or nothing. What the child is matters less than what we think it is and just why we think that way'.² The restrictions imposed on how the child could be represented in the Amalgamated Press stories of the 1930s allegorise the cultural limits placed on the category of 'the child' from its inception, restrictions that are imposed by the adults who imagine and write those children.

By the mid-twentieth century the child had again become a significant figure in British literature. In *The Novel 1945-1950*, Newby remarks upon the 'extraordinary... number of novels and stories [in these years] that were devoted to the pleasures and pains of childhood'.³ Barker is one of the authors he singles out as having a particular interest in childhood. Barker's experience in juvenile fiction may

1 Ibid., p. 149.

2 Kincaid, *Child Loving*, p. 62.

3 Newby, *The Novel 1945-1950*, p. 8.

explain her preoccupation not only with children, but with what the child means to adults. Her apprenticeship at the Amalgamated Press raises key concerns, which will be addressed in the chapters that follow, about her representation of the child and other categories of age, and her choices of fictional form. In this chapter I argue that Barker's explicit engagement with innocence and experience suggests that we should look for the 'Romantic child' in her work. I will provide a kind of historical mapping of the Romantic child through British literature from the 1790s to the 1940s. It will concentrate on elements that appear to have contributed to the image(s) of the child we find in Barker's writing. It will not be comprehensive but will instead focus on moments of crisis, fracture and change, such as the 'birth' of the Romantic child; Blake's dialectic of innocence and experience; the influence of Wordsworth on Victorian notions of childhood; the Dickensian child; notions of childhood innocence in the fin de siècle; and modernist uses of the child. I will consider how representations of the child in literature and history have changed over time and evaluate the extent to which nineteenth- and twentieth- century British writers either accepted or adapted the inherited model of the Romantic child. Finally, I will consider what the Romantic child looked like in the 1940s, the decade in which Barker's work was first published.

I. Innocence and Experience

When I saw what usage and abuse could do to words, what a load of associations, inhibitions and conceits they had to carry, I decided that all I could hope to do was explore. Theme and variations seemed like an ideal format. My theme was infinite, the impact of innocence on experience, any sort of innocence on any sort of experience – the first story in the bible: 'Issues from the hand of God the simple soul'. It was more of a fundamental principle than a theme. Barker, *Life Stories*⁴

In *Life Stories*, Barker describes her thoughts on writing her first collection of short stories. The book she mentions is *Innocents*, subtitled '*Variations on a Theme*', and every story bar one is about a child. Barker's description of her work gives several

⁴ Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 16.

references that suggest we look for the Romantic child in her writing. ‘The first story in the bible’ is, of course, *Genesis*, the first book of Moses in *The Old Testament*, which states: ‘the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth’.⁵ Romantic writers contested the idea of original sin and focused on childhood innocence. Barker’s phrase ‘any sort of innocence’ registers the various conceptions of innocence involved in the life of the Romantic child. In particular, her sense of the ‘impact’ of innocence brings to mind the forcefulness of innocence in William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789, 1794). Finally, the phrase in quotation marks, ‘Issues from the hand of God the simple soul’ is the first line of T. S. Eliot’s poem, ‘Animula’ (1929). Critics have argued that the poem, which emphasises the ‘heavy burden of the growing soul’, is an anti-Romantic version of Wordsworth’s ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ (1802-4).⁶ Thus the three texts to which Barker gives reference represent three different stages in the life of the Romantic child; and each contains formulations of innocence and experience and ideas about the nature of the child that Barker seems to want to evoke at this point. But what is especially interesting is her language. By naming ‘the impact of *innocence on experience*’ an essential principle of her writing, Barker reverses the traditional hierarchy in which experience impacts upon innocence. This suggests that innocence, and by association the child, may itself be an active force for change, rather than being acted upon – an idea that recalls the work of Blake and Henry James. Furthermore, Barker’s choice of the term ‘principle’ rather than ‘theme’ suggests a moral element and rejects the terminology used to describe fiction in favour of a term more frequently aligned with philosophy. Barker’s reading of innocence and experience thus appears to be a serious principle that underpins the outlook of her work.

I argue that Barker’s allusions, her reversal of the innocence/experience opposition, and her use of philosophical terminology signal to us the nature of her project. Her *oeuvre* is a genealogy of age. It not only explores how others have

⁵ Genesis, 8, David Norton, ed., *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible With The Apocrypha, King James Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 11.

⁶ Michael O’Neill, for example, argues that ‘Eliot provides a complex, ambivalent rewriting of ‘Ode’’. See: Michael O’Neill, ‘Romantic and Victorian Poetry’, in Jason Harding, ed., *T. S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 200-210, p. 201.

written the child but if (and how) the child may be written at all. This is why Barker moves from a discussion of the 'uses and abuses' of language straight on to a discussion of innocence and experience and, by implication, the child. Both words and the child have 'associations, inhibitions and conceits' to carry. The association of childhood and innocence has been (and often still is) considered 'natural' and unquestionable. Barker's fiction recognises the burden and restriction placed on the child by the adult tendency to imagine childhood in terms of opposition, and children as devils or dolls. Her fiction attempts to move past dichotomous ways of thinking, privileging the ambiguity of the child. Barker's preference for short fiction may perhaps be explained by her refusal of dichotomy and her simultaneous desire for 'wholeness' or 'completeness', as the short story is a form able to hold contradiction. Similarly, the child that Barker writes is not either/or but a figure that overcomes this duality. It does this not by being divine or ideal but because it is undecidable: suspended between innocence and experience.

II. The Romantic Child

Before thinking about the Romantic child in the mid-twentieth century I want to explore its origins, history and development. What are the main characteristics of the Romantic child? When did the figure originate? What has it represented at different historical moments? What might the early life of the Romantic child tell us about how the figure goes on to be represented in mid-twentieth century literature? The survey begins in the late eighteenth century, despite the debate surrounding this chronology. Judith Plotz, for example, asserts that '[i]t is customary to date the so-called cult of childhood to the late eighteenth century [...] Like most originary dates, this one is [...] dubious'.⁷ Others have shown that the figure of the child was associated in previous centuries with what we might view as Romantic preoccupations: questions of innocence, free will, salvation, relations between the child and nature, questions that later preoccupied Romantic writers.⁸

⁷ Plotz, *Romanticism*, p. 254.

⁸ In his useful survey of the child figure in Western literature from Greek to English Pre-Romantic writing, Robert Pattison identifies 'a minor tradition of eighteenth-century verse about children before Blake'. He acknowledges that '[t]he 'romantic child' of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* may have

Despite the inevitable omissions involved in locating the 'birth' of the Romantic child in the late eighteenth century, there is good evidence to support this chronology. It is not that the pre-Romantic tradition of writing about children did not cover some of the same ground as Rousseau, Blake and Wordsworth but that Romantic writers felt that their conception of the child was something new, asserted it as such, and succeeded in convincing contemporary readers of the originality of their theses. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in *Emile: or, On Education* (1762), '[w]e know nothing of childhood' and, as Peter Coveney points out, Rousseau's audience appeared to agree: there was an increase in writing on education, with 'at least 200 treatises... published before the end of the century, all in some way influenced by *Emile*'.⁹ Coveney argues that the impact of *Emile* lay in its rejection of both original sin and of the primacy of reason, and by implication its rejection of orthodox Christian thought and rationalism. He identifies in the late-eighteenth-century 'a central conflict between Reason and Feeling, within which the romantic child was created', arguing that '[i]t was [...] against [the] materialist, rationalist, perfectionist, and essentially secular eighteenth century that Rousseau, Blake and [...] Coleridge reacted'.¹⁰ Hugh Cunningham agrees that the Romantic child emerged out of conflict in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, but argues that this opposition was between Romantics and evangelicals, with rationalists in between.¹¹ Whether the Romantic tradition was a reaction against rationalist thought, or evangelical thought, or both, it is clear that the Romantics understood the child in a very different ways to earlier schools of thought.

The rationalist tradition, influenced by John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), was concerned with the perfectibility of humanity and the creation of an ideal man through experience, reason and knowledge, giving little attention to the child itself, only to what it might become. In Locke's formulation, the child is a blank slate, a 'tabula rasa' on which experience leaves its mark. Evangelical

been already there in embryo in the generation before him' but argues that Blake's *Songs* have the 'impact of a major talent upon the currencies of a minor literary convention'. (Pattison, *The Child Figure*, pp. 52-3.)

9 Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, pp. 44, 46.

10 Ibid., pp. 37, 40.

11 Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), p. 130.

thought, following the dogma of original sin in earlier Christian doctrine, emphasised the sinful nature of human beings and expected childhood obedience, neatness and religious education.¹² The early Romantic view of childhood was very different. Rousseau focused on what the child was in itself rather than only what it might become. In *Emile*, he encouraged readers to value childhood for its own sake; writers such as Locke, Rousseau argued, 'are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man'.¹³ The additional theses of Rousseau's text are that children are born with natural goodness, that adults, too, can choose to be without sin, and that feeling is as important to human development as reason.¹⁴ For Rousseau, the child is so important because it is associated with 'the feeling of life'.¹⁵ The child is 'completely absorbed in the present, rejoicing in abounding vitality,' and should be encouraged to exercise this concentration and energy in pursuits appropriate to children.¹⁶ Rousseau's work, with its concentration on childhood and assertion of the importance of feeling, was a hugely significant influence on later Romantic writers. 'His influence lies behind the whole progressive concentration of interest upon the child in the second half of the century', argues Coveney: 'Rousseau's great contribution was to give authoritative expression to the new sensibility, and to direct its interest towards childhood as the period of life when man most closely approximated to the 'state of Nature''.¹⁷ Four elements, then, are central to Rousseau's conception of the child: inherent difference from adults, natural innocence, 'the feeling of life', and primitivism. I argue that these are the same characteristics associated with the *particular* figure we now think of as the 'Romantic child' and that this figure originates in the late eighteenth century.

The last of these characteristics – primitivism – merits further attention. In *Emile*, Rousseau sets up an opposition between uncorrupted nature and corrupt society. He argues for a system of education in which the child's 'natural goodness'

12 Ibid., p. 132.

13 Rousseau, *Emile*, in *ibid.*, p. 113.

14 Pattison, *The Child Figure*, p. 52.

15 Ibid.

16 Rousseau, *Emile*, in *ibid.* p. 53.

17 Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, pp. 41-2.

is protected and developed.¹⁸ This requires the child's isolation from external influences until she reaches puberty, something that is possible for Rousseau because he views the child as a naturally whole and independent being.¹⁹ Placing the child in opposition to the corruptions of 'civilized' society encourages a comparison between the child and the primitive: both live within themselves, existing independently from society and in harmony with nature.²⁰ Here Rousseau draws on ideas of the 'noble savage' as a model of primitive innocence and goodness and suggests that the child may be considered to be such an example too.²¹

III. Blake's Dichotomous Child

The relationship between the child and innocence and experience is a central focus in the current exploration of the heritage of the Romantic child because the relationship between these states is so important to Barker's writing. Both Locke and Rousseau make assertions of childhood innocence in their own ways: Locke in his argument against innate human characteristics, in which the child is 'white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas'; Rousseau in his rejection of original sin and insistence upon childhood being akin to man's natural state.²² William Blake is influenced by both of these conceptions of childhood innocence, as is particularly clear in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Writing of Blake's poem 'Infant Joy', Hugh Cunningham argues that it expresses 'an almost revolutionary perception that a child is not a piece of paper [...] that adults can write on or mould at will, nor scarred by original sin. There is, at birth, an individuality, a voice'.²³ Thus, Blake's *Songs* definitively rejects Locke's thesis of the child as an empty vessel, asserting instead the presence within the child of individuality, imagination and joy. But this does not

18 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile; or, On Education*, 1762, trans. by Allan Bloom (USA: Basic Books, 1979), p. 9.

19 Ibid., pp. 85-6.

20 Ibid., pp. 39, 85.

21 Many thinkers believe that Rousseau 'invented' the noble savage; as Terry Ellingson has shown, this is not the case. See: Terry Jay Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

22 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1689 (New York: Digireads Publishing, 2008), p. 52.

23 Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, p. 129.

necessarily mean that Blake concurs with Rousseau's version of childhood. Indeed, Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley argue that while the child of Rousseau's *Emile* was a figure of 'essential goodness and innocence', Blake's child is not bestowed 'with such an uncomplicated Rousseauistic innocence'.²⁴

In the introductory poem to Blake's *Songs*, for example, the child on the cloud is a laughing, joyful figure enjoying the speaker's 'piping'; however, in 'Infant Sorrow' the child is described as 'piping loud;/Like a fiend hid in a cloud'.²⁵ Blake's repetition of images of the cloud and piping encourages comparison between the two child figures whilst also setting them in opposition to one another. Discussing a similar oppositional relationship between two child figures in Blake's 'Cradle Song' and a correlative poem, Bruhm and Hurley argue that 'Blake's desirous and cunning child operates as a kind of necessary other for the angelic, pristine infant [...] To make the child innocent is to suppress the disruptive alternative to innocence – which, in fine binary logic, makes that "other" essential to our understanding of innocence itself'.²⁶ The important point here is the idea of the alternative to innocence as a 'necessary other'. Neither innocence nor experience may be abstracted as 'natural' human states. It is not a question of making a choice *between* innocence and experience: innocence and experience are necessary to one another. Indeed, as Mary Y. Hallab argues, neither state alone is desirable because on its own each is 'equally incomplete and static':

Joyful innocence, apparently the free and guiltless expression of desire... is made possible by ignorance and passive dependence; cynical experience, the guilty restraining of desire [...] is characterised by fear, suspicion, cunning. But innocence prolonged can become hardened or reasoned into something very much like experience. Passiveness imposes its own demands; love becomes possessive tyranny [...] At worst [...] innocence is limiting and stultifying, trapping its possessor in a partial and incomplete existence, bounded by fear and resistant to change.²⁷

24 Bruhm and Hurley, eds., *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, p. xvi.

25 William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*, 1789, 1794 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 132, 151.

26 Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, p. xvi.

27 Mary Y. Hallab, 'Carter and Blake: The Dangers of Innocence', in Joe Sanders, ed., *Functions of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Thirteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 177-184, p. 177. Pattison also notes the dangers of

Blake's conception of childhood innocence involves 'Vision' and 'imaginative joy', which children possess but adults have lost through experience.²⁸ However, for Blake, the movement from innocence to experience is not framed in terms of sentiment and loss, as it is for Rousseau and Wordsworth. Coveney observes Blake's 'unregretful perception of Experience,' arguing that, '[t]hrough knowledge, acceptance, lay the reconciliation and power to 'be born again'. There is no 'romantic' nightmare, no cul-de-sac of debilitating regret'.²⁹

Instead Blake posits a dialectical interaction between innocence and experience – 'the two Contrary States of the Human Soul' – that, through contradictions, results in progression. This dialectical understanding brings to mind Barker's statement, quoted in my introduction, that innocence and experience cancel one another out. The two states, she writes, 'merge... invert... infiltrate... transmute'. Barker's statement not only evokes Blake but also recalls Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of "Aufhebung" or 'overcoming'. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) Hegel used the life cycle of a plant to emphasise the absurdity of the fixation in 'conventional' thinking on 'the antithesis of truth and falsity'.³⁰ He emphasises that conflicting states are in fact 'reciprocally necessary moments', as are the different forms that occur in the development of a plant.³¹ Hegel's use of the life cycle of the plant, which begins with the bud, is also echoed by Barker's use of the metaphor of the bud to describe the child in her story, 'Domini', which I discuss in the following chapter.

innocence in Blake's poetry, arguing of 'The Chimney Sweeper' that: 'Blake sees... that innocence is at least partially ignorance, and ignorance merely perpetuates the existing enormities of the sweep's life and the world at large.' On the other hand, in the correlative poem in *Songs of Experience*, the sweep understands the reality of his situation, rather than being fooled by 'visionary innocence' as in the first poem, and is better for it. 'Here at least the sweep is imprisoned by corrupt earthly agents, not by his own false impressions. His clearer understanding of the situation is a kind of grace, a true baptism by which to lift himself from the fallen state.' (Pattison, *The Child Figure*, pp. 66-67.)

28 Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, p. 53.

29 Ibid.

30 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807, trans. by Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 2. M.H. Abrams, among others, has noted the influence of Hegel's *Phenomenology* on Romantic thought. See: M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1973), pp. 225-237.

31 Ibid.

IV. Wordsworth and the Victorian child

Blake's 'unregretful perception of Experience' is an important point to remember as we proceed, via Wordsworth, into the Victorian period. The child of Blake's *Songs*, is a nuanced and unsentimental figure. However, because Blake's work had no real impact in England until Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* (1863), it is Wordsworth's Romantic child that was the most influential in the early nineteenth century. Blake did not regret human experience per se; neither did he conceive of growing up as an irretrievable loss of innocence. A state of innocence and salvation, in the sense of joy and imaginative vision, might be achieved by a person of any age, not just by a child. This contrasts with Wordsworth's view, in which the state of childhood is exalted high above anything that most adults are able to experience, although poets can of course experience child-like moments of 'vision'. In his 'Ode', Wordsworth conceives of the child as being divine: 'trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God'.³² In contrast to the divine, 'visionary' child, he presents the blinkered adult: 'Inmate Man', who 'can see no more'.³³ This novel view of childhood had a huge impact in England. 'By the middle of the nineteenth century,' argues Hugh Cunningham:

[M]any Christians had come to believe that children came direct from heaven, bearing messages from God... What Wordsworth had done was to break decisively with all previous thinking about children. Childhood now became a repository of sensitivity and wisdom. And if that were so, it became almost a duty to stay in touch with childhood, to remember as an adult what it felt like to be a child.³⁴

32 William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', in Stephen Gill, ed., *William Wordsworth: Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), pp. 157-164, p. 159, lines 64-65. Pattison argues that Blake undercuts this kind of Wordsworthian sentimental exaltation when, in the 'Introduction' to *Songs of Innocence*, he presents a child figure seated on a cloud, suggesting divinity, and then in 'Infant Sorrow' reveals this figure to be a fiendish child. (Pattison, *The Child Figure*, p. 68.)

33 Ibid., pp. 157-160, lines 56, 82, 9.

34 Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, p. 134.

But staying in touch with one's childhood was problematic. Robert Pattison argues that childhood for Wordsworth was 'a condition which for the vast majority of men is irretrievably lost as soon as completed' and that the poet 'felt that the loss of the childhood state was a natural inevitability [...] childhood is a lost realm somewhere in the past of our lives and the past of our culture'.³⁵ Through Wordsworth, childhood becomes, on the one hand, a divine state of 'sensitivity and wisdom' that adults are duty-bound to attempt to access; and, on the other, a 'lost realm' from which they are excluded. If 'Inmate Man' was locked into adulthood, so too was the Romantic child imprisoned in this lost realm called 'childhood'. The child that an individual once was represents his or her own personal history, and childhood is made abstract as the past of adulthood. Carolyn Steedman argues that:

Romantic writing in general, and in Britain the moment of thought expressed by the Wordsworthian 'Romantic Child', located individuals in time and chronology by possession of their own personal past. In this kind of account, a self was formed by the laying down and accretion of bits and pieces of a personal history, and this detritus, these little portions of the past, most readily assumed the shape of a child when reverie and memory restored them to the adult. The child within was always both immanent – ready to be drawn on in various ways – and, at the same time, always representative of a lost realm, lost in the individual past, and in the past of the culture.³⁶

In Wordsworth's 'Ode', the child, figured as a stage of life, does not appear to be important in itself. Rather, it has importance only in relation to the adult speaker, as a source of inspiration for the poet 'to draw on', as Steedman puts it. For Wordsworth, childhood is 'that immortal sea/Which brought us hither'.³⁷ Adults, poets especially, can see their childhood on the shore, in the distance, and are able to remember their childhood past and 'find/Strength in what remains behind'.³⁸ Wordsworth's poem gives us the child Steedman describes above: a child that is eternally present but at the same time always 'lost' and absent.

35 Pattison, *The Child Figure*, pp. 57-8.

36 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. 10.

37 Wordsworth, 'Ode', in Gill, ed., *Selected Poems*, p. 162, lines 168-169.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 163, lines 182-183.

Wordsworth's 'Ode' is a crucial text for understanding conceptions of the child in the Victorian period. Childhood is figured as the Garden of Eden, a place to which adults cannot return, a stage of life they have lost. Catherine Robson argues that 'the story of Adam's ejection from Paradise in Genesis, previously important to the perception of childhood because of its explanation of the source of original sin, increasingly offered itself as a myth of personal development to middle-class Victorian individuals, both religious and otherwise'.³⁹ Therefore, particular currents of Christianity 'which effectively transformed the Garden of Eden from a place to a stage of life, naturally found [themselves] largely in sympathy with Wordsworth's progressive narrative of the early bliss of childhood and the falling-off of maturity'.⁴⁰ But as well as being figured as a lost realm, the Wordsworthian Romantic child appears to be held in a static, abstracted state of innocence, particularly when compared to Blake's dialectical interaction between innocence and experience. For Wordsworth in the 'Ode' children and adults are, as Robson puts it, 'entirely different eras', and this view of children as essentially different to adults, as we shall see, is particularly important to Victorian conceptions of the child.⁴¹ Plotz argues that 'an unchanging child forever fixed in childhood is an important Romantic trope: the trope of the Erl King's grasp'.⁴² Plotz focuses on what she calls 'this Romantic fixation of "the eternal child," "the immortal child," "the child forever," the "child / And nothing more"'.⁴³ This is the child figure that makes the most impact on the Victorian imagination.

The urge to fix and define the child increases from the 1830s. One cannot help but feel that this is an attempt to stabilize an increasingly conflicted idea of 'childhood'. Sally Shuttleworth argues that definitions of childhood as a category attracted 'unprecedented levels of attention across medical and historical sciences at this period' but that 'the question of what it meant to be a child [was] increasingly

39 Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, p. 8. Robson's argument is that in the Victorian period the early blissful stage of childhood is fundamentally associated with the little girl. Rather than look at gender at this point, I want to focus instead on which elements of the Romantic child were, or were not, preserved in Victorian images of childhood.

40 Ibid., p. 23.

41 Ibid., p. 22.

42 Plotz, *Romanticism*, p. xiii.

43 Ibid., p. xiv.

unclear'.⁴⁴ Steedman points out that in the middle years of the nineteenth century technical knowledge about children increased, as did information about human physical development. The way in which this knowledge was used is important, argues Steedman: 'new information about childhood was abstracted, or conceptualised into the figure of 'the child', or the idea of the child'.⁴⁵ The child, then, as a literary figure and object of study – which is, crucially, separated from but completely bound up with Western adult identity – is hugely important to the Victorian period. Robson notes 'the highly visible centrality of the child in any number of arenas and at all class levels in Victorian life'.⁴⁶ Cunningham too observes that:

[I]n the adult imagination childhood as an ideal became more separated from adulthood than it had ever been before. Children were valued, rather than chided, for their childishness. Precocity, much esteemed in previous centuries, was now to be avoided. Some adults even began to think that childhood was the best time of life, something unknown before the romantics had sown the seed of that idea.⁴⁷

The Victorian focus on an 'ideal' state of childhood, in which children should be innocent, undeveloped, and confined to the domestic sphere, had both positive and negative consequences. Robson argues that 'the belief that the child has but recently come to us from the hand of God carries an inescapable double edge: it both promotes the reformers' zeal... and it gives rise to a punishingly high expectation of children's behaviour'.⁴⁸ As I will discuss later, this idealised image of the child had consequences for real children who did not (could not) live up to it and were instead designated as criminal, 'non-child', non-human or savage.

44 Sally Shuttleworth, 'The Psychology of Childhood in Victorian Literature and Medicine', in Helen Small and Trudi Tate eds., *Literature, Science, Psychoanalysis, 1830-1970: Essays in Honour of Gillian Beer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 86-101, p. 100.

45 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. 5.

46 Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, p. 6.

47 Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, p. 140.

48 Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, pp. 29-30.

V. The Dickensian Child and the Condition of England

An important writer of children in the Victorian period was of course Charles Dickens, who recognised the middle ground between the ideal child and its criminal counterpart to an extent but still maintained a belief in the Romantic notion of natural childhood innocence seen in Wordsworth's writing. Robert Newsom suggests a complication in the critical narrative that credits Dickens with the importation into the Victorian novel of Wordsworth's innocent child figure.⁴⁹ There was, argues Newsom, 'a competing version of the child, no less widespread among Victorians than that of the Romantic child, [which] held that children are especially [...] given to disobedience, the hallmark of original sin'.⁵⁰ Newsom argues that although Dickens resisted this extreme religious position 'he was nevertheless as adept at imagining wicked children as spotless ones' (his examples are the Artful Dodger, Tom Scott, and Tom Gradgrind).⁵¹ This may be true, but a crucial characteristic of Dickens's 'wicked' children is that they are *not* innately so. Take one of the child characters mentioned by Newsom, for example, Tom Gradgrind in *Hard Times* (1854). There is no doubt that Tom is selfish in using his sister, Louisa for his own ends, but Dickens suggests that the faults in Tom's character arise from his upbringing: Tom's 'imagination had been strangled in his cradle'; all of the Gradgrind children 'had been lectured at from their tenderest years'.⁵² The emphasis on adult intrusions into the cradle places the blame for Tom's monstrosity not upon original sin (as Newsom suggests) but upon the adults who raised him, and particularly on their stifling of his imagination and expression. Contrary to Newsom's protests, I argue that Dickens's view of childhood is in line with the Romantic image of the child. Dickens's children are born innocent; if they are corrupted, it is by adult institutions and systems.

With Dickens the wellbeing of children and the preservation of the state of childhood became associated with the 'Condition of England'. His fiction stresses the importance of childhood not just for the individual but for society as a whole.

49 Robert Newsom, 'Fictions of Childhood', in John O. Jordan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 92-105, p. 92.

50 Ibid., p. 93.

51 Ibid.

52 Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1854 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1985), pp. 165, 53.

Individuals and systems which enslave and exploit children and do not allow them ‘a childhood’ are the mark of an uncivilized country. Richard Locke argues that: ‘Dickens extended the romantics’ moral, psychological, and philosophical use of the child from the realm of lyric and personal epic poetry into that of the encyclopaedic Victorian novel so that a child’s welfare now also became the crucial index of a nation’s – indeed, an empire’s – social and political health and even its survival.’⁵³ Child welfare was a central preoccupation of the Victorian era. Throughout the nineteenth century a number of Acts of Parliament came into force concerning, on the one hand, the exploitation and abuse of children and, on the other, the problem of juvenile delinquency. Robson notes that the Factories Regulation Act of 1833 set a minimum age of nine for textile mill workers.⁵⁴ In addition, the 1854 Youthful Offenders Act standardised the treatment of children convicted of crimes.⁵⁵ But while these pieces of legislation were in many ways positive developments in terms of children’s rights and welfare, they had additional consequences that were less beneficial, especially for working-class children. As Robson notes, labouring or criminal children were often represented as un-child-like or inhuman in writing of the period: ‘children who do not behave as children should behave are not children’.⁵⁶ As well as protecting children, legislation gave them less freedom to be different from the imagined idealised model of the innocent ‘Romantic child’. Robson argues that ‘[t]he absolute division of adult and child [...], results in no less rigidity within the new category of the child, which can only countenance the true child of innocence and purity, and the “not-child,” the juvenile delinquent. The construction of the ideal inevitably spawns its demonized opposite’.⁵⁷ The opposition of innocence and experience, ideal and criminal, child and not-child is entirely polarised; there is no possibility of integration.

Dickens’s novels also appear sympathetic to the Wordsworthian Romantic view of childhood through their association of the child with the past. We saw earlier how Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ was taken up by the Victorians, for whom childhood was figured as the Garden of Eden, a blissful place to which adults cannot return, a stage

53 Locke, *Critical Children*, p. 13.

54 Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, pp. 59, 62.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

of life long since lost. Dickens participates in the consolidation of this process of 'fixing' the Romantic child as a figure associated with the past. 'Children for Dickens', Cunningham argues:

[B]ecame a symbol of all that was good in the world before adult behaviour and adult institutions began to make their impact. [...] Christmas became... important... because it was a celebration of childhood, of birth, a time when children could be centre stage and adults could, from their memories, regain strength for the struggle of life. This requirement that adults feed off their childhood memories had the effect of associating childhood with the past'.⁵⁸

The idea of childhood memories as a kind of restorative food to nourish the emotionally depleted adult has similarities with Wordsworth's 'Ode', in which the child is figured as a source of inspiration for the poet to draw on. It is worth noting that in the 1890s, as Victorian literature intersected with literary modernism, Freud's theories strengthened the association between childhood and the past but added a different inflection. Writing about 'Freud's modern individual', Adam Phillips argues that: 'Adulthood, for many people, has become a long hangover created by childhood. The modern individual [...] is furtively seeking only the pleasures of the past.'⁵⁹ According to Phillips, psychoanalysis maintains the earlier association between the past and the child but represents childhood as a source of pain as well as pleasure. Freud's challenge to the Victorian idea of the innocent 'Romantic child' appears to prompt the return of Blake's dichotomous child. But the tendency to view childhood as a place of stability and safety survives Freud and continues into the twentieth century. I noted in my introduction that the idea resurfaces during the Second World War, when writers looked back to their Edwardian and interwar childhoods. Barker's fiction problematises the idea of childhood as an idyllic, innocent stage of life on which adults can 'draw' for strength and solace.

The beginnings of the 'death' of the innocent Victorian child can be detected from mid-century. The more that children are prized for their childishness, the more

⁵⁸ Cunningham, *Invention of Childhood*, p. 149.

⁵⁹ Adam Phillips, 'Introduction', in Adam Phillips, ed., *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. vii-xv, p. xiv.

innocence is revered and fixed, the less willing adults are to let children grow up. Coveney argues that the Victorian literary solution to the corruption of innocence that would come with the end of childhood was child death. He argues: 'The Victorians seem to have taken to themselves the romantic image of childhood, and negated its power. The image is transfigured into the image of an innocence which dies. [...] the image of a purity which must die before it is corrupted.'⁶⁰ We see this phenomenon in the character of Little Nell in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41). Pattison suggests that Nell has a kind of 'deadly innocence', by which he means that she is always surrounded by images of mortality; she inhabits places of death, such as graveyards, and is connected with old men. He argues that Nell's preservation as an innocent divine child involves her own death: 'Her innocence, like the innocence and beauty of nature, is somehow fatal [...] Possessed of every virtue, pure beyond the sympathies of modern audiences [...] Innocent children always have a certain morbid quality in Dickens, even those he permits to survive'.⁶¹

VI. The Savage Child and the Colonial Subject

Over the course of the nineteenth century the idea of 'the child' became increasingly contradictory and unstable at the same time as it became ever more taxonomized and regulated. The ideas of childhood discussed above, in which it is both an idealized, abstracted state of innocence and a 'lost' realm of the past, demonstrate the instability and contradiction of the category of child. If, in the Victorian period, childhood was mythologized as the ideal stage of life and the maturity of adulthood was seen as a 'falling off' (as Robson puts it) then how do we account for concurrent nineteenth century narratives in which the child is associated with the primitive, unenlightened, savage stage of the development of the human species? In the first formulation, which draws on the Romantic idea of the 'noble savage', the child and the primitive are models of natural innocence in opposition to the corruptions of maturity and civilization. In the latter formulation, however, the maturation of society away from savagery and towards civilization is highly desirable; and thus the

⁶⁰ Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, p. 193.

⁶¹ Pattison, *The Child Figure*, p. 80.

child is associated with an earlier stage of human development against which nineteenth century Western society is compared and found to be superior.

Shuttleworth notes the duality, arguing that '[t]he child, as primitive, is the idealized focus of children's literature, but that:

Psychiatric models [...] tended to emphasize the burden of somatic and psychological inheritance carried by children, in a new evolutionary rendering of the biblical notion that the sins of the fathers will be visited on the sons. The child, according to this model, is doubly burdened: the carrier of primitive, animalistic passions, but also the attenuated nerves of an overdeveloped civilisation and unbidden memories of the past.⁶²

This suggests that at the end of the nineteenth century the child was viewed in the same dichotomous terms as it was at the end of the eighteenth century: the innocent child of nature versus the inherently sinful child. Shuttleworth argues that '[t]he 1890s witnessed the coming of age of the science of child development, but also, concomitantly, a dissolution of the boundaries of childhood'.⁶³ By her account, the late Victorian desire to 'fix' the child was a response to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and subsequent child psychology and represents an attempt to maintain and stabilise the distinction between adult and child in the face of these complications. Attempting to fix the child was a defence against what Shuttleworth calls 'a science that would abolish the category of childhood as previously understood'.⁶⁴ 'Innocence', she argues, 'was replaced with experience, as the child came into the world bearing the marks of familial and racial history, offering itself up as a 'key' to lost worlds. An individualised study of one infant gave birth to a science that would subsume the particularity of childhood within a larger narrative of human development'.⁶⁵ The late-Victorian sense of the child as a 'key' to understanding the

62 Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 353.

63 Shuttleworth, 'The Psychology of Childhood', p. 101.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

history of humankind represents a return to the idea that the child is nothing in itself but only matters in relation to what it signifies about the adult and the human race.

The association between the child and primitive may be seen in anthropological discourse. Edward Tylor argued that children's games bear a trace of 'primitive warlike arts' and reproduce 'early stages in the history of childlike tribes of mankind'.⁶⁶ The child/primitive association may also be seen in British imperialist discourse. Alan Sinfield links ideas of development and enlightenment with narratives of imperialism, arguing that:

[I]n the period of imperial enterprise, progress seemed easy to demonstrate, in science and technology, economic and political institutions, in the arts and humanitarian concerns. An ideology of progress appeals to a rising class – it seems to bespeak its coming dominance. [...] The savage was that which European Man had left, or was leaving, behind, and imperial enterprise could be taken as the sign of that achievement.⁶⁷

But, as suggested above, the primitive stage could not be simply or easily left behind because of the idea of childhood as a 'lost' realm of human development prior to the corrupting influences of Western society that indelibly marked the mature adult. It appears to be the case, then, that maturity degrades individuals but represents the progress of society. The conflicted 'European man' (to use Sinfield's figure) yearns for a lost paradise of primitive childlike innocence but also congratulates himself on the development, enlightenment and historical progress of his society away from its primitive and savage past.

Another reason that the primitive or savage could not be easily consigned to the past of the European man was the barbarity of the colonial enterprise itself. Sinfield argues that '[t]he attributes that are fastened upon the colonial subject are [...] fraught and contradictory' and that these contradictions 'derive from the structure of the colonial situation':

66 Edward Tylor, quoted in Heather Kate Montgomery, *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 19.

67 Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 139-143.

[T]he natives have to be savage so that it is right to occupy their country and mistreat them; they have to be subservient so that they can be made to serve. They have to be innocent so that they can be dominated by the settler, and to be dishonest so that you can never trust them very far. Therefore stereotypes of the native have continually to be reworked, rediscovered, reaffirmed.⁶⁸

The colonial subject is conceptualised here as a figure whose identity must be constantly stabilised in order to authorise the imperial right to rule. The native always has to be other to the identity of the European man, always has to be 'savage' so that the European man may be 'civilized'. Sinfield's characterisation of the colonial subject thus speaks to the contradictory and unstable figure of the child that develops during the Victorian period. Indeed, as Steedman points out, 'child' was not always a chronological category: "Childhood' was a category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority or weakness, before it became descriptive of chronological age."⁶⁹ The colonial subject or 'native' is often placed in a childlike position in relation to European man and colonial territories are figured as the 'children' of the Empire. As I argue in chapter three, an understanding of relations between the Britain and its colonial subjects in the language of parent and child continues through the early twentieth century and into the post-Second World War period.

VII. Henry James and the Limits of Innocence

By the end of the nineteenth century, the process of fixing the child had led to the consolidation of different stages of childhood. By this point, argues Steedman, childhood was fixed 'not just as a category of experience, but also as a time-span'.⁷⁰ The fixing of childhood also defined related age categories, most notably, according to John Neubauer, the category of adolescence. Neubauer argues that the term may have been used earlier but that the emergence of 'interlocking discourses about

68 Ibid., pp. 118-119.

69 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. 7.

70 Ibid.

adolescence [...] in psychoanalysis, psychology, criminal justice, pedagogy, sociology, as well as in literature [...] testifies that human life was perceived in terms of a new category by the end of the nineteenth century'.⁷¹ If we follow Neubauer in locating the emergence of the adolescent in the late nineteenth century then we might argue that this new category was a sort of culmination of the Victorian process of fixing the child, whereby adult and child ended up being completely separated with adolescence as a transitional period in between.

At the turn of the nineteenth century Henry James wrote two texts focused on ideas of childhood innocence and the limits of knowledge and experience: his novel, *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and his gothic novella, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). One of James's main preoccupations in these texts is the fragility of boundaries between innocence and corruption. His fiction draws attention to the way in which the supposedly opposed states of innocence and experience are dependent on one another. It is preoccupied with epistemological questions: what are the limits of knowledge and experience? Can we know what another person knows? James's fiction is part of the modernist move from objective to subjective representation, which Randall Stevenson calls, 'the trend from objective to subjective, the spatial shift of attention from 'outer world' to 'inner world''.⁷² Stevenson argues that James is one of the early modernist writers (along with Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair) who are concerned with perception and perspective. James's use of limited perspective stages questions about epistemological and ontological limits.

The preoccupation in James's fiction with the ambiguity of distinctions between innocence and experience is part of a wider investigation into limits and boundaries. Stevenson notes 'James's general interest in how innocence encounters experience', with the word 'encounters' suggesting James's focus on the borderline between these states.⁷³ Neubauer argues that 'James started from the romantic dichotomy between innocence and experience but concentrated on the hesitant

71 John Neubauer, *The Fin-De-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 6.

72 Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Longman, 1998), p. 17.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

sensibilities in the obscure intermediary zone between them'.⁷⁴ T. J. Lustig agrees that James is preoccupied with intermediary states, asserting that: 'James is undoubtedly raising questions about boundaries. It is [...] in the way in which he questions the notion of boundary itself that he makes [...] some of his most powerfully unique and original contributions.'⁷⁵ James's fiction reminds us that there is a limit to how much we can know the world, other people, and ourselves. Discussing *The Ambassadors* (1903) in particular, Stevenson notes that the novel focuses on the mind's 'capacity to grasp what is happening' and on the protagonist, Lambert Strether's constant '[g]uessing, interpreting, doubting'.⁷⁶ Stevenson argues that this tendency in James's fiction anticipates the questioning in high modernism 'about how the areas of mind and world can be related; about how, and how accurately or completely, individual perception can reflect the world it encounters'.⁷⁷

James's focus on subjective experience draws attention to the limits of perception. Stevenson notes that James tends to use a central character and that the fictional material is 'shaped and focused' through this character's 'perceptions and perspective'.⁷⁸ In the case of *What Maisie Knew*, for example, the limitations of Maisie's understanding of the adult world are highlighted. She is constantly trying to fill in the gaps and make sense of what is happening around her. Stevenson argues that Maisie 'is a child whose limited but suggestive perceptions are used to build up a highly ironic, provocative vision of the moral dilemmas surrounding her'.⁷⁹ The irony is created by a disparity between what Maisie knows and what the reader knows. I argue, though, that James's novel suggests a further irony that is born out of the similarity between Maisie's position in the novel and the reader's position in both fictional and non-fictional worlds. Like Maisie, we can only make sense of our environment using the knowledge we have. Our vision of the world, like hers, may be confused and will always be incomplete.

74 Neubauer, *Culture of Adolescence*, p. 80. For Neubauer, the 'intermediary zone' is adolescence. He argues that James focuses on adolescent characters, citing Nora Lambert in *Watch and Ward* (1878), Pansy Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and Nanda Brookenham in *The Awkward Age* (1899).

75 T. J. Lustig, *Henry James and the ghostly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 7.

76 Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, p. 19.

77 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

79 *Ibid.*

Something similar is being staged in *The Turn of the Screw* when Miles dies at the end of the novel in the arms of the Governess, an adult desperate to find out the truth about the innocence/corruption of the child in her care. Many of the numerous critical interpretations of the novella have noted that the text continually resists the attempts of the Governess, and the reader, to find out 'the truth' about Miles and Flora and that meaning in the story is repeatedly deferred and finally slips away.⁸⁰ The novella resists the desire in literary criticism to overcome ambiguity. Lustig argues that the 'classic phrase' of this critical debate 'acts out the polarized paradigms of a previous period' with '[t]he conflicting accounts of the governess' resembling 'an opposition between the madwoman in the attic and the angel in the house: the very terms in which the nineteenth century tended to see women in general and [...] governesses in particular'. Similarly, Lustig observes, the debate 'replicates the ambivalent Victorian response to children: are they pure and innocent (Wilson) or corrupted, guilty, full of impure knowledge (Heilman)?'⁸¹ In *The Turn of the Screw* our ability to know the nature of world and other people is questioned. The story's deferral of meaning ensures that there is always the possibility of innocence *or* experience: for Miles and Flora and for the Governess. Each of the characters is potentially virtuous and potentially corrupt. I suggested above that the attempt to pin down innocence renders it static, powerless and deathly. The death of Dickens's Little Nell makes the connection between innocence and death. It is significant, then, that *The Turn of the Screw* ends with Miles's death rather than the revelation of any final 'truth' regarding his character. This 'paradox of innocence and licentiousness in the same character,' argue Bruhm and Hurley, 'serves as a fine allegory for the erotic enigma that is the modern child'.⁸² James's children tread the borderline between innocence and experience.

In Coveney's view, James takes the themes of childhood and innocence and creates something 'separate altogether from the tradition [of Romantic innocence]

80 For further discussion of the deferral of meaning in James's novella, see especially: Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', *Yale French Studies*. No. 55/56, *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 94-207.

81 Lustig, *Henry James and the ghostly*, p. 6.

82 Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, p. 109.

we have been discussing'.⁸³ I argue that, on the contrary, James engages explicitly with the Romantic child, although his treatment of the figure, especially the Victorian version, is highly sceptical. Critics of *What Maisie Knew* have put great emphasis on Maisie's emptiness. She is a 'cup', 'vessel', 'shuttle-cock', 'go-between', 'hollow'; 'a ready vessel for bitterness'; a moral *tabula rasa*'.⁸⁴ In the novel, argues Pattison:

Except in [the] final pages... Maisie remains an innocent [...] She must remain "a ready vessel" – and an empty one. [...] Innocence, then, is a purely negative state, a void into which all manner of evil intentions will rush. Indeed, it is almost a necessary condition for the propagation of evil; without Maisie's innocent presence, the various cruelties of the novel would not have been possible. [...] Maisie's innocence is a weak, passive thing till she acquires the knowledge to which the title alludes.⁸⁵

Pattison's point about innocence and evil as states that are dependent upon one another is crucial. However, I would argue that for James innocence is not necessarily a passive state. I agree instead with Ellen Pifer, who argues that Maisie, though 'innocent' of the full implications of the actions of adults, does not maintain a passive role for long. Pifer points out that James, in his preface, calls Maisie the 'little wonder-working agent', and repeatedly emphasises her 'freshness'.⁸⁶ Pifer argues that: '[t]o survive and finally to flourish in her distinctly modern environment, James's child calls on the resources – freshness, spontaneity, and wonder – that she, like Dickens's literary children, has inherited from the novelist's Romantic predecessors.'⁸⁷

This is not to say that James is championing a simple Romantic innocence (as Pifer notes, he also mentions Maisie's 'demonic foresight') but that James is aware of the ambiguities of the Romantic child and enjoys occupying the between of innocence and experience. Similarly, in *The Turn of the Screw*, he restores a Blakean duality and movement to the relationship between innocence and experience. Adult attempts to impose absolutes, to fix the child as either devil or doll, are shown to

⁸³ Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, p. 194.

⁸⁴ Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, pp. 92-3; Pattison, *The Child Figure*, pp. 131-2.

⁸⁵ Pattison, *The Child Figure*, pp. 132-33.

⁸⁶ Ellen Pifer, *Demon Or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (University of Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000), pp. 29-30.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

have violent consequences. James's novella may therefore be read as an appeal for ambiguity. As James shows in both *What Maisie Knew* and *The Turn of the Screw*, innocence prolonged or alone may be a weak, negative and empty state. For James, as for Blake, innocence and experience are necessary to one another, and a prolonged or static state of innocence is not to be desired. In this sense, Blake and James are the two major influences on Barker's fiction. Both contribute to her preoccupation with the child and her dialectical understanding of innocence and experience.

VIII. The Short Story and the Child

Because of its shared history with the child, the short story is an ideal form for Barker to use in her re-examination of the relationships between innocence and experience. Mary Louise Pratt argues that the short story has traditionally been seen as a genre focused on a single moment in the life of an individual rather than on the whole of a life, and thus 'as a training or practice genre, for both apprentice writers and apprentice readers'.⁸⁸ Attempts to define the short story, argues Pratt, invariably place it into a hierarchical relationship with the novel, 'with the novel on top and the short story dependent'.⁸⁹ Such definitions of the short story highlight the importance of the notion of development to traditional criticism about the genre. Descriptions of the short story as 'dependent' or as an 'apprentice form' understand it as underdeveloped and infantile, an incomplete form when compared to the supposed maturity and completeness of the novel.⁹⁰ This unequal relationship between short story and novel mirrors the one between child and adult, in which the child is seen as an undeveloped body which will mature into a finished adult form.

The short story is also associated with the child through the notion of epiphany, which is often considered by short story theorists to be a defining characteristic of the genre, and is thought to originate with Wordsworth's 'spots of time'. Wordsworth explicitly linked his 'spots of time' with childhood. He argues that

⁸⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It' (1981), in Charles E. May ed., *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 91-113, pp. 99, 97.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 98.

these moments '[a]re scattered everywhere, taking their date/From our first childhood' and places them in opposition to 'trivial occupations and the round/Of ordinary intercourse'.⁹¹ So from the outset epiphany is associated with childhood and opposed to the trivia and mundanity of everyday adult life. Modernist understandings of epiphany or epiphanic experience draw on Wordsworth's framework. Vicky Mahaffey argues that: '[t]he temporary apprehension of a precious, unattainable wholeness is what much modernist literature aims to recapture, through Joyce's epiphanies [...] Woolf's moments of being, or the "image" of Imagist poetry'.⁹² Mahaffey's book shows that childhood often provides these moments of 'temporary apprehension', as is the case in Virginia Woolf's 'An Evening Party' (1917-1918) when an unidentified character asks: 'Don't you remember in early childhood when [...] some imperceptible shock froze the universe to a solid ball of crystal which one held for a moment [...] then we were absolute and entire; nothing then was excluded; that was certainty – happiness.'⁹³ In 'A Sketch of the Past' (1939), Woolf suggests that everyday life consists of two phases: 'being' and 'non-being'. She argues that '[a] great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done'.⁹⁴ Woolf's contention that the vast majority of everyday life consists of 'this cotton wool, this non-being' has similarities with Wordsworth's description of 'the round/Of ordinary intercourse', in which 'round' gives a sense of monotony and repetition.⁹⁵ Although she does not suggest that 'non-being' is exclusively associated with adulthood, Woolf's 'moments of being' are most strongly associated with childhood: the 'three instances of exceptional moments' that Woolf recounts take place when she is a child.⁹⁶

Barker's understanding of the short story and 'the moment' draws on and reworks both Romantic and modernist traditions. In *Life Stories*, Barker argues that

91 Wordsworth, Book XI of The Thirteen-Book *Prelude* of 1805, in Jonathan Wordsworth, ed., *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 464-468, p. 478, lines 274-275, 262-263.

92 Vicki Mahaffey, *Modernist Literature: Challenging Fictions?* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 16.

93 Virginia Woolf, 'An Evening Party', 1917-1918, quoted in *ibid.*

94 Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', 1939, in Jeanne Schulkind, ed., *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings*, 1976, 1985 (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 78-160, p. 84.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Ibid.*

in good writing ‘the moment was all and ought to be caught in the telling [...] The moment ought to persist like a flavour so that the reader would discover it complete [...] and beyond reproach or censure’.⁹⁷ Barker’s sense that there is a wholeness to the revelatory moment echoes Woolf’s description of a ‘shock [that] froze the universe to a solid ball of crystal which one held for a moment’. But her view of childhood is very different to the one expressed in Woolf’s ‘An Evening Party’. For Barker, the wholeness of the moment does not have its source in childhood as ‘absolute and entire’ but in the ambiguity of childhood. This ambiguity is best expressed in short fiction. For Barker, the short story is, on the one hand, ‘one of the two literary forms in which it was just possible that complete integration could be achieved’ and, on the other hand, ‘a contradiction in terms and yet with its essence contained in those terms’.⁹⁸ These seemingly incompatible statements suggest that, in Barker’s view, the moment brings together opposing forces and the short story is able to contain or hold this opposition. This view gives some insight into Barker’s use of short fiction to represent the ‘fundamental principle’ of her work: the dialectic of innocence and experience. The short story is a form in which the dialectic of innocence and experience may be contained and sustained. She does not try to (or want to) resolve the contradictions between these two states but wishes to represent their dialectical relationship in a form that can tolerate difference. The short story is able to hold the contradiction between innocence and experience that is inherent in the ambiguous figure of the child.⁹⁹

IX. The Short Story, Modernism and Adolescence

Dominic Head situates the rise of the modernist short story at the end of the nineteenth century, arguing that ‘the birth of a new kind of short story [...] was concurrent with the emergence of literary modernism’.¹⁰⁰ When he argues that the

⁹⁷ Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ It is worth noting that Elizabeth Bowen felt that the short story was more suitable than the novel for a portrayal of what she called ‘the Simple Soul’. For a discussion of this, see: Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 206.

¹⁰⁰ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 1.

modernist short story 'has an enduring ability to capture the episodic nature of twentieth-century experiences', Head is referring to the way the short story represents difference, opposition and fragmentation.¹⁰¹ His use of 'episodic' emphasises the fragmented character of the experiences of the modern self and its interactions in society and the word 'capture' picks up on the importance of the moment to the short story form. Head proposes that traditional distinctions between the novel and the short story are complicated by modernist fiction. After all, he argues, the short story tradition 'was the immediate inheritance of the modernists, a tradition which they questioned and subverted.'¹⁰² He argues that in the context of modernist fiction the novel/story distinction doesn't work because 'the modernist story, far from being 'smaller and lesser' in any technical sense, actually exemplifies the strategies of modernist fiction.'¹⁰³ Barker also disputes the idea of the short story as 'modest', stating that she 'found it at once easier and more difficult to write a short story than a novel; because it was both an unassuming and wildly ambitious project to get life [...] into a nutshell'.¹⁰⁴ This suggests that although she would agree that distinctions between novels and short stories are complicated, Barker would maintain the categorisation between them because, in her view, the short story does something very particular, something different to even the modernist novel.

The 'strategies of modernist fiction' are well known: techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue are hallmarks of literary modernism. Stevenson argues that the new literary forms and techniques of modernism may be accounted for by the original nature of the modern experience and a widespread sense of change:

Analogous innovations in so many contemporary art forms may have arisen not from mutual influence [...] but from common apprehension of the shifting nature of life, and of the methods of perceiving it, in the early twentieth century. In other words, if contemporary novelists 'changed everything' in their work, [...] it would be reasonable to suppose that this was simply because they perceived everything

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 3.

103 Ibid., p. 6.

104 Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 16.

around them as changed – even, in Woolf’s view, human character itself.¹⁰⁵

Stevenson notes the sheer pace of industrial and technological change from around 1880-1910 and shows how this is interwoven with contemporaneous conceptual and philosophic change: ‘new speeds, a new pace of life, [...] new conceptions of the fundamental coordinates of experience, space and time’.¹⁰⁶

The modernist sense that everything had changed suggests that there are useful connections to be made between literary modernism and the emergence of the category of adolescence. Neubauer locates the birth of this ‘new’ category in the fin-de-siècle and argues that its emergence occurs at the same time as literary modernism.¹⁰⁷ He argues that the ‘characteristic traits of adolescence, such as the blurring of identity, rapid role changing, and the merging of the individual into a group, can only be represented by means of [the] shifting narrative perspectives that [...] became the hallmarks of literary modernism’.¹⁰⁸ The argument is not only that the instability of the new category of adolescence required representation by the fragmented narratives of modernism. It is also proposed that the adolescent experience speaks to the modernist experience: that adolescence is representative of the trials of becoming a modern subject. A sense that the nature of life, the way one perceives things, even one’s entire character may be ‘shifting’, or have shifted, is a common experience of adolescence. What is suggested, then, is that the modernist experience of rapid, overwhelming change that renders the world unknowable is akin to experiencing the shifting liminal phase of adolescence. In other words, as Catherine Driscoll puts it: ‘[t]he concept of adolescence is central to the development of the modern subject’.¹⁰⁹ Both the adolescent subject and the modern subject undergo what Neubauer calls a ‘crisis of identity’ – a crisis that ‘can only be represented’ by the fragmentations of modernist texts.¹¹⁰

105 Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, pp. 8-9.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

107 Neubauer, *Culture of Adolescence*, p. 6.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

109 Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 7.

110 Neubauer, *Culture of Adolescence*, p. 10.

X. The Modernist Child

The instability and fragmentation of the modernist experience resulted in a renewed focus on the duality of the child. Margaret R. Higonnet argues that modernism is from the beginning marked by the child metaphor and that it is the duality of the child that appeals to modernists.¹¹¹ The way in which modernists imagined the child certainly differed from Victorian ideas of childhood because they drew attention to the duality of the child rather than trying to efface it. However, as Adrienne E. Gavin argues, 'old models were not simply swept away'.¹¹² According to Higonnet, the child is not only 'an image of an increasingly technological and mechanically innovative future' but also continues to be 'an image of origins, nature, and archaic expressiveness'.¹¹³ I am interested in the duality of the modernist child because this divided conception of childhood is what Barker inherits from modernism and what preoccupies her in her writing of innocence and experience.

On the one hand, in modernist fiction the child is associated with the past. War and revolution link the child to the past and, Higonnet argues, lend the child special importance: '[s]et in contrast to the civilized adult, the child as a figure for nature and the primeval can be assimilated to a critique of the industrialized and mechanized World War'.¹¹⁴ Modernist fiction is preoccupied with a loss of innocence and the disenchantments that experience brings. Vicki Mahaffey notes that 'all of [Joyce's] shorter works record the experience of some loss: the *Epiphanies* seems to have been arranged to depict the loss of innocence' and that '[m]any of the poems in *Pomes Penyeach* echo the theme of lost youth'.¹¹⁵ This theme is important in Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927), a novel that displays a pessimism about childhood. In a moment reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'Ode', Mrs Ramsay panics because her children are growing up and she feels that they 'will [never] be so happy again'.¹¹⁶

111 Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Modernism and Childhood: Violence and Renovation', in *The Comparatist*, Volume 33, May 2009, pp. 86-108, pp. 86, 90.

112 Gavin, 'Introduction' in Gavin, ed., *The Child in British Literature*, pp. 1-18, pp. 12-13.

113 Higonnet, 'Modernism and Childhood', p. 86.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

115 Vicki Mahaffey, 'Joyce's Shorter Works', in Derek Attridge, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 185-212, p. 186.

116 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 1927 (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), p. 40.

Coveney argues that in Woolf's writing, '[t]he sense of children conveyed [...] is one of fragility, enchantment, joy, and painful vulnerability to the disenchantment of experience'.¹¹⁷ This conception of the child appears similar to Wordsworthian notions of childhood. Finally, modernism's focus on psychology emphasised the importance of childhood experience to the adult mind, making a firm association between the child and the past. Stevenson notes 'the extent to which psychology had become an area of 'conscious and deliberate' study, and of widespread public interest, especially by the 1920s'.¹¹⁸ Higonnet argues that: 'the Surrealists linked Freudian dream theories to a conception of childhood as prerational, closer to the unconscious or subconscious, in which primal drives lie close to the surface. Thus, we find allegories of the innocent child [that] deploy a nostalgic, backward-turned strain'.¹¹⁹ The Surrealists' idea of the child as 'prerational' and more subject than the adult to 'primal drives' registers and develops late-nineteenth-century ideas of the child as primitive. The nostalgia of modernism is also noted by March-Russell who argues that: '[d]espite the establishment of Modernism [...], the use of idealized children to contrast with the corruption of adult society remained a literary convention'.¹²⁰

On the other hand, modernists associate the child with the future. The Freudian child may have been utilised in nostalgic allegories but psychoanalysis simultaneously prompted what Sarah Bilston calls a 'new understanding of children as beings who could lie, express murderous rage, and experience sexual desire'.¹²¹ Higonnet argues that 'artists adapted the [psychoanalytic] figure of the destructive child to align themselves with a forward-looking revolutionary vision'.¹²² The child was connected to the new modernist aesthetic, Higonnet argues, which involved a 'metaphoric understanding of the "new" through the child'.¹²³ She notes the associations made between the child and new technologies, observing 'the

117 Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, pp. 317-18.

118 Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, p. 65.

119 Higonnet, 'Modernism and Childhood', p. 92.

120 March-Russell, 'Baby Tuckoo Among the Grown-Ups', p. 196.

121 Sarah Bilston, *The Awkward Age in Women's Popular Fiction, 1850-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 10.

122 Higonnet, 'Modernism and Childhood', p. 92.

123 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

dynamism achieved through an ambiguous juxtaposition of violence with innocence or naivete' and arguing that '[t]his paradox [...] coincides with the Modernist concern to meld the symbol with technology'.¹²⁴ So it appears that for modernists the child is an inherently divided symbol. Indeed, following Franco Moretti, Higonnet argues that modernist avant-gardes choose youth 'over the multitude of other possible signs, because of its ability to *accentuate* modernity's dynamism and instability'.¹²⁵ Higonnet argues 'that the emblematic role of the child possesses an ambivalence that reaches back to Romanticism':

The symbolic child is linked both nostalgically with the past and proleptically with an increasingly mechanized future. We need to recognise the divergences and stylistic richness of this figure that adapt it to what Moretti calls the "instability" of Modernism, since the new – the future – appears in tandem with the past. Such ambiguities in the concept of the child point towards ambiguities in Modernism itself.¹²⁶

In some ways the modernist recognition of the ambiguities of childhood enabled the creation of more nuanced and complex representations of the child than might be found in Victorian literature. The Victorian child was not, of course, one-dimensional but there is an attempt in the period to erase any contradiction or duality in the category of 'the child'. By contrast, modernist representations restore the duality of childhood, using it symbolically to emphasise the dynamism of modernism as a movement. But most modernist representations of the child figure, although they put emphasis on its duality, do not move past this. Higonnet observes the symbolic power of opposition: the 'juxtaposition of violence with innocence'. Modernists such as F.T. Marinetti draw upon ideas of the innocent child in particular, as Higonnet suggests when she states that '[t]he *innocent* child is an emblem of the future and, therefore, of modernity'.¹²⁷ By drawing on the established opposition of innocence and experience and using it for symbolic power modernists are not

124 Ibid., p. 90.

125 Ibid. p. 90. Italics in original.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid., p. 86. My italics.

challenging old constructions of childhood or creating new ones but reworking conventional ideas about the child.

Coveney argues that in modernist fiction there is a strong desire to convey the perspective of the child, and that this shows that the child is not there simply as a source for adults to draw inspiration from. He relates the desire to convey the child's perspective to the influence of psychoanalysis and its focus on the child as the source of adult identity. In writing after psychoanalysis, argues Coveney:

The child would no longer be used for a romantic 'message', or as the vehicle for self-pity, indulgent pathos, or escape. If he were 'impure', malicious, cruel, tender, kind, painfully sensitive – and most often an amalgam of all these qualities – then he would be presented in his reality. He would no longer be used as the guiltless 'angel' of a romantic, moralizing idyll; or the child of the Puritans' sin and the Devil; and child neither of 'purity' nor 'wrath', nor necessarily 'happy' in a fallacious, romanticized Nature, nor poignantly and inevitably 'unhappy' as the 'victim' of industrial society. He would be conveyed as a child, with his awareness conveyed as it was experienced, from within.¹²⁸

Coveney suggests that modernist fiction tries to capture the multidimensional character of the child. The child may be 'impure', malicious, cruel, tender, kind, painfully sensitive – all of these things. She does not have to be confined to just being one of them. While I agree that some modernist writers were preoccupied with writing from the perspective of the child, I argue that Coveney overstates the radicality of representations of childhood in modernism. The modernist child is often still a symbol, still a cipher. Modernist fiction does not undertake a general overturning of the dualism of the child; rather, modernist texts tend to use this duality for symbolic purposes.

There is a sense of arriving full circle in the similarities between modernist and Romantic views of childhood. In both periods the child was a symbol both of the past and of the future, and the contemporary era was thought of as the end of the old ways and an age of new beginning. In the early period of the French Revolution many of the leading English writers, including Blake and Wordsworth, were in favour of radical change. Wordsworth writes in the *Prelude* about 'human nature seeming

128 Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, p. 306.

born again'.¹²⁹ This may be compared with Woolf's statement, quoted earlier, that human character changed in 1910. For both the Romantics and the modernists, though, early optimism about a reborn or changed human nature turned to pessimism. In the Romantics' case this was due to the terrors of the French Revolution; for modernists it was because of the fallout of the First World War and the sense of repetition that was felt with a second war on the horizon. Coveney argues that modernist writers such as D. H. Lawrence saw the early twentieth century as 'essentially a tragic age', in a way similar to Romantic writers' view of their era:

The predicament was continuous, and, for them, continuously worsening. The response – 'we've got to live' – was very much the same. And it is within this response that they directed their interest towards the child, as a symbol of sensitive growth towards viable maturity. For them the child was, if you like, a creative symbol; a focal point of contact between the growing human consciousness and the 'experience' of an alien world, about which they could concentrate their disquiet, and, importantly, their hopes for human salvation. We see just how significant Blake's initial definition of 'innocence' and 'experience' became to the long tradition of Romantic protest through the symbol of the child.¹³⁰

The connection Coveney makes between the Romantic and modernist periods seems an apt way in which to end this section because the modernist child is both a product of and a reworking of the Romantic child. Writers of both periods found in the child a way to think about the adult self and express a sense of the unprecedented change of their historical moments.

XI. The Child at Mid-Century

At the beginning of this chapter, I noted P. H. Newby's observation about the unusual number of novels and stories in the years 1945-1950 that were devoted to the theme of childhood. The survey that followed was intended to contribute to an understanding of why the figure of the Romantic child becomes prominent in British literature and culture after the end of the Second World War. I have tried to show

¹²⁹ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Sixth, in Abrams and Greenblatt, eds., *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 345-348, p. 346, line 342.

¹³⁰ Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, pp. 339-340.

how, from the late nineteenth century onwards, we see a rewriting of the Romantic child and the Victorian child in modernist fiction, which provides new understandings of notions of innocence and experience. But I have also proposed that modernist representations of the child utilise the duality of the child rather than questioning it. Particularly important for the chapters that follow is the idea that both adolescence and the short story are 'born' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that there is a connection between these and the advent of literary modernism; a tradition in which epiphany and representation of childhood experience are central, a tradition that Barker, like other mid-century writers, is writing after.

If we follow Coveney in seeing the modernist child as 'a creative symbol; a focal point [...] about which [modernists] could concentrate [...] their hopes for human salvation' then it is clear that the child's role in modernism differs from the place of the child in fiction after modernism. For modernists, an association between the child and new technologies put emphasis on the novelty of modernism and the 'juxtaposition of violence with innocence' was dynamic. For late-modernist or after-modernist writers, the juxtaposition of children and violence had very different connotations, partly due to the privileging of youth in fascism and totalitarianism, and the child certainly was not a focal point for hopes of human salvation. The child that emerges in British literature around mid-century is more a figure of the past than of the future. Gavin argues that: 'literary childhood in the 1945-70 period often reflected nostalgia for a more secure, idealized past Britain, often symbolised by large country houses and portrayed through an innocent child's-eye perspective'.¹³¹ MacKay and Stonebridge note that the 'nostalgic fantasies of the belle époque', familiar after 1918, resurfaced after the Second World War: 'Never such innocence again', as Philip Larkin famously lamented in his poem about 1914'.¹³² Nostalgic associations between childhood and an idealized, secure and innocent past are certainly a feature of mid-century writing.

But while some post-war fiction focuses on '[a]dult betrayal of children's trust and innocence', other writers undermine or reject the idea of innocence

131 Gavin, 'Introduction', in *The Child in British Literature*, p. 13.

132 MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, p. 8.

altogether.¹³³ The fiction of this period is preoccupied with the illusory nature of an 'innocent' past. MacKay and Stonebridge note that writers such as Rebecca West and Angus Wilson show how the century's 'lost innocence' is an illusion and that private domestic violence foreshadows the public violence of twentieth-century warfare.¹³⁴ Other mid-century writers like Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Greene extend James's investigation of the ambiguities and dangers of innocence. We find that innocence attracts danger and is itself dangerous. Writing of Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout* (1968) Eibhear Walshe argues that the novel is 'a story of innocence and vulnerability and the betrayal and exploitation that such unprotected innocence attracts'.¹³⁵ In Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955), Pyle's innocence is represented as a dangerous fundamentalism, 'a kind of insanity'.¹³⁶ Fowler says of Pyle: 'Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm'.¹³⁷

Barker's fiction is also a critique of innocence but her focus in her early writing is on childhood innocence and experience. As I attempted to show in the survey above, by the time Barker came to write *Innocents* in the 1940s the child figure had accrued an extraordinary number of competing and overlapping connotations, connections and relations: innocence, original sin, free will, salvation, the fall, loss, history, nation, memory, language, knowledge, interpretation, and fictional form. Barker's emphasis in the passage at the start of the chapter is on the weight of meanings under which words – and, by implication, the child – are subsumed. The symbolic weight of the Romantic child prompts Barker's investigation into innocence and experience. Her genealogy of age considers the ways in which others have figured the child and critically reworks these figurations in her own fiction. The child that Barker's fiction registers most strongly is the Blakean version of the Romantic child: a dialectical figure whose innocence is always implicated in experience. This

133 Gavin, 'Introduction', in *The Child in British Literature*, p. 13; Pat Pinsent, 'The Post-War Child: Childhood in British Literature in the Wake of World War II', quoted in *ibid.*

134 MacKay and Stonebridge, 'Introduction', in *British Fiction After Modernism*, p. 8.

135 Eibhear Walshe, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout*, 1968 (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. vii-xi, p. viii.

136 Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*, 1955 (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 155.

137 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

figure speaks to the ambiguity about innocence and children in the mid-century British imagination. There is a preoccupation in this period with what childhood is and what it means, ideas that were increasingly unclear in a post-psychoanalytic, post-war world. The dialectical Blakean child allows Barker to move past the modernist duality of the child. Her fiction not only highlights and overturns oppositions of innocence and experience but dismantles them, insisting on the undecideability of the child. In this way, and in several others, Barker's treatment of the child figure anticipates postmodernist understandings of childhood. She recognises that 'the child' is a concept and that childhood is not 'natural' but constructed. Her fiction is suspicious of 'grand narratives' of childhood and stages and parodies representations of the child in literary, psychoanalytic, psychological, and anthropological texts. Like many writers at mid-century Barker looks back, returning to childhood. But she is not looking back on the past as 'innocent', on the innocence of her younger days, or on that of childhood in general. She looks back at 'the child' as a concept, rewriting it in order to deconstruct earlier figurations of childhood.

Chapter Two

“Could I say I was possessed?”:

The Uncanny Child in ‘The Iconoclasts’, ‘Domini’ and *The Gooseboy*

She put out a hand to the bowl of roses by her chair and touched a close green bud. “A child is furled on itself. Not so vulnerable as one might suppose. And because it is a child, may we take for granted to what fidelities it owns?” Barker, ‘Domini’¹

The image of a child as a ‘close green bud’, new, perfect, vulnerable and full of potential waiting to flower, is a familiar cliché. Barker’s fiction disrupts this way of thinking about children, presenting them as violent and mad as well as vulnerable and innocent. Barker was a careful writer; her work is widely praised for its precise, sparse style, so the ambiguous syntax in the phrase ‘*close* green bud’ should not be seen as accidental. A child is ‘*closed*’, shut up, ‘furled on itself’, suggesting self-containment, strength and inaccessibility; a child is ‘*close*’: near, intimate, secretive, stifling.² Such uncertainty is also at work in the question: “may we take for granted to what fidelities it owns?” This might mean that we take for granted the truths to which a child will confess; but the more salient meanings of the word ‘fidelities’ are faithfulness and loyalty, with the word ‘owns’ being as much associated with possession as confession, suggesting that it is the child’s loyalties that are being taken for granted. The ambiguity of the passage implies that, for Barker, when it comes to children, taking anything for granted is a mistake. The inconclusivity of her prose echoes the strangeness of what it describes: the uncanny unknowability of the child.

Children are the main focus of nineteen out of thirty of Barker’s short stories published between 1947 and 1964. This chapter begins by considering how Barker’s obsessive writing and rewriting of the child in her early short fiction both reflects and

1 Barker, ‘Domini’, in *Novelette: with Other Stories*, 1951 (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 216-232, p. 216.

2 *Collins English Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 105.

resists some of the central narratives being told about children in mid-twentieth-century society and culture. When Barker began to write in the 1940s Freudian and post-Freudian ideas of infantile sexuality and aggression had become widespread and influential in both intellectual and popular culture. First, I examine the history of mid-century psychoanalysis in order to establish the dominant narrative about the child in the immediate post-war period. Then I analyse Barker's short story, 'The Iconoclasts' (1947) in relation to this narrative, arguing that through its engagement with Freud's famous case study, 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy' (1909), more commonly known as 'Little Hans', the story stages the ways in which the child became both an object of study and a focus of concern for anthropologists, psychoanalysts and politicians of the 1940s. Next, I read Barker's gothic ghost story, 'Domini' (1949) as a work that questions both the knowledge of children and the adult desire to 'know' them. Through its allusions to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, I argue, Barker's story explores the shortcomings of notions of childhood innocence and presents children as figures of ambiguity. Her staging of the Freudian theory of the uncanny draws attention to the way in which the child is often figured as the unconscious of the adult, as 'other' to adult identity.

The chapter then turns to a much later novel, *The Gooseboy* (1987), thus addressing Barker's contention that 'each writer has but one basic theme' which is re-shaped and re-submitted 'again and again in his work'.³ I propose that this late novel not only shows Barker's preoccupation throughout her career with the dialectic of innocence and experience and the figure of the child, but also demonstrates the ways in which ideas of childhood innocence and corruption linger in the late-twentieth-century imagination. The *Gooseboy* draws attention to the inherent strangeness of the child. Through its representation of the 'oieboy', a mute 'wild' or 'feral' child living in the French countryside, the novel alludes to the case of Victor, the eighteenth-century 'wild boy of Aveyron', thereby evoking a further example of how the child has been studied in order to explain human behaviour. In different ways, then, these three texts challenge the objectifying tendencies of child-study and

³ Barker, Arvon Foundation tutorial, pp. 1, 2.

collapse binary oppositions of savage/civilized and innocence/experience, insisting that the child be understood as a figure against which adult society defines itself.

I. 'The Child is Father of the Man'

In mid-century Britain there was intense interest in the child. Interest from government ministers and the press, from Mass Observation and documentary-makers, from writers, artists, photographers and directors. As the BBC aired radio programmes about good parenting, MPs lectured on juvenile delinquency, youth gang crime, lack of parental control and decreased morality, participating a widespread moral panic about youth. This was partly to do with issues of child welfare. There were worries about the evacuation of children from British cities during the war and the humanitarian crisis around the issue of lost and displaced 'war children' in Europe as a whole, highlighted by UNESCO.⁴ But, I suggest, the panic was more to do with concerns over the welfare and morality of society in the future. Like the 'lost children' of Europe after the war – who, as Tara Zahra argues, 'spawned dystopian fears of European civilization in disarray'⁵ – at mid-century in Britain children were viewed with suspicion and uncertainty; they figured variously in discussions about human morality, as threats to society, as yardsticks showing the corruptive influence of the war, and as symbols of a future about which many were so unsure. The 1940s British preoccupation with the child thus follows a long-standing association made between the child and the nation; however, the connection made between them in the post-war period was particularly intense because it came at a point at which young people were becoming increasingly defined – the term 'teenager' is coined in 1945 – and restricted and protected – the Children Act came into operation in 1948.

If the future of society is intimately bound up with the nature of the child, then childhood becomes a political issue. The concerns of politicians about issues such as evacuation and juvenile delinquency were no doubt influenced by the

4 Established in 1946, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published two reports in 1950 entitled 'Homeless Children' and 'War-handicapped Children'.

5 Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families After World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 4.

research of psychologists, psychoanalysts and, to a lesser extent, anthropologists.⁶ The research of these disciplines had always shared common ground through a mutual focus on the child; but in the late 1930s, as Denise Riley shows in her book *War in the Nursery* (1983), this shared interest in the child assumed in some areas a more pronounced undercurrent of political ideology. Parallels were drawn between individual and national character structures and in America data on children was used to formulate the psychology of national character 'types' with a particular interest in the so-called 'fascist' character.⁷ During the war psychoanalysis became more prominent in Britain, argues Michal Shapira, and analysts such as Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, and Donald Winnicott were asked to treat a wide variety of people, with a particular focus on children, who 'came to be seen, on the one hand, as vulnerable and in need of protection; on the other hand, as anxious, aggressive subjects requiring control'.⁸ Ideas of the child as savage were influenced by Klein, who argued that: 'The repeated attempts that have been made to improve humanity – in particular to make it more peaceable – have failed because nobody has understood the full depth and vigour of the instincts of aggression innate in each individual'.⁹ This figuring of the child struck a particular chord in the postwar imagination and, as Riley notes, in the 1940s Klein's ideas were taken up (in part) by other psychologists, most notably Bowlby, and disseminated to the general public in radio programmes and women's magazines that gave advice to parents about how effective nurture could overcome the savage nature of the child.

On the 30th June 1947, Barker's first collection, *Innocents* was published to widespread critical acclaim. In a letter to Barker the previous summer accepting her stories for publication, Leonard Woolf wrote: 'It is a long time since I have come across short stories as good as these, and, if you will allow me to say so, I do not think

6 Many of these researchers were in very influential positions. For example, during the war psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott was a consultant psychiatrist to the British Government's Evacuation Scheme; and psychoanalyst John Bowlby was commissioned to write a report on children in post-war Europe for the World Health Organisation. In addition, the Mass Observation project, founded by anthropologist Tom Harrisson amongst others, published a book, *Juvenile Delinquency* in 1948.

7 Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), pp. 64-5.

8 Michal Shapira, *The War Inside* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 1.

9 Melanie Klein, *The Early Development of Conscience in the Child*, 1933, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 74.

I have ever read short stories about children which are so convincing.¹⁰ Due to her focus on children, the earliest readers of Barker's fiction considered it to be influenced by psychoanalysis. (I discuss the contemporary reception of *Innocents* in detail later.) Two months before Woolf's correspondence, Barker received a letter of rejection from the publishers Jonathan Cape thanking her for her 'short stories concerned with child psychology and childish psychology in adults'.¹¹ Although Barker writes of 'Freudian depths' in her introduction to *Hester Lilly*, the archive does not confirm that Barker read either Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1940s.¹² However, a number of factors suggest her psychoanalytic knowledge. Her use of the word 'animus' in 'The Iconoclasts' suggests that she was familiar with Carl Jung. English translations of Freud's work were published in the early 1950s by Barker's publisher, The Hogarth Press. Barker read psychologist Charlotte Wolff's writings on female sexuality and lesbianism and corresponded with Wolff about her work, suggesting not only that Barker had an interest in this area but that she was familiar enough with psychological terminology to fully engage with Wolff's work.¹³ In the pages that follow I examine how ideas about childhood in the work of Klein and Bowlby differ from those in Freudian psychoanalysis. Considering the widespread dissemination of psychoanalytically-informed ideas in mid-century popular culture, and the likelihood that Barker was familiar with psychoanalysis, it is important to establish the conceptions of the child that were dominant when Barker began to write. Just as an examination of the child in mid-century psychoanalysis illuminates the preoccupations of Barker's work, so Barker's fiction informs our understanding of psychoanalytic narratives about the child in post-war Britain.

Klein's focus on the innate aggression of the child develops from, but also alters, Freud's theories. According to Freud, the mother's breast is '[t]he child's first erotic object', which it does not at first understand to be separate from its own body.¹⁴ It is only 'when the breast then has to be separated from the child's own

10 Leonard Woolf, letter to Barker, 8th August 1946, box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

11 Jonathan [Leapey?] of Jonathan Cape Ltd., letter to Barker, 14th June 1946, box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

12 Barker, 'Introduction' to *Hester Lilly*, p. viii.

13 For Barker's correspondence with Wolff see: box 13, folder 13, HRHRC.

14 Freud, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis', 1940, in Phillips, ed., *The Penguin Freud Reader*, pp. 1-63, p. 43.

body, transferred 'outwards' because he so often finds it absent, [that] it takes the part of the originally narcissistic libido-investment with it as an 'object'.¹⁵ This first object is later formed by 'the whole person of the mother' who Freud describes as the child's 'first and strongest love-object' – 'its first seductress'.¹⁶ Freud's characterisation here of the infant making a separation between the mother and itself, and thus conceiving of its first 'object', is helpful in understanding post-Freudian developments in psychoanalysis, particularly the theory of objects relations. Klein's ideas were based on her work with young children in the 1920s using her new play technique. She considered a child's play to be a symbolic expression of the conflicts in its unconscious. In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (1932) Klein writes that: 'The child expresses its phantasies, its wishes and its actual experiences in a symbolic way through play and games.'¹⁷ Hanna Segal notes that although Klein's observations of children's play largely confirmed Freud's theories, Klein also observed some unexpected phenomena, such as 'children of 2½ displaying oedipal phantasies and anxieties which clearly already had a history' and the early appearance of the super-ego, which 'seemed to have very savage characteristics'.¹⁸ Thus, Klein came to understand that the object relationships of the child had an early origin in its relationships with part-objects, for example the mother's breast. Klein's observations 'led her to a formulation of the earliest stages of the Oedipus complex and the super-ego in terms of early object relationships, with an emphasis on anxieties, defences and object relations, part as well as whole'.¹⁹

Klein emphasised the aggression of the child: '[t]he object-world of the child in the first two or three months of its life could be described as consisting of hostile and persecuting, or else of gratifying parts and portions of the real world'.²⁰ The child splits the ego and objects, for example the breast as a source of food, into good and persecuting part-objects in order to try to, as Segal puts it, 'retain good feelings and

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 1932 (London: Random House, 2011), p. 7.

18 Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the work of Melanie Klein* (London: Karnac, 2008), p. 2.

19 Ibid., p. 4.

20 Klein, 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States', 1935, in Juliet Mitchell, ed., *Selected Melanie Klein* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), pp. 115-145, p. 141.

introject good objects, whilst expelling bad objects and projecting bad feelings'.²¹ The anxieties of this early stage of the paranoid-schizoid position are considered by Klein to be essential to the development of the ego. Later, at around four or five months old, writes Klein, 'the ego is [...] made to realize that the loved object is at the same time the hated one, and in addition to this that the real objects and the imaginary figures, both external and internal, are bound up with each other'.²² This is the depressive position, the overcoming of which, argues Klein, 'depends on how [the infant] is able to find its way out of the conflict between love and uncontrollable hatred and sadism'.²³ Juliet Mitchell argues that the infant's later 'normal' development depends on 'whether or not it can identify with an internalized 'good' mother to the extent that it can repair the damage done by its destructive urges to the 'bad' mother, or whether it must flee the implications of the position'.²⁴ The depressive position involves feelings of guilt and empathy, which are focused on the object (mother). Psychosis develops in those who cannot reconcile love and hate and distinguish between real and imaginary or external and internal objects.

John Bowlby trained under Klein and, like her, realised the importance of aggression in childhood. However, he disagreed with Freud's and Klein's understanding of the mother-child bond as the outcome of libidinal drives and came to attribute more significance to the environmental factors affecting the bond between mother and child. Bowlby was influenced by ethology, notes Shapira, in his view of children as being frequently in conflict with one another, like 'primitives' or animals, over 'possession of goods or affection and frustration after failure or punishment'.²⁵ For Bowlby, argues Shapira, the withholding of affection or goods 'should be seen as one of the chief sources of hatred and aggression in childhood' and '[t]hese hazardous feelings of aggression could last into adulthood, endangering democracy'.²⁶ This argument illuminates the connection Bowlby went on to make between the separation of mother and child and juvenile delinquency. In 1939, for

21 Segal, *Introduction*, p. 3.

22 Klein, 'Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States', in Mitchell, ed., *Selected Melanie Klein* p. 141.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

24 Mitchell, *Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 115.

25 Durbin and Bowlby, 'Personal Aggression and War', 1938, quoted in Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 208.

26 Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 209.

example, he, Winnicott, and Emanuel Miller, published a letter claiming that the evacuation programme '[could] lead to a big increase in juvenile delinquency in the next decade'.²⁷ Furthermore, he concluded his 1944 article, 'Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves: Their Characters and Home Life' with the following statement: '*prolonged separation of a child from his mother (or mother-substitute) during the first five years of life stands foremost among the causes of delinquent character development and persistent misbehaviour.*'²⁸ Shapira notes that after the war analysts from the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency (ISTD) 'contributed to the discussion of what was seen as a wave of juvenile delinquency due to the upheaval of war and the breakup of families'.²⁹ It is important to note that the connection Bowlby makes between childhood aggression and national instability implies that state intervention in families, particularly with regard to mother-child relations, would result in a more peaceable nation.³⁰

Bowlby's sense of children as primitives or animals and the links he makes between the child and the nation suggests the influence not only of ethology but of anthropology. The relationship between the child and nation, most obviously expressed in the child/primitive or child/savage parallels, has a long and complex history. As Heather Montgomery puts it: 'Children have been continual motifs since the earliest days of anthropological writing, the savage and child existing in parallel

27 John Bowlby, Emanuel Miller, and D. W. Winnicott, 'Evacuation of Small Children', 1939, in *ibid.*, p. 60 (italics in original).

28 Bowlby, 'Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves: Their Characters and Home Life', 1944, in Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 207.

29 Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 16. The issue of increased juvenile delinquency due to the war began to be widely discussed in newspapers as early as 1940. At first, concern was about increased petty crime due to the blackout and lack of parental control, but immediately after the war, it became a panic about the decreased morality of children in general. A summary in *The Times* of a Metropolitan Police report for the year 1946 states that, in London, juvenile delinquency had increased and that nearly two thirds of young offenders were found to be operating in gangs, with children young as eight found to be ringleaders. (Tuesday 11th June 1947, issue 50810, p. 5, col. C.) In November 1946, *The Times* reported that Home Secretary Lord Templewood was to submit a motion calling for a new penal reform measure to combat juvenile delinquency. (Issue 50520, p. 8, col. A.) Early in 1947, in a lecture to The School of Law at Cambridge University, Home Secretary Lord Templewood emphasised the influence of postwar uncertainty upon decreased morality and expressed concern that his proposals would not reach the root of the problem: 'for the root is moral, and the reason why the root has grown in recent years is that, however we may explain it, many moral restraints have lost much of their power in the confused and restless world of to-day.' (Reported in *The Times*, February 1st 1947, issue 50674, p. 2, col. A.)

30 Shapira, *The War Inside*, p. 209.

to explain social and cultural development'.³¹ The parallel was also key to early child psychology, and later to psychoanalysis. Riley observes that late-nineteenth-century psychologists would 'note in infantile behaviour shadows of our forgotten ancestors'.³² For psychologists, Riley argues, '[t]he child appears to present a life caught at its start in an unmuddied form, a pure object for study. The child is in this sense the genesis of the adult, the 'father of the man''.³³ The reference to Wordsworth's conception of childhood in 'My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold' (1802) reminds us that in British literature, too, there has long been a parallel between primitive and child. The most well-known expression of this comparison, as discussed in chapter one, is Romantic writers' use of the figure of the 'noble savage'. Rousseau played a crucial part in formulating the characteristics of the figure of the Romantic child: inherent difference from adults; natural innocence; "the feeling of life"; and primitivism. The last of these – the sense that the child, like the primitive or savage, lives within itself in harmony with nature and independently from society – is particularly relevant to the current argument. In contrast to Rousseau, psychoanalytic theory understands children to be inherently conflicted. Whereas Rousseau argues that the child is self-sufficient and should therefore be without desire, psychoanalysis highlights the child's sexuality and aggressive drive for domination. Wordsworth's formulation, then, provides a good illustration of the dual role of the child in the twentieth century. Not only is the child 'father of the man' – the key to understanding individual consciousness and development, as is the case in psychoanalysis and developmental psychology – the child is father of all men, the starting point for understanding the development and character of whole societies, as is the case for psychoanalytic anthropology and group psychology.

Although psychoanalysis registers the complexities of the child it is still based on a child/primitive association, on the observation and study of the behaviour of children, and the sense that children can provide the model for understanding the behaviour of adult individuals and whole societies. Freud writes:

31 Montgomery, *An Introduction to Childhood*, p. 18.

32 Riley, *War in the Nursery*, p. 48.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Surely there must be a possibility of observing in children at first hand and in all the freshness of life the sexual impulses and wishes which we dig out so laboriously in adults from among their own debris [...]

With this end in view I have for many years been urging my pupils and friends to collect observations of the sexual life of children [...].³⁴

Freud makes a distinction between the easily accessible ‘first hand’ child, and a historic child figure that is hard to reach and hidden from view by the ‘debris’ of adult life. He suggests that the process of extracting the child from the adult resembles an archaeological ‘dig’ in which buried artefacts are brought to light ‘laboriously’. By contrast, ‘the sexual impulses and wishes’ of the ‘first hand’ child may be more easily accessed through observation. The adult gaze, applied to the figure of the child as an object of study, will elicit ‘hidden’ knowledge about individuals, societies, and the history and future of the species without the need for a drawn-out, difficult process of unearthing. This objectification of the child reinforces a sense of adult domination. It also values the child not in itself but as ‘the father of the man’ – for what it can reveal about the adult mind. With this in mind, is the psychoanalytic child any less of a figure of the past or an object of knowledge than the Romantic child? I argue that both ‘The Iconoclasts’ and ‘Domini’ address these questions. Indeed, *The Child is Father* was one of Barker’s suggestions to Woolf in 1946 for the title of her first collection but he thought it ‘not quite right’.³⁵ This suggests that in the 1940s Barker was thinking about ideas of the child as a figure through which the adult mind could be understood. The sections that follow aim to show how Barker’s fiction engages with, and questions the idea of, the child as an object of study in psychoanalysis.

II. ‘The Iconoclasts’

Barker’s engagement with child-study is made particularly clear in the opening passage of ‘The Iconoclasts’. The story begins with a boy, five-year-old Marcus, playing in his back garden, building a castle out of mud. He is later joined by an older

34 Freud, ‘Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume X (1909), Two Case Histories: ‘Little Hans’ and the ‘Rat Man’*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 5-149, p. 6.

35 Leonard Woolf, letter to Barker, 31st August 1946, box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

boy, Neil, who ridicules his beliefs and habits. Marcus's project requires him to carry pails of earth from the bottom of the garden up to a paved area, a route that involves the ascent of a set of stone steps. But his journey is complicated by his obsessive belief that the top step is hallowed ground:

The top step was sacred. To tread on it was not only a crime but a deliberate thumbing at fate. Of course a lot of people did – his parents, the occasional gardener [...] It worried Marcus to think what a lot of trouble they were storing up for themselves, until he decided that as they were adults, they had graduated out of the power of the step. One day, he too would be beyond it, he would be able to tread there without his footstep shaking loose some dreadful animus.³⁶

The foregrounding of Marcus's ritualistic avoidance of the step immediately suggests a parallel between the mind of the child and the primitive mind. 'The Iconoclasts' actively engages with some of the assumptions of the child/primitive parallel. First, Marcus's avoidance of the step is presented as a ritual designed to appease both 'fate' and the 'dreadful animus'. This takes account of the theory that children's play echoes the beliefs and traditions of primitive culture, suggesting that children, like primitive people, fear punishment for breaking taboo by gods or impersonal powers. Second, Marcus has a golliwog named Boddy, which he talks to as he plays. After 'rescuing' Boddy from a beetle, Marcus scolds him: "You'll have to be more careful."³⁷ Early anthropologists suggested that a feature of the primitive world view is a lack of differentiation, so that the primitive individual, like a child, will speak to creatures and things as if they were people.³⁸ Third, the tone of passages that describe Marcus playing in his garden feels like that of an anthropological or psychoanalytic case study, as though he is being observed like a specimen in his natural habitat. The story appears to be an examination of a day in the life of a five-year-old boy, an investigation of his habits and beliefs.

36 Barker, 'The Iconoclasts', in *Innocents: Variations on a Theme*, 1947 (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 56-86, p. 56.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

38 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 1966 (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 100.

I want to pursue this last point further. Marcus's age, the sustained focus on the ritualistic detail of his play, and his relationship with Boddy suggest that 'The Iconoclasts' may be read in the light of psychoanalytic case studies, particularly Freud's study of 'Little Hans'. It is worth noting that Klein drew on 'Little Hans' when developing her play technique; later I will discuss the representation of Marcus in relation to Klein's youngest patient, Rita. Little Hans 'is afraid a horse will bite him in the street', tries to avoid going out and becomes frightened when he is outside.³⁹ Freud argues that the horse represents Hans's father and that Hans is afraid of his father because he harboured 'jealous and hostile wishes against him' and 'wanted to have his father 'out of the way' [...] so that he might be alone with his beautiful mother and sleep with her'.⁴⁰ Freud classifies Hans's phobia as 'anxiety-hysteria' and argues that in this state 'the libido which has been liberated from the pathogenic material by repression is not *converted* [...], but is set free in the shape of *anxiety*'.⁴¹ The idea of the libido being 'set free' is significant because, according to Freud, Hans's fear of horses/his father results from the violence Hans wishes on his father. Marcus's phobia is attached to the top step, which is 'sacred' because it may 'shak[e] loose' a 'dreadful animus'. Because the word 'animus' may be defined as motivating a person to act with 'animosity' and 'hostility' and the step represents a fear or threat specific to childhood (adults have 'graduated' out of its power) I propose that the representation of Marcus's phobia of the step in 'The Iconoclasts' stages Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex.⁴²

Both Marcus and Hans are preoccupied with family hierarchies and wish to transgress the established order. Freud argues that desire for knowledge is 'inseparable from sexual curiosity'.⁴³ He notes that Hans's curiosity is particularly focused on his parents and the origins of babies (prompted by the birth of his sister), and that Hans likes to pretend to have his own children who were delivered by the stork.⁴⁴ Marcus also imagines having a child-like 'subordinate': 'Boddy did what no

39 Freud, 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy', p. 22.

40 Ibid., pp. 123, 111.

41 Ibid., p. 115.

42 "animus, n.". OED Online. September 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7800?redirectedFrom=animus> [accessed September 19, 2015].

43 Freud, 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy', p. 9.

44 Ibid.

one else did, he went in awe of Marcus. That made a full circle – Marcus’s father looked up to his superior at the office, Marcus’s mother looked up to Marcus’s father, Marcus’s grandmother looked up to them both, Marcus had to look up to everybody, and Boddy looked up to Marcus.⁴⁵ Marcus demonstrates his resistance to the family hierarchy by hiding when his grandmother tries to find him ‘because it was part of his policy to be elusive, not easily found – in fact not to be found at all. He preferred to turn the tables and seek the seeker’.⁴⁶ ‘Turning the tables’ or inverting the established family hierarchy is what Hans wishes to do by supplanting his father’s position. Marcus’s father appears only once in the story, as a figure of authority who objects to and ridicules the ritual Marcus has developed in order to avoid the top step: ‘His father didn’t like him to go in under the bushes’ and ‘to Marcus’s father [the ritual] was just a source of humour’.⁴⁷ Marcus’s flouting of his father’s instructions subverts parental authority.

His treatment of Boddy also suggests his phantasy of being the parent. When Marcus talks to Boddy he imitates an adult register: “I haven't got time to turn around today.”⁴⁸ Marcus also abuses Boddy, pushing the doll into a bush ‘for not looking impressed’ with his mud castle.⁴⁹ This role play recalls Klein’s description of the play of a two-year-old neurotic girl called Rita in ‘The psychological principles of early analysis’ (1925). Rita, writes Klein, ‘would incessantly play ‘mother and child’ internally’: ‘Rita would be a strict mother and [Klein] would be a naughty child. She would reproach me with all manner of things [...] The child was actually playing two roles here; similarly the role that she had assigned to me was a dual one – I was simultaneously the excessively strict mother and the child who suffered from this strictness.’⁵⁰ Marcus’s chastisement of Boddy recalls Rita’s ‘strict mother’ role, again suggesting the ‘The Iconoclasts’ is staging psychoanalytic theory. Klein attributes Rita’s aggression in her rituals and role-play to her guilt about wishing violence on

45 Barker, ‘The Iconoclasts’, p. 58.

46 Ibid., p. 59.

47 Ibid., pp. 56-57.

48 Ibid., p. 57.

49 Ibid., p. 59.

50 Klein, ‘The Psychological Principles of Early Analysis’, 1925 (unpublished lecture), quoted in Claudia Frank and Elizabeth Spillius, eds., trans. by Sophie Leighton and Sue Young, *Melanie Klein in Berlin: Her First Psychoanalyses of Children* (Hove, UK; New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 117.

her mother and father and her fear that the violence she had phantasised inflicting on her parents would be visited on her. This resembles little Hans's fear of horses, which Freud argues results from the violence he wishes on his father. If we accept that 'The Iconoclasts' stages psychoanalytic theory then Marcus's violence towards Boddy represents his experience of similar aggressive phantasies and his subsequent guilt. Further, the duality of the roles Rita imagines is significant in light of Marcus's abuse of Boddy, Neil's violence towards the doll, and the status of Neil's body as an object at the end of the story, which I discuss later.

A second factor that suggests Marcus's phobia of the step may be read as a staging of the Oedipus complex is the similarity between his and little Hans's treatment of objects. Marcus uses ritual to deal with his fears about the summerhouse, which he thinks is inhabited by a 'creature':

Whatever it was in the summerhouse, he believed it preferred him to hurry by and not stare too much. For dignity's sake he could not run past; he always, however sober his pace, began to skip and hop when he came in sight of the hut, thus placating its creature without loss of prestige. So the skipping and hopping became a ritual and after the manner of ritual, had a definite form. Two hops, three skips and a short jump, took Marcus on a level with the summerhouse door. He was then entitled to assert himself and his command of the ritual by a deliberate stare. Two hops, three skips and a short jump took him well out of the creature's jurisdiction again.⁵¹

The obsessive behaviour of both little Hans and Marcus is similar. Each attaches the anxiety that stems from his libido onto non-human objects. Marcus has a phobia about the 'dreadful animus' under the step and 'the creature' in the summerhouse; Hans fears the horse. I noted earlier the importance attached by Freud and Klein to the role of object relations in the development of the infant's sense of self and sexuality through anxiety. The sexual nature of Marcus's anxiety is suggested at several points in the story, most notably when Marcus shows Boddy a worm:

There was a worm in the pile of earth. Marcus showed it to Boddy.
"That's a snake. [...]"

⁵¹ Barker, 'The Iconoclasts', p. 60.

He thought he might keep the worm and let it swim in the moat of his castle, so he put it under a flower-pot.

"This is very important," he said, making the earth into a tight pile and cutting it with his spade. "It's a secret."⁵²

The worm or 'snake' is an obvious phallic symbol, something the story registers when Marcus puts emphasis on the worm's secrecy and, after displaying it, covers it with a flower-pot. When Marcus 'shows' the worm to Boddy, Barker's story recalls Little Hans's enjoyment of exhibiting his penis and attempting to see other people's sexual organs.⁵³

In addition to the common elements of content in the two texts, there are similarities in the form and structure of 'The Iconoclasts' and 'Little Hans'. The description of the ritual Marcus creates to ward off 'the creature' reads like a psychoanalytic explanation of his behaviour. Immediately of note is the combined third-person objectivity and close focus of the narrative voice. Also of interest is the formality of the language ('entitled to assert himself and his command of the ritual') which is used in subordinate clauses ('thus placating its creature without loss of prestige') to offer an explanation of Marcus's behaviour. 'The Iconoclasts', like 'Little Hans', describes in detail Marcus and his routines, including specifics about his age and physical appearance ('small for his five years').⁵⁴ The very precise set of physical movements he develops to appease the 'creature' is described to us by the narrator in minute detail. This is reminiscent of the encyclopaedic detail of a Freudian case study.

Several other stories in *Innocents* resemble psychoanalytic case studies in terms of content and form, providing a psychological analysis of the behaviour of an individual character. The structure of "Here Comes a Candle..." is chronological, with three parts addressing three crucial points in protagonist, Haidee's life: her early childhood; her experience at school aged twelve; and the day of her forty-eighth birthday.⁵⁵ Haidee's overbearing nature results in her rejection by her grown-up children and the story traces this back to a childhood incident in which she was

52 Ibid., p. 58.

53 Freud, 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy', pp. 106-107.

54 Barker, 'The Iconoclasts', p. 56.

55 Barker, "Here Comes a Candle...", in *Innocents*, pp. 31-55.

ignored and abandoned by the adults around her. Whether or not Barker was deliberately drawing on the ideas of Freud and Klein when she wrote *Innocents*, the similarities between her stories and psychoanalytic case studies were noted at the time, both directly, as in the above letter from Jonathan Cape, and in the sense that, like psychoanalysis, Barker's stories were seen as revealing a previously hidden world of childhood.

Writing in *The Daily Mail*, Peter Quennell observes that *Innocents* is 'concerned with the more ruthless, *mysterious*, and amoral side of childhood'.⁵⁶ A *New York Times* reviewer agrees, writing that Barker's stories 'explor[e] with remarkable penetration the *mysterious* mental world of childhood'.⁵⁷ A review in *The Atlantic* also notes that Barker 'mov[es] with amazing penetration into [children's] *mysterious* mental world'.⁵⁸ The fact that all the reviews identify a concern with, and an exploration of, the mystery of childhood indicates that *Innocents* was seen as a psychoanalytically-informed work of fiction which, like psychoanalysis, revealed 'hidden' knowledge about humankind through the 'observation' of children. Quennell's review further suggests a psychoanalytic reading when he writes that, for Barker, the child is 'an intensely self-centered being who gazes out at life through the semi-transparent walls of his or her own private universe, seeing the world peopled with gigantic adult shapes, sometimes impressive and beautiful, sometimes threatening and hideous'.⁵⁹ These 'gigantic adult shapes' that are both pleasant and terrifying recall Klein's descriptions of the parental couple phantasised by the infant during the oedipal stage. Barker's publisher, John Wheelock recognised her debt to psychoanalysis in a letter which evaluates 'Domini' in terms of its psychological accuracy: 'I do think that Domini, being merely a fiction in the child's mind, strains credulity in the case of a story where the realistic detail is so accurately presented.

56 Peter Quennell, review of *Innocents*, press clipping from *The Daily Mail*, 28th June 1947, box 6, folder 6, HRHRC. (My italics.)

57 Review of *Apology for a Hero*, press clipping from the *New York Times*, 16th April [1948?], box 6, folder 6, HRHRC. (My italics.)

58 Review of *Innocents*, press clipping from *The Atlantic*, May 1948, box 6, folder 6, HRHRC. (My italics.)

59 Quennell, review of *Innocents*.

But schizophrenia is a very subtle thing and might well be present in the case of such a child with such a background, I suppose.⁶⁰

Barker's fiction was seen to have a similar aim to psychoanalytic case studies: to penetrate the surface of the 'mysterious' world of the child. But although Barker's stories stage the theories of Freud and Klein, they also undermine the assumptions of psychoanalytic case studies. In Barker's stories the impulse, found in discourses of child study such as psychoanalysis, to 'master' the child, to know it completely through observation and interpretation, is resisted. Instead, the unknowability of the close/closed child is emphasised. Both 'The Iconoclasts' and 'Domini' appear to play with the reader, emphasising that she cannot ever really 'know' the child. For example, as I discuss later, the line 'could I say I was possessed?' in 'Domini' may be read as a joke or a challenge to our desire to settle on a 'once and for all' reading of a text. In addition, the sustained inconclusivity of Neil's death, analysed below, resists the reader's desire for resolution.

The order of Marcus's small world is disrupted by the arrival of ten-year-old Neil Farncombe. A sharp contrast between primitive infancy and maturity is created by the juxtaposition of Marcus's childish rituals and the appearance of Neil, who is 'casual and self-possessed'.⁶¹ Neil, the 'iconoclast' of the story's title, refuses to entertain Marcus's beliefs about the step and reveals that the 'creature' or 'gremlin' in the summerhouse is in fact a rat. This could suggest a mature, common-sense quashing of primitive infantile fears, the triumph of rationality over superstition. However, Barker's story goes on to reject oppositions between the 'savage' and the 'civilized'. While Marcus is portrayed as a primitive, the description of Neil has obvious fascist connotations: 'Marcus was too young to know what fanaticism was, or he might have seen in Neil's face the fatal unity, feral and precipitate, and no more amenable than flame. The clear, freckled brow, gathered and jutting over those oddly empty blue eyes, the firm, intolerant mouth, so pitiless that it chilled and almost repelled.'⁶² This account of Neil as a 'fanatic' with 'oddly empty blue eyes' suggests a stereotypical 'fascist character'. Neil appears intolerant, devoid of pity – robotic,

60 John Wheelock, letter to Barker, 1st May 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

61 Barker, 'The Iconoclasts', p. 61.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

even. But the description of Neil's wrinkled and protruding forehead is more reminiscent of atavistic descriptions of 'born criminals', depicting him as sub-human and savage. Neil is an ambiguous figure who combines two extremes of inhumanity: the mechanization of fascism and the savagery of a more animalistic type of criminality. His defining characteristic is his inhumanity and, suggests Barker, whether this inhumanity is 'civilized' or 'savage' does not matter.

Neil's ambiguous status is emphasised towards the end of the story when, after attempting to carry out a 'four-point landing' to 'test his nerve', he falls from the top sail of a windmill, presumably breaking his back: 'He landed on his back. The ground shook him once, flinging up his arms and legs like a doll's, then he lay still.'⁶³ The reader realises Neil is likely to die but is never certain if he has. At first Neil is still and silent and his eyes are closed; but later we are told that he 'picked a stalk of grass and stuck it in the side of his mouth'.⁶⁴ On the following page, in a clichéd image of death, Neil lets the chips of wood from the mill sail fall from his hand; but he is still not dead, as when Marcus tries to pull him up he '[bares] his teeth in another extreme of fear, both savage and agonized'.⁶⁵ This sustained inconclusivity produces a chilling atmosphere; but the uncertainty about whether Neil is alive or dead does something more. First, it creates an uncanny effect and, second, it foregrounds ideas of object relations, objectification – and the child as an object of study.

In *The Uncanny* (1919), Freud quotes Ernst Jentsch's description of what makes E.T.A. Hoffmann's story, 'The Sand-Man', an uncanny text. Jentsch suggests that a sense of the uncanny is created when the reader is left in 'doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is alive and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate'.⁶⁶ Freud argues that Jentsch's observation is 'undoubtedly correct' but that the uncertainty over whether Hoffmann's character Olympia is human or automaton is neither the only, nor the most important, uncanny

63 Ibid., p. 80.

64 Ibid., p. 82.

65 Ibid., p. 84.

66 Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', 1906, trans. by Roy Sellars, *Angelaki*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1995), ed. Sarah Wood, pp. 7-16., p. 8. Accessed at <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/> [accessed March 25 2011].

effect in Hoffmann's story.⁶⁷ Freud protests several times against Jentsch's argument that 'intellectual uncertainty' creates a sense of the uncanny, and later states that a doll that seemed to be alive would not excite fear because children 'make no sharp distinction between the animate and the inanimate'.⁶⁸ This proves at first to be the case for Marcus in 'The Iconoclasts'. After Neil has fallen, Marcus performs a quick celebratory dance then waits patiently for a response. The repeated use of the word 'odd' suggests Marcus is unsettled, but not scared, by the fact that Neil does not move. 'It was odd', Barker writes, and later: 'An odd qualm chilled [Marcus] as he looked into Neil's face.'⁶⁹ Soon, however, Marcus's mood alters from one of puzzlement to one of terror:

[Neil] lay there staring at Marcus, and now the shadow had come back. He had a grey cloth face. He never looked away, and the terror in his eyes was so violent and so inexplicable that Marcus was frightened too. He glanced round about; there was only the bland empty sunshine and the stooping mill. There was nothing to be afraid of – that made Marcus more frightened than ever.⁷⁰

As far as Marcus is concerned there is nothing to be afraid of. Marcus is terrified not by Neil's fear but by its inexplicability – the strangeness of such violent emotion. For the reader, inconclusivity generates an 'odd qualm' similar to that experienced by Marcus, but a real sense of the uncanny is produced as we experience Neil's ambiguous state through Marcus's uncomprehending eyes. The uncanny in Barker's story is created by a sense of 'intellectual uncertainty', so that the reader's lack of confidence over whether Neil is dead or alive mimics Marcus's inability to understand Neil's death, something seen as characteristic of the 'primitive' or childish mind.

The sense of uncertainty foregrounds ideas of object relations and objectification. Throughout the story, Barker has highlighted Marcus's relationship with his doll, Boddy. The staging of Marcus's Oedipus complex is achieved through his fear of non-human objects (the 'dreadful animus' and the 'creature') and by his

67 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 1919, in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-162, p. 135-6.

68 Ibid. p. 141.

69 Barker, 'The Iconoclasts', pp. 81, 84.

70 Ibid, p. 83.

aggressive behaviour towards Boddy, which in psychoanalytic terms represents the violence he wishes to inflict upon the body of his father. Confronted by a human object that is neither animate nor inanimate, Marcus compares Neil's post-fall body to a series of objects. Through these comparisons the story dramatises the way in which a young child might make sense of death through objects. First, Neil is compared to a doll. When he falls the ground flings up 'his arms and legs like a doll's'. We find that his '[l]egs and arms were flung out just as Marcus had seen Boddy's arms and legs spread wide when he was thrown on the floor'.⁷¹ Next, Neil is compared to a scarecrow with 'a grey cloth face' and, 'flatten[ing] himself to the ground [...] bearing his teeth', to an animal under attack.⁷² Marcus's comparison of Neil's body to a doll, scarecrow and animal stages object relations theory and highlights Marcus's lack of distinction between animate and inanimate objects. By drawing attention to a series of bodies, Barker draws attention to all these things as objects and suggests that, like 'Boddy', the body of the child is an object too. But the ambiguity of Neil's body as corpse or living child actually resists objectification precisely because it cannot be intellectually classified. In this way, Barker's uncanny characterisation of Neil engages with, and is critical of, twentieth-century discourses of child study. 'The Iconoclasts', first of all, undermines the opposition between the mind of the 'savage' child and the western adult mind and, second, resists the desire to objectify 'the child', pinning it down like some rare species under the microscope.

III. 'Domini'

'The Iconoclasts' stages psychoanalytic theories, representing Marcus's Oedipal desires while also calling into question the idea of the child as an object of study in psychoanalysis. 'Domini' (1949) goes further by representing a child who carries out the violence that Marcus enacts only in his phantasies. In doing so, 'Domini' considers the question of a child's responsibility for an aggressive act alongside the idea of childhood innocence. The story insists that we cannot discover whether Francesca is innocent or guilty. This in turn suggests that we cannot ever really 'know' the child,

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 81. Note also Barker's playful Boddy/body pun.

⁷² Ibid, p. 84.

despite the narratives created to explain childhood, which perhaps reveal more about adults than children. Through its staging of the Freudian uncanny, 'Domini' shows how the child is considered 'other' to the adult because it cannot be known.

'Domini' concerns a seven-year-old girl, Francesca, growing up in a large house in the British countryside in the 1880s. The story is recounted by Francesca, now an old woman, to an unnamed narrator. After the death of Francesca's authoritarian father and during her mother's absence in London, Francesca is left alone with the servants for almost a year, during which time she reignites a friendship with Domini, her imaginary playmate from the days when her father was alive. When Francesca's mother finally returns, Domini becomes difficult to handle, constantly criticising Francesca's mother's low-cut ball dresses and her relationship with her new suitor, the dreadful Poultney St Austell. Domini persuades Francesca into considering a plan to burn her mother's dresses and, one night, after catching her mother with Poultney St Austell in the summerhouse, Francesca decides to do it. Domini appears and convinces Francesca to burn the dresses on the veranda of the summerhouse, arguing that because the lights are out, Francesca's mother and her lover are no longer inside – which, of course, they still are. After the fire, as she and Domini walk back through the snow, Francesca notices a strange thing: "Why, Domini," she said, "you don't make any footprints!"⁷³

The dramatic revelation, the framed-narrative, the setting in the past in a large remote house: Barker's Jamesian ghost story deploys and, I would suggest, parodies Gothic conventions, in particular the idea of the uncanny double. But 'Domini' is above all a serious meditation on the unknowability of the child and the dangers of ideas of innocence. As I suggested in chapter one, Barker is concerned not with the corrupting effect of experience on innocence, but with the impact of innocence on experience. This unusual focus disrupts established ideas about innocent children and, through an exploration of Francesca's responsibility, exposes childhood innocence as a concept tied up with adult guilt. Similarly, 'Domini' destabilises other binary oppositions on which child study is based: conscious/unconscious, known/unknown, and adult/child. Barker's use of the

73 Barker, 'Domini', p. 232.

homograph 'close' indicates her unwillingness to subscribe to dichotomous ideas of the child.

The story makes it clear that we are to see Domini as Francesca's double. As Freud describes it in *The Uncanny*, the 'double' is: 'a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind... [which] has become a vision of terror'.⁷⁴ In 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis' or the 'Rat Man' (1909), Freud encourages his patient to consider the moral self as the conscious, and the evil self as the unconscious.⁷⁵ He states: 'The unconscious, I explained, was the infantile; it was that part of the self which had become separated off from it in infancy, which had not shared the later stages of its development, and which had in consequence become *repressed*'.⁷⁶ Freud proposes an evil, infantile self, separated and repressed in infancy. In 'Domini', this infantile unconscious self returns as a monstrous double. When Domini, who has previously been Francesca's 'ideal companion', reappears after a year's absence, 'to Francesca it seemed there was a terrifying change in him. He had grown, not as a boy grows – outstripping his clothes, shooting forth at neck and wrists, cracking his voice; he was not older by such frailties. He was incalculably older, he had a power far beyond the playmate, and a presence which she was learning to dread'.⁷⁷

The doubling of Francesca and Domini dramatises the Freudian uncanny. Domini is represented as Francesca's unconscious 'creation' which has escaped her conscious control. The language of the description is significant. Phrases describing physical change such as 'outstripping' and 'shooting forth at neck and wrists' depict the fast-moving transitional qualities of adolescence, traditionally seen as the boundary between childhood and adulthood – the short phase in which a child becomes an adult. The 'cracking' or breaking of the voice reminds us that puberty is a time of rupture and irreversible change. Domini, however, does not change in a physical sense; he does not grow 'as a boy grows'. Instead he develops in Francesca's

74 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 1919, in Victor Sage, ed., *The Gothick Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 76-87, p. 83.

75 Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume X (1909)*, pp. 155-318, p. 177.

76 Ibid.

77 Barker, 'Domini', p. 223.

mind, gaining 'power' and 'presence'. Implicit in Domini's adolescent growth is the idea of Francesca's developing sexuality. Her witnessing of her mother's sexual liaison in the summerhouse and the description of puberty above suggest her sexual awareness. Psychoanalysis might argue that Francesca's aggressive behaviour is the result of her thwarted unconscious desire for sexual intimacy with her mother, and that Domini represents the uncontrollable growth of Francesca's repressed sexuality. In this case, Francesca is driven by her unconscious desires and is not responsible for her actions.

'Domini' turns on and problematises the question of Francesca's innocence. Looking back, Francesca questions the concept: "'Innocent?'" said Francesca to me. "In the ways of the world, perhaps, or I would have guessed that my mother and her lover were still in the summerhouse. And even there," she unfolded one blue and white hand from the other, "it is only ignorance given a softer name. Could I say I was possessed?"⁷⁸ The 'unfolding' of the hands and the question itself invite the reader to consider what is meant by innocence. But Francesca's speech confuses the different meanings of the term. Francesca's sexual innocence, her innocence 'in the ways of the world', is imbricated with her legal innocence, the question of whether or not she knew her mother was in the summerhouse or, in other words, if her actions were deliberate or accidental. Thus knowledge and sexual knowledge cannot be separated. Francesca's question about possession further complicates the idea of her innocence. The question is surely intended to be sarcastic, especially because 'Domini' parodies elements of the gothic ghost story, a genre that features 'actual' possession.

Francesca's legal innocence might be supported by the idea that children have an innate lack of knowledge. This originates from Locke's sense of the inexperienced mind as 'white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas'.⁷⁹ As discussed in chapter one, in Locke's formulation children are fundamentally lacking: in experience, awareness, intention and motivation. The argument might be, then, that children have no agency because they have not had enough experience to know

⁷⁸ Barker, 'Domini', p. 232.

⁷⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 52.

the implications of their actions. Certainly, in 'Domini', Francesca acts without knowing why: 'Why was it, when the dresses were all piled and ready, that Francesca suddenly lost sight not of what she intended to do, but of her reason for doing it?'⁸⁰ Perhaps we can argue that Francesca *is* possessed in the sense that she is not fully responsible for her actions? The ironic tone of Barker's narrative resists any such conclusions. 'Domini' suggests that adults are so keen to see children as innocent that we would sooner believe a child to be schizophrenic, or even possessed by supernatural forces, than face up to the idea that a child might intentionally commit an act of violence. For Barker, the 'innocent child' conceals and simplifies a complex being, revealing more about adult desires than anything concerning children themselves.

The question of Francesca's innocence is bound up with what she knows; and knowledge is not easy to judge, especially the knowledge of children, Barker suggests. When Domini is described as 'incalculably older' this implies that he is an unknown quantity and, by extension, that Francesca is too. The use of organic imagery in the same description calls to mind the metaphor of the 'close green bud' and, in doing so, puts emphasis on the unknowability of the child. Barker's insistence on the child's ambiguity may explain the numerous allusions in 'Domini' to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. I noted previously that in James's novella the Governess is fixated on finding out the 'truth' about the (sexual) knowledge/innocence of the children in her care but that the text continually resists her, and the reader's, attempts to find out 'the truth' about Miles and Flora. The obsessive desire to know what others know is what Freud calls the 'epistemophilic instinct' or 'the sexual instinct of [...] knowing'.⁸¹ Like *The Turn of the Screw*, Barker's story stages the epistemophilic instinct, concentrating on what Francesca knows and by implication on what 'the child' knows. And, again like James's novella, 'Domini' makes salient the idea that Francesca (like Miles and Flora) will never be 'known' but will remain ambiguous – a 'close green bud', at once familiar and strange, 'other' even to the adult she becomes.

80 Barker, 'Domini', p. 230.

81 Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', p. 245.

The question of Francesca's innocence or guilt is never resolved. It is significant that, at seven years old, she is on the cusp of the age of criminal responsibility. 'Domini' is set in the 1880s, before the age of criminal responsibility was raised to eight in 1933, but it is written in 1949.⁸² This adds to the uncertainty over whether Francesca's childish irresponsibility was accepted as an extenuation of her crime. The same motif appears again and again in Barker's early writing: the child figure who, like Francesca, may be responsible for a crime but is never held to account because of adults' misguided sense of children as 'innocent', which, after all, is only 'ignorance given a softer name.' We might expect ideas about criminal responsibility to be particularly significant in the late 1940s because of the crimes committed across Europe during the Second World War. However, as Lyndsey Stonebridge argues, although there was a recognition of general violence and barbarism in mid-century culture, the Nazi genocide against the Jewish people was not explicitly acknowledged in popular 1940s consciousness, and questions of responsibility and guilt were evaded. The moral panic about youth, in which concern about juvenile delinquency and criminal children intensifies, appears to be part of this evasion: 'By the late 1940s and early 1950s', writes Stonebridge, 'the lawlessness of youth had become a metaphor for the largely unacknowledged lawlessness of the war that had just passed.'⁸³ Why this concern about lawlessness and immorality is focused on children rather than on adults is a key question. It is as if the guilt and fear prompted by the war and by knowledge of war crimes is displaced onto the figure of the child. Child psychology during and after the war was in part an attempt to understand the violence of the twentieth century. But because psychoanalysis figures the aggressive, uncontrolled unconscious as infantile there is a sense in which the child is not only the origin of violent phantasies but of actual violence and 'evil'.

'Domini' represents the ambiguity of the child, staging the conflict between experience and innocence, what is known and unknown, and revealed and concealed. Freud is credited with dispelling the myth of childhood sexual innocence. His *oeuvre* shows that children are sexual, aggressive and far more complex than

82 Pamela Cox, *Gender, Justice and Welfare: Bad Girls in Britain 1900-1950* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 19. It was raised to 10, its present level, in 1963.

83 Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety*, p. 54.

adults had assumed (and still do assume). However, Freud's writing makes assumptions about the knowability of the child: the complexity of the child may be observed and explained, the psychology of children may be 'known'. In 'Little Hans' he suggests that the 'first hand' child is more easily accessible than the historic child figure. Freud's description of observing the child 'in all the freshness of life' recalls the metaphor of the 'close green bud' and suggests that, for Freud, the child, like the bud, will open to reveal 'truths' about human psychology. 'Domini' resists the idea that the nature and motivations of the child may be so easily understood. The story shows how adults read in the child what they want to see. Freud's 'first-hand' child is still mediated through the adult. The observer and the analyst do not simply 'observe', they interpret and thus construct the child according to their own prejudices and desires. What the child knows, 'Domini' suggests, is something adults cannot ever really discover.

In her book *The Child in Question* (1998), Diana Gittins observes that: 'we have all been a child and we all therefore have a sense of having been something we no longer feel we are. At an individual level the child is thus always Other'.⁸⁴ As the child each individual once was is other, so the category of 'child' is other to the category of 'adult'. This sense of the child as other rests on the adult '*having been something*' or, in other words, rests on the child as a figure of the past. Earlier I argued that the child of Wordsworth's 'Ode' was taken up by the Victorians, who figured childhood as a stage of life long since lost, and that the writing of Dickens, among others, participated in 'fixing' the Victorian Romantic child as a figure associated with the past. Carolyn Steedman points out the importance of the role of Freudian psychoanalysis in developing this association by 'summarizing and reformulating a great many nineteenth-century articulations of the idea that the core of an individual's psychic identity was his or her own lost past, or childhood'.⁸⁵ Freud's theory of the unconscious, she suggests, allows us to understand how adult concerns, desires and fears are projected onto children. Steedman also notes that childhood is a symbol of our individual and collective past, which 'grows up, and goes away, yet

⁸⁴ Diana Gittins, *The Child in Question* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 6.

⁸⁵ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. 4.

also remains to haunt the present.⁸⁶ It is the doubling effect of this absence and presence that interests Barker, as well as a sense of the uncanny as a combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar.

The way in which adult identity is constructed in relation to the child as 'other' is explored in 'Domini' through the doubling of Francesca the child and Francesca the old woman.⁸⁷ The sense of old Francesca's childhood as a 'lost past' is created by gothic elements in the story such as the historical setting and the framed narrative, where old Francesca relates the tale to an anonymous narrator who then tells it to us. The story is set in '1885, the year of Gordon's death at Khartoum' and old Francesca's tale, states the narrator, 'sounded remote as she told it; one could not feel about it any more than about the extremities of a fairy tale'.⁸⁸ This figuring of her childhood as 'remote', like a fairy tale or the story of the death of some historical figure, allows old Francesca to distance herself from her childhood self. By staging the doubling of child Francesca and Domini, 'Domini' suggests that Francesca's desire for and aggressive impulses towards her mother are projected onto her imaginary 'creation', but also places this interpretation in doubt. Unable to overcome this ambiguity and to consign her childhood to the past, old Francesca figures her childhood self as other. The narrator states: 'She does not smile glibly at the sight of children. She watches them, her thoughts go deep and, if she is not roused, grow fathomless.'⁸⁹ Francesca's child-watching, in which her attempts at self-understanding become 'lost' in a bottomless void, is accompanied, as we have seen, by her repeated statements concerning the portrayal of the children as innocent. It is in *this* sense that Francesca is possessed; she is haunted by the actions of the child she once was – a child that is figured both as other and as a core part of her adult identity. There is a sense of looking back at the actions of herself as a child and not being able to claim them as hers; they become instead the actions of a being that is 'not-her', an 'other'. 'Domini's' dramatisation of the Freudian doublings between Francesca and Domini and old Francesca and child Francesca draw on, but also

86 Ibid., p. ix.

87 From now on I will call these figures 'child Francesca' and 'old Francesca'.

88 Barker, 'Domini', pp. 217, 216.

89 Ibid., p. 216.

problematise, ideas about the processes by which parts of the self are split off and separated, and about the ways in which these parts linger and persist.

Despite the paradoxical and ambiguous status of the child there exists, as sociologist Chris Jenks observes, ‘a widespread tendency to routinize and ‘naturalize’ childhood, both in common sense and in theory, [which] serves to conceal its analytic importance behind a cloak of the mundane; its significance and ‘strangeness’ as a social phenomenon is obscured’.⁹⁰ Using striking imagery, Steedman considers why the strangeness of the child is concealed in this way. She argues: ‘the strangest dislocation of them all... is that children are the bloody fragments of another body, little parcels of flesh and bone split off from another... [and] we are nervous when this aspect of our existence is articulated or explored.’⁹¹ In other words, we do not like to think about the strangeness of the child; it is something that we fear, and like other things we fear – the wild, the mad – we have set the child apart as ‘special, different, Other’.⁹²

In 1984, Barker read two stories and gave a talk to a group of creative writers at the Arvon Foundation. The following extract, quoted here at greater length than before, echoes the sense we get in Barker’s fiction of the child as ‘other’ to adult identity, an uncanny figure that lingers and persists:

[T]here’s a theory that each writer has but one basic theme. Which he does over, and re-shapes, and re-submits and twists around – and tries to get away from – again and again in his work. I think it’s true in my case. [...]

But you don’t choose. Not that, or any theme. At least I didn’t. Not deliberately, not consciously. The theme, whatever it is, chooses you. It creeps up on you, it’s there beside you, inside you [...]⁹³

Relationships between experience and innocence, adult and child, Barker states, must be done over, re-shaped, re-submitted and twisted around ‘again and again’.

90 Chris Jenks, *Childhood*, 1996 (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 8.

91 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. ix.

92 Gittins, *The Child in Question*, p. 11.

93 Barker, Arvon Foundation tutorial, pp. 1, 2. Barker was invited to give the tutorial at the Arvon Foundation in Lumb Bank, Yorkshire by the poet, Maura Dooley. Barker continued to work at Arvon for several years after this and there established a friendship with Penelope Fitzgerald.

Her writing of the child, I would argue, is therefore compulsive - it is uncontrollable and also, she insists, involuntary. Though she may try to get away from it, Barker's theme (the theme of innocence and experience and the figure of the child) pursues her and, at the same time, in a characteristically uncanny turn of phrase, is also already 'there [...] inside'. Questions of possession, therefore, appear to apply as much to Barker herself as to Francesca in 'Domini'. In *Spectres of Marx* (1993), Jacques Derrida extends Freud's notion of the uncanny, arguing that it involves the sense of 'a stranger who is already found within [...] more intimate with one than one is with oneself, the absolute proximity of a stranger'.⁹⁴ This description of intimacy with and proximity to a 'stranger who is [...] found within' is strikingly similar to Barker's way of thinking about children and the process involved in her writing of them. For Barker the child is both 'closed' (a stranger, a figure against which we define ourselves) and 'close' (an uncanny presence within, with which we are intimate). Perceiving the child as other involves seeing ourselves as strange and unfamiliar. The figure of the child is so compelling because of its undecidability: it is both ourselves and not ourselves; a symbol of something lost and past but also of the future. For Barker, the child is an unstable and ambiguous figure belonging to past, present and future. Barker writes the figure of the child again and again precisely because childhood cannot be pinned down, split off or consigned to the past.

IV. *The Gooseboy*

Barker's description in her Arvon talk of being pursued and haunted by the theme of childhood innocence and experience prompted my choice of *The Gooseboy* as the subject of this final section. Whilst Barker's preoccupation with the child marks her out as an author who started writing at mid-century, the majority of her books were published between 1971 and 1999, and she re-explores her favourite theme in many of them, including *The Gooseboy*. The novel's titular character, the 'oieboy' is a lad of about sixteen who looks after a herd of Toulouse geese in return for his bed and board at a remote, dilapidated Provencal villa owned by a reclusive film star, Douglas

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 1993, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 172.

Bysshe (stage name, Rex Snowdon). The oieboy is partially deaf, mute, and has severe injuries to the left-hand side of his face. This 'double' face, one half 'perfect' and 'pure', the other 'crippled' and 'raw', is the centre around which the novel turns.⁹⁵ As well as being a fascinating example of the way in which Barker's fiction is haunted by the child, *The Gooseboy* stages quite literally in the oieboy's double-face the ideas of the ambiguity and strangeness of the child I have been exploring in the thesis so far.

Without an origin, living in a semi-wild state, and with limited communication skills, the oieboy evokes the figure of the wild or nature child. His physical injuries, which appear to have been inflicted by man, recall those of the 'wild boy of Aveyron', a mute child with a large scar on his neck found in the south of France in the late eighteenth century. The French setting also makes salient the novel's evocation of the ideas in Rousseau's *Emile*, which I discussed earlier. The 'oieboy' (bird/boy) is an example of a not-child: a child who does not conform to the ideal of childhood, and is perhaps not even wholly 'human'. The adult attempts in the novel to make sense of the oieboy (he is voiceless so cannot 'explain' himself) stage the adult construction of childhood I have been discussing. The boy's divided face represents the divided nature of the symbol of the child, a figure burdened with a huge variety of meanings. The oieboy embodies the contradictions that characterise the child and, like this figure, he is constantly under scrutiny from the adults in the novel: what does his face 'mean'? What is his origin? What has been done to him? What does he know? No fewer than six adult encounters with the oieboy's face are described, and the novel makes it clear that the adults are to be judged by their reaction to the boy.

The 'good' and the 'bad' coexists in the oieboy's double face.⁹⁶ Bysshe and his twin sister, Dulcie observe the oieboy in the most detail. Both note the ageless, lifeless quality of the left-hand side of the boy's face. For Dulcie, 'the left side, was no age. It was no face. Just a piece of raw meat like the meat on butchers' hooks,

95 Barker, *The Gooseboy*, 1987 (London: Arena Books Ltd, 1989), pp. 31, 71.

96 The novel features a series of other doubles, most notably Bysshe and his twin sister Dulcie. The fact that the siblings never meet, and the presence of the word 'she' in Bysshe's name, suggests the idea of these two as doppelgangers. Other doubles include: Bysshe and his stage persona Rex Snowdon; Bysshe and Zwemmer, the character Bysshe plays in his latest film.

purple over the bone and dried up'.⁹⁷ Bysse, too, observes the dried up quality of the left-hand side of the face: '[It] had been denaturalized. What served as flesh was the colour of raw meat, an old rawness in which the blood had darkened and the living tissue had dried hard and rigid as wood.'⁹⁸ The language of the siblings' descriptions signals the ways in which the oieboy's face is strange to them: it has an unnatural, inhuman quality, rawness combined with rigidity, both reminiscent of death. What is worse, though, is that these signs of mortality appear on the face of a child, and we are constantly reminded that he *is* a child by his title, 'oieboy'. For both it is the juxtaposition between the two sides of the boy's face that is at once disturbing and compelling. '[T]he two halves together really shook me', Dulcie remembers. She observes that the injuries 'stopped on a line from his forehead to his chin; no merging, no blending, one skin-cell dead and rotten, the next one to it living and sweating'.⁹⁹ This is the crucial point: dead and rotten things have no place next to a living, sweating child, the combination is strange and unsettling. Dulcie concedes that contrasting the living and dead, good and bad 'is the sort of thing Nature does all the time' and decides that God allows it 'to keep our ends in sight, so we remember where we come from as well as where we hope to go', again connecting the child and origins.¹⁰⁰ The doubleness of the oieboy's face is what Dulcie finds particularly disturbing and, I argue, what others who have studied the child also find problematic. They want the child to be one or the other, good or bad, innocent or corrupt – but not both at the same time.

Dulcie's response chimes with the reactions of other adults in the sense that she feels that the oieboy's face cannot be arbitrary, it must *mean* something. For Dulcie, it signals the divided nature of human beings, her language evoking the notion of original sin. The theme is reinforced by the figuring of the land around Bysse's house as a Garden of Eden (a place associated with lost childhood). Within this biblical landscape the oieboy is described as both angel and devil. In the following

97 Barker, *The Gooseboy*, p. 71.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

100 *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

extract he arrives carrying dead roses, evoking Caliban's entrance carrying wood in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (c.1610):

The oieboy had come into the yard, his arms full of brown roses. He carried them carefully, his head bowed, solicitous, even tender. [...]

Bysse went to the window and whistled. The boy put up his face to the sky. Bysse whistled again, a short blast such as he might use to alert an accomplice or summon an animal. The boy threw down the roses and came to the window. His jeans were soiled and too big for him, so that his body could be seen moving with grace inside the bloated cotton. For grace of movement he could be relied upon, and the sun, doing its bit, shot to blazes every wire-gold hair on his head.¹⁰¹

The oieboy's response to Bysse's whistles, his obedient manner, and his soiled and overlarge clothes encourage a reading of him as a 'devilish' primitive or savage. The Caliban connection suggests that the oieboy is base and animalistic, as do the frequent comparisons made between him and various animals or primitives, which I discuss later. However, the description in the extract above of the sun shining through the oieboy's hair suggests something entirely different. The boy appears as an angel figure, with the light illuminating his head like a halo ('wire-gold hair'). Furthermore, the oieboy's 'grace' is emphasised and the suggestion is that this is a moral as well as a physical state. Elsewhere, Bysse describes the boy's face as an omen: 'when he remembered it [...] He had glimpses like flashes from a nerve end. As if he was being warned about something that was going to happen, or had happened, or ought to be stopped.'¹⁰²

I suggested earlier that Barker's writing may be read as a response to, and a reaction against, the idea that some kind of 'truth' about human nature is located in the body of the child. These various figurings of the oieboy draw attention to the idea that, like the oieboy's face, the child cannot be arbitrary and will offer up a meaning to adults who look hard enough. Child observation, and observation in general, are *The Gooseboy's* main preoccupations. Earlier I discussed the objectification of the child subject in the study of childhood. In *The Gooseboy*, Barker's preoccupation with discourses of child study is suggested through the novel's comparison between the

101 Ibid., p. 13.

102 Ibid., p. 31.

oieboy and the eighteenth-century figure, Victor the 'wild boy of Aveyron'. Michael Newton argues that the figure of the 'wild child' or 'feral child' has long fascinated those interested in what it means to be human: 'These children raise the deepest and most insoluble of questions: what is human nature? Does such a thing exist? How do we differ from other animals? Where does our identity come from? And the inevitable silence of these children provokes a further mystery: what part does language play in creating our humanity?'¹⁰³ Victor's discovery addressed some of these questions. It also undermined Rousseau's theory that the child, like the primitive or savage, lives within itself in harmony with nature and independently from society. Living in isolation, Victor had not developed in a way that was recognised as being human.¹⁰⁴ This reinforced the argument that isolation was not desirable because society was necessary in the production of 'humans'.¹⁰⁵

As well as raising questions about 'what it means to be human', wild children also provoke misunderstanding, violence and exploitation. In *The Gooseboy*, Dulcie's husband, Pike compares the oieboy to 'a wild animal', reporting that the boy tried to get into his car but was 'pulled [...] out by the scruff of his neck' and 'was foaming at the mouth'.¹⁰⁶ Pike's reaction to the oieboy recalls the reaction to Victor, who had to contend with being chased, captured, shipped away from home, and displayed and examined.¹⁰⁷ Barker's novel draws on nineteenth-century ideas of wild children as 'savages', making a link through the allusion to Caliban between the study of 'wild' children and the study of native peoples. *The Gooseboy's* evocation of ideas of wild children as animals and the savagery of native peoples suggests the novel's concern with the psychological and physical damage inflicted upon the objectified 'specimens' of scientific, anthropological and psychological study. Through its characterisation of the American press team, Hilda Latouche and Nat Twoomey,

103 Michael Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (London: Faber, 2002), p. xiii.

104 See Pierre-Joseph Bonnaterre, 'Historical Notice on the Sauvage de l'Aveyron', 1800, quoted in Harlan Lane, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, 1976 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 33-48, p. 36.

105 For a further discussion of this point see: Lane, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, p. 27.

106 Barker, *The Gooseboy*, p. 88.

107 Lane, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, pp. 4, 17-18, 29.

Barker's novel relates this to the objectification and commercialisation of the child in popular culture.

When Latouche and Twoomey, a journalist and a press photographer respectively, encounter the oieboy they want to narrate, explain, record, capture and display him in various ways. They question Bysse about the oieboy: 'How did he get that way?' 'I don't know,' said Bysse. 'Someone surely screwed him up.' Hilda was taking notice. Those fine nostrils of hers were picking up a scent.¹⁰⁸ Hilda, the journalist, follows the scent, constructing a sensational narrative to 'explain' the oieboy's condition which involves him coming from 'a remote mountain village' with an old custom of human sacrifice, 'to make a scapegoat carry their sins away. So they can start again with nice clean souls':

So he's picked – a virgin child – to absolve the sins of his elders. They set fire to him and chase him away. After that his mind goes blank. Naturally.'

'And he's never spoken since. It figures,' said Twoomey.

'He's all locked up. There's dynamite inside him. One day he'll break out and make mayhem. Have you thought about that?'

Twoomey told Bysse, 'You'd be responsible.'

'He ought to be restrained. Does anyone know he's here?'¹⁰⁹

The extract contains some of the worst stereotypical and sensational Western myths about 'primitive' or 'savage' people. It also features an example of popularised psychoanalytic ideas: a traumatised child 'goes blank' and mute as a result of the trauma that is still contained within him, 'locked up' inside him like a bomb ticking down, ready to explode. The oieboy contains the secret of what has been done to him. Hilda insists: 'He's blocked. Someone should take him in hand, show him how to face up to himself.'¹¹⁰ The idea that the oieboy must 'face up to' or confront himself is again a popularised interpretation of psychoanalytic ideas. Note that it is Hilda, the journalist who adheres to this simplified, popularised version of psychoanalysis. Her reading of the oieboy constructs him as a mythical, primitive savage from a remote place like a child in a fairy tale. The oieboy, part child, part

¹⁰⁸ Barker, *The Gooseboy*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

savage, will be a spectacle whose imagined story incorporates the most popular narratives of childhood, often told in sensational media stories: the abused and disfigured child, the wolf child, the savage child, the Freudian sexual child, the traumatised child. All of these stories and myths of childhood draw attention to the myth of 'the child' in twentieth century society and culture.

Twoomey, the photographer, wants to narrate the 'Warboy' (he can't pronounce 'oieboy') and capture his face. His compulsive photography of the boy raises questions about the objectification of the child. Twoomey emphasises the monetary values of his photographs. He won't need to sell the photos of the oieboy because, he anticipates, they will prove so fascinating to people that they will sell themselves: 'They're terrific. [...] It's best when he smiles, because then it's worse. [...] I turned my hat upside down and fooled about to make him laugh and it was like a horror movie. I got every bit of that boy's war.'¹¹¹ The novel emphasises Twoomey's intended exploitation of the oieboy as a curiosity, a child with a face from a 'horror movie', a boy who brings to mind stories from the bible and of war, who appears to represent a basic, popular, highly commercial narrative that will sell itself.¹¹² Bysse is concerned by both Twoomey's and Hilda's exploitation of the oieboy, worried by '[t]he thought that [they are] planning to use the boy, make him into a freak show':

'How would I do that?'
 'Simply by writing about him. Making people aware of his existence.'
 'He's at least as remarkable as the white rhino. A lot of people will want to remark on him.'
 'Conservationists?' suggested Twoomey.
 'Psychopysicists, psychobiologists, physiognomists. Anyone who thinks your fate is in your face is going to be interested in his split level.'
 'He ought to be seen,' said Twoomey.¹¹³

The comparison of the oieboy with a white rhino and Twoomey's mention of conservationists foregrounds the connection between the oieboy and the 'primitive', implied by the comparison to Caliban I noted earlier. Bysse's worry about the oieboy

111 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

112 *Ibid.*

113 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

becoming 'a freak show' and Hilda's list of scientific disciplines recalls the treatment of not only of wild children but of native peoples. Individuals from both of these groups were often taken from their homes in order to be displayed to and studied by scientific institutions and, in the Victorian period especially, featured in freak shows.¹¹⁴ *The Gooseboy* is preoccupied with the fine line between sensationalism and scientific observation and display, not only in the Victorian period but in the twentieth century too.

Twoomey not only wants to 'record' the oieboy's face, he wants to construct his portrait. He states: 'I'm a photo-journalist, I make pictures to tell how it is.'¹¹⁵ It is significant that, although Twoomey says his pictures 'tell how it is', he has already make a distinction between the act of taking the picture and the construction of the portrait: 'I'll take his picture – make his portrait.'¹¹⁶ For Twoomey, the photograph can reveal more than the original, and it captures something more through the participation of the person behind the lens. The photograph's main aim, then, is not to objectively 'record' the oieboy but to construct him. Twoomey decides to create a 'perfect' version of the oieboy's face. He describes the process by which he created this ideal image:

'I took Warboy en face, in full sun, though I didn't get both sides as evenly lit as I'd like. I processed the film, then printed the good side with the other side covered. Reversed the negative, and using a red filter on the enlarger arranged the negative to fit the other half, removed the red filter, printed the other half – holding back the side already exposed and then developed the complete print.'¹¹⁷

The foregrounding here of the complexities involved in producing the image of this 'perfect' child connects the creation of the child in photography with the construction of the child in scientific discourse. It is worth noting the historical links

114 For discussions of the common interest in native peoples in nineteenth-century scientific discourses and the Victorian freak show see: Lillian Craton, *The Victorian Freak Show; The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), pp. 1-3; Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 1-4.

115 Barker, *The Gooseboy*, p. 116.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid., p. 139.

between photography (and later cinema) and the child, explored by Vicky Lebeau in her book *Childhood and Cinema*.¹¹⁸ Just as neither journalism nor photography can make claims to objectivity, historical constructions of the child are not objective but deliver the idea of childhood that is necessary to a particular historical moment.

When Bysse is shown Twoomey's photograph of the 'good half' of the oieboy's face he doesn't recognise him:

It was a monochrome, head and shoulders of a virtual stranger. Bysse could detect a teasing resemblance to someone often seen but not known. It made him realise how little he relied on the good half of the oieboy's face. It had always been so composed, untouched by emotion, blush and sweat. The photograph gave the impression of a stone face, a funerary angel's, without a granule of personality and just enough life to open the eyes but not to blink them.

'Classy,' said Hilda.

'It's all wrong.'

Twoomey bridled. 'How can it be wrong when it's all right?'

'It's not him.'¹¹⁹

The face is wrong because it is a copy produced by Twoomey which erases the oieboy's individuality and personality in favour of perfection. Bysse's comparison of the 'stone face' of the oieboy without his 'bad' half to a 'funerary angel' recalls the connection I noted in chapter one between the Victorian fixing of the child as 'innocent' and child death. This perfect child is not the 'real' oieboy whom Bysse knows, it is an idea of him constructed by an adult, just as the conception of 'the child' is always constructed by adults. But this perfect child – with 'two good sides and no gothic'¹²⁰ – from which any trace of imperfection has been erased is, as Bysse points out, 'all wrong'. The photograph of the oieboy is 'wrong' not only because it doesn't look like him, but also because it is an image that carries a trace of the violence that adults do to the idea of childhood by being unable to tolerate its ambiguity and always desiring to 'fix' it.

Twoomey's photograph, like child-study, tries to 'know' the child, to expose its mysterious secrets. But the 'good' half of the oieboy's face was never the part by

118 See: Vicky Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2008).

119 Barker, *The Gooseboy*, pp. 138-139.

120 Ibid., p. 139.

which he could be known. Bysshe notes that it was always ‘so composed, untouched by emotion’ that he never relied on it to try to understand what the oieboy was thinking. Bysshe concedes that in any case he was never able to ‘know’ the oieboy: the boy is ‘someone often seen but not known’. Bysshe’s sense of the oieboy as unknown recalls the image of the child discussed the first two sections of the chapter: a child both familiar and uncanny, close and closed. As suggested earlier, the oieboy’s face acts as a centre for the novel around which ideas and action are constructed and framed. People cannot help looking at his face and looking for meaning in it. They are drawn to him, they want to know why and how he came to be, where he is from. They want to explain him, write his backstory, and make a spectacle out of him. The novel’s silence regarding the oieboy provokes this desire in the reader to ‘know’ the boy, staging Freud’s ‘epistemophilic instinct’. In *The Gooseboy*, people’s desire to know the oieboy is converted to a desire to look at and touch him, giving him a kind of power. Bysshe’s attraction to the oieboy is hinted by his ‘longing’ to touch the boy’s face: ‘to break and relieve the stricture of the boy’s cheek’.¹²¹ And when Dulcie visits Bysshe’s villa and encounters the oieboy, they kiss.¹²² Perhaps, though, the objectification of the oieboy undermines his power? After all, we never see things from his perspective, he has no name, and he never speaks. It is thus very difficult not to objectify him as ‘the oieboy’.

I argue that it is the oieboy’s refusal to be known that gives him his power. The oieboy, Bysshe asserts, is ‘an unknown quantity, totally unpredictable. I never know what he’s thinking or what he will do when he’s upset’.¹²³ What the oieboy does in response to Twoomey’s idealised photograph of him is to destroy the apparatus that created the image. Wanting revenge, Twoomey goes in search of the oieboy, pursued by Bysshe, and they discover the boy in his grotto, gazing into the mirror, wearing Twoomey’s hat: ‘He removed it, and holding it in both hands lowered it slowly on to his head. [...] The boy adjusted the hat, tilting and tipping it ever lower. When he turned to face them, the brim was pulled down over his right side and raked high over the left. His calcined cheek twitched in the spasm which served him for a

121 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

122 *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

123 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

smile.¹²⁴ The oieboy uses Twoomey's hat to cover up the 'good' side of his face, leaving nothing visible but the 'bad' side, reversing the process that Twoomy used to make his 'perfect' photograph of the boy. The image of the oieboy with which we are left, his smiling admiration of the side of his face that is imperfect but which is unmistakably *him*, is an image that resists the objectifying gaze of the adults and their desire to 'know' him once and for all.

This chapter has attempted to explore some ways in which the body and mind of the child have been studied, classified and objectified by anthropology, psychology and psychoanalysis, and ways in which the child has been figured as a point of origin from which to understand human thought and behaviour. Going back to Riley's text we find that: 'The child appears to present a life caught at its start in an unmuddied form, a pure object for study'.¹²⁵ The key word here is *appears* because, as I have tried to argue, Barker's writing undermines the child/primitive parallel and the rigid oppositions between savage and civilized and innocence and experience that go with it. Gittins argues that in the twentieth century there was a shift 'to a universal image of *the* child and a universal idea of *a* childhood – myths that eradicated difference, [and] denied history'.¹²⁶ Barker's fiction registers the dangers of this kind of universalization. Her writing suggests that adult attitudes towards the child are problematic, questions the assumptions of child-study, and insists that 'the child' is strange, complex and unknowable rather than 'fresh', 'unmuddied' and 'pure'. Barker's obsessive writing and rewriting of the child in her early short fiction should therefore be seen as both reflecting and resisting anxious mid-twentieth-century attempts to possess and pin down the child, attempts which have persisted, and arguably intensified, through the latter half of that century and into our own. For Barker, the child is a contradictory and ambiguous figure that unsettles the stability of adult identity. Her writing explores the many different ways in which the figure of the child may be seen as unstable, unknowable and uncanny.

124 *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

125 Riley, *War in the Nursery*, p. 26.

126 Gittins, *The Child in Question*, p. 91.

Chapter Three

(Dis)articulations: Language, Power and 'Age inversion'

in Barker's Articulated Fiction of the 1960s

[...] 'everything has to connect. The knee-bone connecting to the thigh-bone, the thigh-bone connecting to the hip-bone, the hip-bone connected to the backbone. [...]

'I don't know what you mean.' A.L. Barker, *The Middling*¹

An 'articulated novel' is the name given by Barker to a book that contains several linked short stories or novella that may feature the same characters, themes and events. This chapter argues that paying close attention to the different meanings of 'articulated' allows for a deeper understanding of Barker's 1960s fiction and her *oeuvre* as a whole. I begin by examining the twelve-year gap in Barker's publication history between the collection containing 'Domini', *Novelette: With Other Stories* (1951) and her articulated novel, *The Joy-Ride and After* (1963).² Following the commercial failure of her first novel, *Apology for a Hero* (1950) Barker appeared to withdraw from the literary scene; she did not publish, she received no reviews, and she stopped going to literary parties. Although Barker struggled in the 1950s under the twin pressures of lack of confidence in her writing and full-time work, she never stopped writing. In fact, she used the decade to develop a new kind of book, an articulated novel, which is different from both a short story collection and a novel. In its articulated form this new kind of text stages ideas of attachment and separation in adult and child relationships. These had preoccupied Barker since the late 1940s, when she was writing *Apology for a Hero*.

The sections that follow argue that Barker's 1960s fiction extends and develops the preoccupations of *Apology for a Hero* by making a connection between adult-child relationships in families and communities, relationships between colonial powers and subjects, and those between state and citizens. The prominence of the

1 Barker, *The Middling*, 1967 (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 46.

2 Barker, *The Joy-Ride and After*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1963).

language of articulation in *The Joy-Ride and After* and *The Middling* draws attention to the structural nature of human relationships in families and communities and thus to the balance of power within these relationships. Adult-child relationships are represented as being particularly significant in the constitution of familial and social structures. I read these in the light of Howard Garfinkel's theory of 'ethnomethodology', which puts emphasis on the ways in which society is constructed from the bottom up rather than the top down, thus highlighting the importance of day-to-day exchanges to the construction of social reality. A central element of Garfinkel's theory was conversation analysis. With this in mind I turn to John Mepham's work on 'bad talk' in 1940s fiction, extending his analysis into the post-war period by showing the concern in Barker's 1960s fiction with non-cooperative verbal exchanges and inappropriate verbal articulations. In *The Joy-Ride and After* characters who exhibit these behaviours are unable to articulate in both senses of the word – connection and expression – and this inability is shown to be driven by the trauma and violence of legacies of the war and colonialism. The behaviour of these dis-articulated characters destabilises and disrupts the collective construction of social reality. Finally, I draw on Claudia Nelson's notion of age inversion in the Victorian period, extending it into the twentieth century. The reversal of child and adult roles in *The Joy-Ride and After* not only suggests familial and social instability but also signals the novel's ambivalence about the power relationship between the British state and its citizens and the success of the ideals of Welfarism in 1960s Britain.

Although Barker did not use the term 'articulated novel' until February 1989 in a letter to Richard Cohen, it can be applied retrospectively to both *The Joy Ride and After* and *The Middling*. The word 'articulated' is used in two senses according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: the first relates to connection, the second to verbal expression. In relation to connection, articulated means structures '[c]omposed of segments that are linked or united by joints' and vehicles that consist of 'flexibly connected sections' which can move as a whole; or, in a figurative sense, 'composed of connected parts'.³ In relation to verbal expression, the word means: 'uttered,

³ See: "articulated, adj.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11191?redirectedFrom=articulated&> [accessed October 07, 2013].

pronounced, or expressed distinctly' and carries an additional connotation, with the adjective 'articulate', of a person who can speak coherently.⁴ The term therefore conveys a sense of a functioning structure: separate articulated parts move as one; language articulated correctly may be understood. Barker's use of articulated in her 1989 letter to Cohen about her novel, *The Woman Who Talked to Herself* (1989) utilises both of these meanings: 'May I keep my subtitle: 'An articulated novel'? I think it doubly significant in relation to this book, ie. the jointing – 'composed of distinct parts', and the reference to being 'able to express one's thoughts' [...] which is what Winnie A tries to do.'⁵ It is clear, then, that Barker saw the articulated structure of her book as directly related to its content, and that she is interested in both articulation and in- or dis-articulation. Indeed, Barker's articulated fiction of the 1960s is preoccupied with the ways in which familial, societal, linguistic, and narrative structures may be dysfunctional and incoherent. For Barker, articulation is as much about holding apart and separation as linking together and connection, and as much about misunderstanding and incoherence as it is about communication.

I. Silence

The first question is how do we account for the gap or 'silence' in Barker's publication history between 1951 and 1963? During these years she worked in various secretarial and assistant roles at the BBC, first in the News Division then in the Talks Department.⁶ These positions are unlikely to have been taxing for someone with Barker's intelligence and experience but the daily grind of a full day at work, plus at least an hour's commute each way from Carshalton Beeches to Central London, would have been tiring. The writer of Barker's obituary in *The Telegraph* asserts that 'while the BBC was often undemanding, Pat Barker found little inclination to write in the evenings. Her output between hard covers during the 1950s was small'.⁷ Barker

4 Ibid.

5 Barker, letter to Richard Cohen, 28th February 1989, box 5, folder 8, HRHRC.

6 See: box 16, folder 5, HRHRC.

7 Obituary of A.L. Barker, *The Telegraph*, 26th February 2002 (online edition) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1386000/A-L-Barker.html> [accessed September 11 2013].

was not as inactive as *The Telegraph* suggests but it is true she published no books. Instead she wrote a radio play, *Pringle* for the BBC, and continued to sell her stories to magazines, with a bias towards commercial 'women's' titles such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Modern Woman* and *Woman and Beauty* rather than more literary publications. Although she appears to have assured Nora Smallwood in late 1951 that she was planning to, as Smallwood puts it, 'give the magazines a rest', in the period 1951-57 Barker published twelve stories, mostly in *Good Housekeeping*.⁸ The 1950s also saw a number of rejections of Barker's fiction and she became increasingly frustrated by the requirements and limitations of the magazines in which her writing was published.⁹

It is likely that financial hardship limited Barker's book publications during the 1950s. She had to work full-time to support herself and her roles at the BBC were not well paid. For example, a letter dated January 1958 regarding Barker's transfer from the position of secretary to chief assistant states that her salary will rise from £5.7.8d to £10.8.0d per week. A further letter in July confirms her status as a member of permanent staff and a further salary rise to £10.14.6d per week. According to Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), the average weekly wage at 1954 rates for the main earner in most working-class households was £10 per week.¹⁰ It is clear that even though Barker was a single woman without a family to support and presumably shared her living costs with her housemate, Dorothy, she was certainly not well-off. Financial concerns might have contributed to Barker's frustration about the rejection of her stories. In the 1950s she received on average £15 for a short story and £35 for first British serial rights, meaning that the sale of her fiction to magazines provided a considerable boost to her income. Barker wanted to write short stories, and she wanted to have these stories published and earn an income from them. This perhaps

8 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 1st November 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

9 Her dissatisfaction is shown, for example, by the fact that she changed agents three times between 1951 and 1959. Barker parted ways with Marian Ives in July 1951 and took a new agent, Richmond Towers Ltd. in late 1951 or early 1952. She left Richmond Towers in 1954, appointing another agent, Michael Horniman of A.P. Watt & Son sometime before May 1957. She switched from Horniman to Curtis Brown Ltd. at some point before April 1959. Her suggestion to Oliver Robinson at *Good Housekeeping* that she send him synopses rather than full manuscripts also suggests her frustration at being rejected. He responded: 'I am only too happy... to give you a verdict on a synopsis. I agree with you that it can well save time for everybody.' (Oliver Robinson, letter to Barker, April 1959, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.)

10 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 1957 (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 6.

drew her towards writing for mainstream commercial publications, for which she wrote the correct form as long as she could keep to their restrictions, and away from the world of literary fiction, which admired her prose but wanted a novel.

The argument that it was lack of time and energy and financial necessity that prevented Barker publishing any books between 1951 and 1963 has some support. Barker took a year off work when she won the Cheltenham Festival of Literature prize of £500 in November 1962, after which she published five books in six years. At the end of her novel, *A Case Examined* (1965) Barker wrote a note of thanks 'To the ANONYMOUS DONOR of the Cheltenham Award':

Seventy per cent of writers never earn more than £500 a year from their writing, and many always earn less. They must work to live to write. If working and living use a minimum of twelve hours a day, that leaves them eight to sleep and four to write – or four to sleep and eight to write – in theory [...] They may try to write on buses and in trains, standing, sitting, while the dinner cooks, before the shopbell rings, in any and every moment which can be got. [...] Time to write in peace is what seventy per cent of writers want and do not get.¹¹

Barker's focus here on lack of time and money suggests that we may have solved the mystery of her silence between 1951 and 1963. But it is not quite that simple. Although Barker clearly lacked both the means and the time 'to write in peace' during the 1950s, the archive shows that she had already completed both *The Joy-Ride and After*, and many of the stories for her collection, *Lost Upon the Roundabouts* (1964), by the time she received the Cheltenham prize.¹²

Another tempting argument is that Barker's silence may be explained by the unfavourable reaction to her first novel, *Apology for a Hero*. In this case, the silence could be viewed as a period in which Barker is developing her 'articulated' fiction as a way of writing books of short stories that resemble novels because she has lost confidence in her ability to write a novel but nevertheless wants to be published. A

11 Barker, *A Case Examined*, 1965, in Barker, omnibus edition of *A Case Examined*, *John Brown's Body* and *The Gooseboy*, pp. 7-206, p. 206.

12 Both 'Miss Eagle' and 'The Brute' were written as early as 1952. (See: box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.) Barker had completed *The Joy-Ride and After* by August 1962, the date on which she receives a letter from Smallwood detailing her contract and royalty rate. (Smallwood, letter to Barker, 4th June 1953, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.)

case may be made for this reading. In a letter dated August 1948 John Wheelock, senior editor at Barker's American publisher, Scribner's, delivers a damning verdict on *Apology for a Hero* declaring that '[it] is not, in my opinion, a successful novel. [...] I should almost recommend setting it aside and going on to something else. Whether this book could be made into a complete and artistic whole by drastic rewriting is a question difficult to answer'.¹³ Wheelock's emphasis on the incompleteness of *Apology for a Hero* is significant and I will discuss it later. Here, though, the argument for Barker's loss of confidence in her abilities as a novel-writer might rest its case, concluding with the observation that, although Smallwood, Leonard Woolf and John Hayward all hastily wrote to contradict Wheelock's statement, and Wheelock himself apologised for being 'overly severe', the damage had been done and Barker did not publish another novel until 1963.¹⁴

It is clear from the letters of Smallwood, Woolf, and Hayward that Barker's confidence *was* dented by Wheelock's verdict on *Apology for a Hero*. But the impression gained from other sources is that Barker was never particularly keen on novel-writing and only undertook it under advice from her publishers. For example, on 21st May 1947, only a few weeks before *Innocents* was published on 30th June, Smallwood writes: 'We all feel so strongly about your work', adding: 'Now you must go ahead with the novel'. Smallwood writes again on 24th July: 'I am still looking forward to seeing that novel'.¹⁵ At the time, short story collections were not as popular as novels and this is one reason why Barker's publishers kept pushing for the latter. John Wheelock's 1951 letter concerning *Novelette: With Other Stories* provides evidence for this point. He informs Barker that Scribner's would like to change the order of the stories, with 'Novelette' first, in order 'to present it less as a collection of short stories than as a novelette in which the stories that follow are extra dividends, as it were. In this way we ought to get wider distribution and partially overcome the resistance, still prevalent over here, to a collection of short stories'.¹⁶

13 John Wheelock, letter to Barker, 17th August 1948, box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

14 See: Woolf, letter to Barker, 31st August 1948; Smallwood, letter to Barker, 3rd September 1948; John Hayward, letter to Barker, 8th September 1948; Wheelock, letter to Barker, 17th September 1948. See: box 8, Folder 7, HRHRC.

15 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 24th July 1947, box 8, folder 7, HRHRC.

16 Wheelock, letter to Barker, 3rd April 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

Despite the resistance Barker continued to write short stories, and Smallwood appeared to understand her preference, writing: 'I don't blame you for wanting to stick to that form'.¹⁷

Barker's preference for the short story over the novel is well documented. In a letter to Jean Chaudhuri in 1983, for example, Barker writes that she cannot give a talk 'about the difference between writing short stories and writing novels [...] for the simple reason that I have not written any novels. Those of my books which have been published under the guise of novels have been short stories stretched, disguised, tarted up and otherwise corrupted to fill the publisher's bill'.¹⁸ Jane Gardam's account of Barker's career supports this: 'as she grew older, [novels] became more difficult and less satisfying to her. She took to sliding short stories into the novels by stealth, what she called 'articulated stories' embedded in a ribbon narrative. 'What's needed now is a novel,' she was told and wrote back, 'But is it? Oh, the burden of a novel. The enormity of narrative''.¹⁹ Both accounts describe Barker slipping short stories and novellas concealed as novels under the nose of her publishers, revealing her ambivalence towards the novel form but also her awareness of the need to adapt her writing to resemble it. Perhaps her solution to the mismatch she perceived between the way she wanted to write and the novel was a form she later called the 'articulated novel'? Another explanation of Barker's long silence and change of formal style, then, is that the articulated novel is a form that Barker develops to allow her to write books of short stories that resemble novels.

This interpretation doesn't quite work either. First of all, because the form of the articulated novel is related to its content and, second, because it is a distinct form. The book to which Gardam refers is almost certainly *The Woman Who Talked to Herself* (1989). This is the only novel Barker ever referred to as being 'articulated' and it is one of her later books (Gardam puts emphasis on the lateness of Barker's articulated fiction). However, in the letter to Cohen about *The Woman Who Talked to Herself* quoted earlier, Barker does not conceal the fact that the book contains short stories and makes it clear that in her mind the form of the book represents its

17 Smallwood, letter to Barker (undated, c. 1951), box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

18 Barker, draft response to Jean Chaudhuri's letter, 22nd June 1983, box 9, folder 3, HRHRC.

19 Gardam, 'Introduction', in Barker, *Submerged*, p. viii.

content: her subtitle, 'An Articulated Novel' is 'doubly significant in relation to this book', she writes.²⁰ So Barker's motivation for choosing this form is not to publish short stories 'under the guise of novels' or 'by stealth'. Rather, the articulated form of *The Woman Who Talked to Herself* represents its theme of not being able to communicate or, in other words, inarticulacy. Barker writes to Cohen that Winnie A. 'tries' to articulate her thoughts, suggesting that she does not succeed. A preoccupation with people's inability to effectively communicate with one another may be seen in much of Barker's fiction. For example, she states that her book, *A Heavy Feather* was 'about the impossibility of communicating', 'that everyone was an island', and that: 'I was sealed off inside my skin and so was everyone else. One could only signal waving and drowning.'²¹ For Barker, people are fundamentally alone and separate, 'sealed off' from one another, and can never really know each other. The form of the articulated novel stages this idea of people as separate parts that are nevertheless attached to one another. This is one way in which the form of the articulated novel is related to the ideas of articulation, dis-articulation and in-articulation within it.

The distinctiveness of the articulated novel is a second obstacle to the idea that the form is simply a short story collection in the guise of a novel. An articulated novel has an interrelation between its different parts in the form of shared, returning characters and/or shared events seen from different perspectives, and not just in terms of shared themes or ideas. A short story collection may also have this, of course. The stories might have shared characters or events as well as themes and ideas, but this is not an essential characteristic of the genre. An articulated novel is also distinct from a novel, defined as an 'extended piece of prose fiction'.²² The different parts of an articulated novel have a wholeness of their own, a completeness that is separate from that of the entire piece of work. So an articulated novel is composed of *several pieces* of prose fiction rather than being one extended piece. The different parts are attached but they are also separate and could stand alone

20 Barker, letter to Richard Cohen, 28th February 1989, box 5, folder 8, HRHRC.

21 Barker, *Life Stories*, p. 14.

22 J.A. Cuddon, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, Third Edition* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 599.

without the rest of the book. This is not usually the case for a novel. It is worth noting, too, that contemporary opinion did not think that *The Joy-Ride and After* resembled a novel. For example, in his 1964 review of Barker's book in *The Saturday Review*, the writer and literary critic, Granville Hicks writes that Barker's novel 'isn't really a novel but a collection of three loosely related stories'.²³ So rather than resembling a novel, or indeed a short story collection, Barker's articulated novel is a distinct type of book with an articulated structure that replicates on the level of form the ideas of separation and attachment with which it is concerned.

Barker's silence between 1951 and 1963 should be read as a period in which she is rethinking the form of her fiction. The archive shows that she was planning another novel as early as 1951. In November Smallwood writes: 'You couldn't give us better news than to say that your heart has been really stirred to write a book'.²⁴ By 1953, though, no novel has materialised and Smallwood writes to ask if the one Barker was working on has been abandoned.²⁵ So Barker was either writing the *The Joy-Ride and After* throughout the 1950s or at least thinking about her new novel. It is during this period that she rethinks the form of her fiction in order to better communicate the ideas of attachment and separation with which she was already preoccupied in the late 1940s when writing *Apology for a Hero*. From the beginning these ideas are connected to adult-child relationships. The concern in *Apology for a Hero* and in Barker's 1960s fiction with adult and child being, on the one hand, cleaved, hinged and latched together and, on the other hand, cut, broken and wrenched apart, speaks to the focus on mother-infant relationships in mid-century psychoanalysis. Barker continues to be preoccupied with the idea of adult and child articulation in her 1960s fiction. The importance of the move to articulated novels is that these texts stage the interdependency of constructions of adult and child, and thus speak to Barker's dialectical understanding of innocence and experience. Barker focuses on the ways in which children and adults are 'matched' with and 'hinged to' one another, as well as being apart from, misunderstanding, disliking, and hurting

23 Granville Hicks, 'Literary Horizons: How the Poor Live and the Rich Die', in *The Saturday Review* (online edition), 8th February 1964, pp. 29-30, p. 29, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1964feb08-00029> [accessed 9th August 2015].

24 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 1st November 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

25 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 4th June 1953, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

each other. Adults and children are articulated: linked together and dependent, but also separate.

In *Apology for a Hero*, ex-clerk, Charles Candy is figured as an adult child.²⁶ Charles is utterly dependent on his wife, Wynne; she calms him down and acts as 'the source and mainstay of his reality'.²⁷ On their marriage she adopts the mother-role, calming Charles down after 'one of his frights'.²⁸ While Wynne reassures Charles she makes their bed: 'He had followed her movements; all she said was maintained by the action of her fingers. As a small child, he once woke from a nightmare to find his mother making an apple-pie. She spoke kindly to him, but it was her hands, floury and quick among the pastry, which comforted him.'²⁹ The emphasis in this passage on the reassurance the child figure gains from watching his mother (or, rather, parts of his mother) recalls the importance Freud and Klein placed on the infant-mother bond in the development of the infant's ego through object relationships. Klein argues that the infant must reconcile its love and hatred of the mother in order to avoid psychosis (the 'splitting' of people or parts of people into all 'good' or all 'bad'). Charles is unable to do this, remaining dependent on his idealisation of Wynne (and later on that of his house, Concleave) for his sense of self, and at the same time obsessively hating Wynne's sister, Perry who comes to stay with the couple after her marriage breaks down. (The novel implies that Charles's hatred of Perry is coupled with violent sexual attraction; Freud and Klein emphasise that the mother is the infant's first erotic object.) *Apology for a Hero* ends with a case of mistaken identity. Wynne dies after falling from a cliff but Charles mistakes the body for Perry and delays getting help. The death occurs after Charles argues with Wynne over Perry, and is filled with anger and an 'appetite for violence'.³⁰ Afterwards Perry confronts Charles about his delay getting help: 'you hated me [...] Enough, perhaps, to let me drown – to let *her* drown'.³¹ Thus, *Apology for a Hero* foregrounds the aggressive

26 The name Charles Candy is perhaps an allusion to Powell and Pressburger's film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943). The colonel of the title is named Clive Candy, later Clive Wynne Candy, a man who grows older but remains a child. (My thanks to Charles Jones for pointing out the resemblance.)

27 Barker, *Apology for a Hero* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 14.

28 Ibid, p. 15.

29 Ibid, p. 16.

30 Ibid., p. 96.

31 Ibid., p. 145.

impulses of the child figure emphasised by Klein. Its doubling of Wynne and Perry stages Klein's idea that the infant 'splits' the mother by representing Charles's psychotic inability to overcome his idealisation of the 'good' mother, Wynne and his hatred of the 'bad' mother, Perry, and realise 'that the loved object is at the same time the hated one'.³² In the end his violent impulses towards the 'bad' mother lead to the annihilation of the 'good' mother.

The preoccupation in *Apology for a Hero* with ideas of attachment and separation in the development of mental structures anticipates the interest in the disarticulation of familial and social structures in Barker's fiction of the 1960s, particularly *The Joy-Ride and After*. *Apology for a Hero* also anticipates the language of articulation that we find in Barker's 1960s fiction. In the final chapter of the novel, after Wynne is dead, Charles sails away from the Cornish coast on the Albuquerque, the ship he co-owns with Perry, leaving Concleave behind:

All its solid virtues were there; [...] What kind of a man was he to exchange any part of it – the porch of Bath stone, one window-joint of English oak – for this? For nosing, blind, through mist towards God knows what wastes and depths of water, where stone splintered like wood and wood shredded like dust? The ship was no better than a grain between the wheel of the sea and the blade of the wind. Where would it be when one was whetted on the other?³³

Ideas of jointing, splintering, shredding and cutting dominate, along with the contrast between the solidity of Candy's English home and the unknown misty depths of the sea on which he is setting sail. The name of Candy's house, 'Concleave' merits particular attention. The OED defines 'cleave' as follows:

cleave, **v.**¹

1a. *trans.* To part or divide by a cutting blow; to hew asunder; to split. Properly used [...] of dividing anything in the direction of its length, height, or depth; also, of dividing slate or crystals along their cleavage planes, and other things at their joints. [...]

d. To intersect, penetrate, or fissure, in position.

2. To separate or sever by dividing or splitting.

³² Klein, 'Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States', in Mitchell, ed., *Selected Melanie Klein* p. 141.

³³ Barker, *Apology for a Hero*, pp. 235-236.

cleave, v.²

1. To stick fast or adhere. [...]

3. [...] To cling or hold fast *to*; to attach oneself (by grasping, etc.) *to* [...]

4. To adhere or cling *to* (a person, party, principle, practice, etc.); to remain attached, devoted, or faithful *to*.³⁴

Thus 'cleave' means at the same time to separate and to attach. Further complication is provided by the prefix 'con', which according to the OED appears 'in certain phrases, [such] as con amore' meaning 'with', the same as the Latin prefix 'cum', and at the same time, as the adverb 'con', is defined as '[a]n abbreviation of the Latin prep[osition] *contra* [or] 'against''.³⁵ Separate and attached, against and with: the word 'Concleave' holds two sets of opposites apart and at the same time connects them.³⁶ *Apology for a Hero* ends with an image of complete disarticulation when 'the *Albuquerque's* mainsail split from top to bottom', with the fracture and fragmentation of the ship representing Charles's divided sense of self.³⁷ In other words, *Apology for a Hero* and *The Joy-Ride and After* are connected, we might even say articulated, across the twelve-year gap in Barker's publishing career through their mutual preoccupation with the ways in which mental, familial, or social structures are articulated and disarticulated.

II. Articulation

The Joy Ride and After is composed of three novellas. The first, 'The Joy-Ride' concerns sixteen-year-old garage apprentice, Joe Munn and his relationships with the people in his community. These include Evie from the café across the road, Joe's

34 "cleave, v.1"; "cleave, v.2". OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34105> [accessed February 12, 2015].

35 "con, prep."; "con, adv. and n.1". In *ibid.*

36 In addition 'Concleave' sounds like 'conclave', a word defined by the OED as '[a] private room, inner chamber, closet' ("conclave, n.". In *ibid.*). Charles's house Concleave represents the 'inner chamber' of his mind, his sense of self. When he leaves Concleave his ship the *Albuquerque* replaces the house. Much is made of the fragility of the ship; for example, laying awake during his first night on the ship, '[h]e tossed, alone, with a whirling lamp and a pair of restless boots, in a cube ten feet by twelve broken only by a saucer of darkness above his head' (Barker, *Apology for a Hero*, p. 242). This idea is recalled at the beginning of *The Joy-Ride and After* when Rumbold sits in his office: 'It was [...] a two-by-four place with glass-topped walls like the wheelhouse of a ship'. (Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 11.)

37 Barker, *Apology for a Hero*, p. 263.

boss, Bart Rumbold, Major Monty Brind (Rumbold's sinister friend), Joe's family, especially his fifteen-year-old cousin, Esther, and his elderly neighbour Mrs Martineau. The story ends after Joe and Esther take Brind's car out of the workshop, driving it onto the bypass where they hit a woman, leaving her for dead. The woman is Alice Oram, the protagonist of the second novella, 'The Narrow Boat'. Leaving her house suddenly one evening, following the discovery of her husband's affair, and an upsetting conversation with her daughter, Alice ends up miles away and walks alongside the bypass looking for the stop for the bus home. After being hit by Joe driving Brind's car, Alice loses her memory and is found by Garnett, a reclusive man who lives on a narrow boat. Joe's passenger, Esther Munn reappears in the third novella, 'A Likely Story'; she is now twenty years old and married to Arthur Bulow, a canteen manager.

The Middling concerns the life of Ellalie (Ellie) Toms and each section takes the form of a short story. In the first section, eight-year-old Ellie constructs an elaborate lie, telling her parents and her uncle and aunt that her cousin, Lydie has been kidnapped by an unknown man. Her uncle Vince immediately suspects Colonel Gabbitas, a local upper-class man 'invalided out of the army' after the First World War and brings Ellie to the Colonel's house so that she can identify the guilty party.³⁸ The Colonel realises the inconsistencies in Ellie's story and sets a 'trap' which exposes her lie.³⁹ Enraged by this, Ellie accuses The Colonel but at this point Ellie's father, Archie appears with Lydie, who has been hiding in Ellie's bedroom. By this point we know that although The Colonel did not take Lydie, he is a paedophile and has set his sights on Ellie. As she is led home by her father, The Colonel calls out: 'Good-bye, Ellie, I hope you'll come to tea when they've cut out your tongue.'⁴⁰ The rest of *The Middling* is concerned with Ellie's struggle to overcome the trauma of the sexual abuse she suffers at the hands of The Colonel, which occurs between the first and second parts of the book. She tries and fails to establish close relationships, in part two as a teenager with her friend Laura, and in part three as an adult with a man, Wooller. By the final part of the novel Ellie is married with two children. She is also

38 Barker, *The Middling*, p. 42.

39 Ibid., pp. 44, 47.

40 Ibid., p. 54.

an alcoholic, sent away by her husband to Sidlow Park, a detox-clinic, and then to a cottage in the country with a nurse, Hattie Straw. The whole book is in first-person but Ellie's different life stories are articulated by a narrator who appears to be writing a book very like *The Middling*.

The prominence of the language of articulation in *The Joy-Ride and After* and *The Middling* draws attention to family and community as structures and to the power relationships between adult and child that constitute those structures. Both novels are packed with references to articulation. In *The Joy-Ride and After*, for example, the language of car mechanics runs through the first part of the novel. Rumbold, a mechanic, thinks '[t]he axles, shafts, rods and bolts under the curded grease and the webs of mud – they had properness and purpose. All machines had that'.⁴¹ Significantly, the machines and systems are linked metaphorically to the human body, making it clear that mechanical articulation represents human articulation and putting emphasis on both as structures. Rumbold spends his time working with vehicle systems in which parts need to be properly articulated for the car to move. He describes his business in terms of the human body: 'a place like this on the neck of nowhere needs new blood to keep it going' and also makes a comparison between a human nerve and mechanic pipeline.⁴² A mechanical-human connection is also made by Arthur Barlow in the third part of *The Joy-Ride and After*: 'Let me tell you something, this factory [...] it's a business, the sum of its parts, and flesh or metal they've got to work together.'⁴³ The idea of people working together in a system speaks to the historical moment of the book: the wartime effort was not long over; the introduction of the Welfare State after the war aimed to produce a system based on equality not hierarchy. In *The Middling*, the articulation of things again represents the articulation of people, who are represented as being or not being articulated to one another. For instance, Ellie says of her friend, Laura: 'she was never [...] latched to me'.⁴⁴ Also, Ellie observes: 'There we were, my father and me – latched, you might say'.⁴⁵ And Ellie's father remarks to Vince: 'That's the – hinge of

41 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 15.

42 Ibid., p. 37.

43 Ibid., p. 239.

44 Barker, *The Middling*, p. 74.

45 Ibid., p. 52.

it'.⁴⁶ Note that in both sentences there is a dash followed by the joining word ('hinge', 'latched') so that the articulation suggested by the words is replicated in the construction of the sentence itself. It is also worth noting that the word 'latched', with its connotations of breast-feeding, speaks to the conception of the mother-child relationship in mid-century psychoanalysis I addressed earlier.

In *The Joy-Ride and After* and *The Middling* articulation is linked to control of human relationships; or, more precisely, in the novels the person who gets to perform or control articulation is shown to have power and dominance. Both Brind in *The Joy-Ride and After* and The Colonel in *The Middling* are represented as being dominant. Brind is a bully who engages Joe in 'bad talk' on their first meeting and has a history of cruelty. Rumbold tells Joe that Brind is 'inhuman' and has a lack of pity, and warns Joe that he should 'watch his tongue' when Brind is nearby.⁴⁷ Similarly, The Colonel likes to control things and people. He has a fondness for games concerning articulation and construction; when Ellie asks Lydie what games the Colonel likes, 'she said riddles and old bits of old wire'.⁴⁸ He creates a puppet and thus makes something inanimate into an animate being that articulates or expresses. He puts emphasis on the fact that Ellie's account of Lydie's abduction must properly articulate, that things have to fit together: 'The knee-bone connecting to the thigh-bone, the thigh-bone connecting to the hip-bone, the hip-bone connected to the backbone.'⁴⁹ Furthermore, The Colonel often appears mechanical himself: his face is like a 'glass clock'.⁵⁰ Significantly, both men are represented as seeking to control or articulate people by exerting control over talk, asserting power through language, and silencing people. Both novels contain references to tongues (a tongue being cut out and 'hold your tongue') and in both cases the action of cutting or holding renders the speaker mute.

All this concern with articulation – mechanical, business and biological systems, latching, hinging – suggests a preoccupation with hierarchies and power. Norman Fairclough in his book *Language and Power* (1989) observes that power is

46 Ibid., p. 51.

47 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, pp. 36, 37, 38.

48 Barker, *The Middling*, p. 42.

49 Ibid., p. 46.

50 Ibid., p. 47.

concerned with the ways in which domains are structured: ‘One aspect of power is the capacity to impose and maintain a particular structuring of some domain or other - a particular way of dividing it into parts, of keeping the parts demarcated from each other, and a particular ordering of those parts in terms of hierarchical relations of domination and subordination.’⁵¹ Parts of domains are separated from one another by being ordered in particular ways but are also held together in hierarchical relationships. There is a sense, then, in which parts of domains (and domains themselves) are articulated; that is, the parts are ordered so that they are at once separate and joined together to form a functioning structure. In Barker’s 1960s fiction the combination of the imagery of articulation, which represents human relationships in terms of mechanical systems, and the articulated structures of the books, creates an overall impression of a body of work that is fascinated by the ways in which power structures divide, demarcate, and order.

III. Disarticulation

Howard Garfinkel’s theory of ‘ethnomethodology’ is useful here. Garfinkel coined the term in the mid-1950s and elaborated his theory in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967). Explaining the differences between sociology and ethnomethodology, Dirk vom Lehn states that traditional sociology ‘assume[s] that actors in social situations always encounter a pre-existing shared culture and align their action with rules and norms’.⁵² In other words, traditional sociology assumes that social actors are passive and order is imposed from above. Indeed, vom Lehn observes that ‘[t]he premise of such sociological theory [...] is the presumption that the social world is principally unorganized and only gains *order* when the idea of an existing shared culture and a system of rules is deployed’.⁵³ Ethnomethodology, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the interpreted and constructed nature of ‘society’. Unlike traditional sociologists who ‘started with the assumption that *social order* was a theoretical concept, made visible through sociological and statistical analysis,’ argues vom Lehn, ‘Garfinkel

51 Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Harlow: Longman, 1989), p. 13.

52 Dirk vom Lehn, *Harold Garfinkel: The Creation and Development of Ethnomethodology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014), p. 90.

53 Ibid.

argued that organization and structure were a fundamental property of the everyday activities that participants ongoingly, observably, and intelligibly produced'.⁵⁴ Thus ethnomethodology was critical of sociological grand narratives and abstractions and instead put emphasis on the role of human agency in the construction of social reality.

Garfinkel used the term 'organizations' to designate 'a set of mutually anticipated, expected, recollected events' which form the basis of 'a person's perceived situation'.⁵⁵ According to Garfinkel, 'rules were not instructions that people followed, rather, rules were properties of situations people act in. Participants know what a situation is because it is accomplished in and through their actions and those of other participants. When participants encounter a situation, they design their actions to make them fit and align with the continuously produced context and to contribute to its production'.⁵⁶ Garfinkel locates the production of social order, or the ordering of the social world, in the day-to-day actions of social actors, rather than social order being a set of norms and values imposed upon social actors by 'society'. For Garfinkel, social actors do not passively respond to a set of norms and values imposed 'from above' but instead actively produce, with others, their social reality. Thus social order is not a theoretical problem but a practical one to be solved by cooperating social actors. Garfinkel tested this theory using conversation analysis. He argued that both parties in a conversation situation must build a structure of shared assumptions in order for them to understand one another's references and intentions and thus engage in functional talk. It follows that if social actors refuse to cooperate by engaging in functional talk then the social order will be disrupted. And if this lack of cooperation is widespread enough, the social order will be destabilised.

The destabilising properties of dysfunctional talk are explored by John Mepham in his essay on 'bad talk' in the writing of Patrick Hamilton and Elizabeth Bowen. Mepham argues that after the 1920s 'writers developed an interest in using fiction as a way of analysing talk, and a particular interest in the ways in which talk

54 Ibid.

55 Garfinkel, 'Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies', 1956, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

56 *Ibid.*, quoted in vom Lehn, *Harold Garfinkel*, p. 86.

can go wrong or be diverted from its presumed purposes'.⁵⁷ He draws on the work of Garfinkel and the philosopher Paul Grice, outlining a model of functional talk in which speaker and listener must cooperate in order to communicate. Mepham's analysis of bad talk gives several contextual factors that relate specifically to the 1930s and 1940s: the threat and rise of fascism; the war; an increased interest in conversation; and a move in fiction after modernism from inner subjectivity to intersubjectivity (in part related to the rise of the 'talkies' from 1930 onwards).⁵⁸ Mepham states that in the novels of Hamilton and Bowen 'there is a [...] sense that fascism grows from or is complicit with common psychological impulses and pathologies of personality, and that the power-mad, dictatorial behaviour and cruel, sadistic and systematically humiliating relations typical of political fascism can also be found in apparently ordinary domestic situations'.⁵⁹ Mepham's sense of the presence of dictatorial, cruel, sadistic, and humiliating behaviour in day-to-day domestic situations is precisely what we find in *The Joy-Ride And After*. I want to extend Mepham's analysis of bad talk and its implications into the postwar context, and will argue that Barker's 1960s fiction connects the domestic fascism of the 1930s and 1940s with legacies of war and decolonisation and issues of class, race, age, and the welfare state that are specific to the post-war context.

The Joy-Ride and After opens at Rumbold's garage. He is absent and his apprentice Joe is in charge when a stranger arrives at the office asking to see Rumbold. Joe, quite correctly, assumes the role of garage attendant, asking the customer formal questions: "Anything I can get you?"; "Can I get you something, mister?"⁶⁰ However, the stranger (later revealed to be Brind) refuses to answer Joe's questions, instead forcing Joe to answer his:

"What's your name?"

"Munn."

"Is this your first job?"

"Second. If it's urgent I could fetch him."

He moved past Joe. So closely that their shoulders touched, and sat

57 John Mepham, 'Varieties of Modernism, Varieties of Incomprehension: Patrick Hamilton and Elizabeth Bowen', in MacKay and Stonebridge, eds., *British Fiction After Modernism*, pp. 59-76, p. 60.

58 Ibid., pp. 59, 64.

59 Ibid., p. 63.

60 Barker, *The Joy Ride*, p. 20.

down by the desk, stretching his long legs in front of him. "I'm in no hurry."

"You can't sit there. This is the office, it's private."

The stranger blew two neat plumes of cigarette smoke. "How many work here?"

"Just me and Mr. Rumbold. This is his office." Joe cast about and found the right phrase. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to ask you to step outside."

"You talk and I'll listen."⁶¹

This exchange is a good example of Mepham's idea of bad talk. In functional talk the speaker and listener must cooperate. In order for the listener to understand what the speaker is trying to say, the speaker must obey particular rules ('maxims or principles') and both parties must have or develop 'a shared definition of the setting, the situation, and of what is going on'.⁶² They must also build a structure of shared assumptions, 'so that they grasp one another's references and get the drift of one another's intentions'.⁶³ Mepham argues that: 'Only within such a framework of shared assumptions and good talk behaviour can the listener perform the cognitive work that is an essential element of all talk, the work of 'filling in', of silent inference and interpretation, that allows the listener to move on from the literal meaning of the speaker's words to whatever it is that he or she has in mind.'⁶⁴

The exchange between Joe and Brind displays the opposite of good talk behaviour. Joe begins correctly, asking what the (supposed) customer requires. However, Brind almost immediately demands that Joe reveal personal information about himself, without explaining why he wants to know or what his relationship with Rumbold is. In addition, although he must perceive that he is creating a difficult situation for Joe who is a young, inexperienced employee, he deliberately ignores Joe's protestations that he should not sit down in Rumbold's office. Brind thus refuses to cooperate with Joe; instead ensuring that Joe does *not* know what is going on and is *not* able to grasp his intentions. The conversation reveals Brind's wilful failure to obey the rules of functional talk. It shows how a speaker may withhold

61 Ibid., p. 21.

62 Mepham, 'Varieties of Modernism', p. 67.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid, p. 68.

information in order to block the cognitive work of inference and interpretation on the part of the listener, thereby securing his own, and undermining the listener's, power and status. The exchange is a good example of talk that has been 'diverted from its presumed purposes'. Brind does not engage with Joe in order to communicate with him; rather, his intention is to assert power over the boy. For Joe, the experience of Brind's bad talk is disempowering: 'Short of throwing the man out there was nothing he could do'.⁶⁵ In *The Joy-Ride and After* bad talk and other non-cooperative behaviours are widespread: people seem not to know, or to have forgotten, the ways in which to make their actions align and fit with a situation, and how to contribute to its production. And in Barker's novel this non-cooperation is linked to the legacies of war and colonialism.

It is suggested that Brind's behaviour has been influenced by the war. As the conversation between him and Joe above suggests, Brind is a bully: overbearing, difficult and cruel. Rumbold makes a link between Brind's behaviour and his wartime experience in a Burmese prisoner of war camp. Explaining why he is allowing Brind to stay on at the garage as his partner, Rumbold tells Joe that (Major Monty) Brind was his superior officer when they were in Burma. Rumbold describes how the British troops worked '[e]ighteen hours a day on a ration of bad rice and rubber nuts' building an air-strip.⁶⁶ Brind was '[f]ilthy and tattered and gaunt with fever, a toiling scarecrow [...] like the rest of them' but he 'climbed back to the top of the pile', presumably by selling information.⁶⁷ Rumbold says of Brind:

"He's a breed." A far-flung breed, indigenous to a system rather than a soil. "The Monty Brinds are born with sand in their boots, they always land right way up."
[...]
"Wherever there's a string you'll find Brind pulling it. He was an officer in my unit."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

There is a sense here of Brind being part of a 'system' but not belonging to any particular country. Does Barker mean the military system, the colonial system, the prisoner of war system? Brind is part of a 'breed' of people different to Rumbold and Joe. Does Rumbold mean a different social breed? Brind was an officer which signals a certain social status but 'breed' suggests more than this. The extract also uses the language of articulation: Brind, who pulls strings to survive, is a manipulator, a puppet-master figure who articulates people. He is also represented as being dangerous and not to be trifled with. Rumbold warns Joe: 'You'd better watch your tongue when he's about'.⁶⁹ So Brind is connected with the language of verbal articulation like The Colonel in *The Middling*, who also has a military background. Perhaps Brind and The Colonel, who have been traumatised and infantilised by war, aim to regain their adult sense of self by exhibiting dominant and bullying behaviours towards children. This reading speaks to the way in which adult identity is constructed in relation to the child. Putting the child 'back in its place', Brind and The Colonel try to reassert their sense of self and their adult place in the world. Also, in wartime high-ranking officers such as Brind and The Colonel are like parent figures in the sense that they are responsible for their troops' safety and wellbeing. So Brind's behaviour in Burma, where he sold information (about his men, his country?) in order to survive the camp and climb 'back to the top of the pile' figures him as an irresponsible parent who puts his own interests before those of his troops.

Ten years after the war, Rumbold still remembers his time in Burma vividly, suggesting the continuing presence and influence of the war in the national memory and imagination.⁷⁰ The implications of these examples of bad talk in *The Joy-Ride and After*, then, are that the savagery and barbarism of war continue to be present in post-war incidents of bullying and violence which disrupt social cooperation and cohesion through their intrusion into domestic life. And it is not only bad talk that is shown to be disruptive. For instance, Joe's mother, Jessie often laughs inappropriately. Her laughter is described as an overwhelming and destructive force. When she is recounting a story to her family, for example, her 'laughter rolled round

69 Ibid., p. 38.

70 Ibid., p. 11.

the room'.⁷¹ And later: '[Esther] flinched almost before Jessie's laughter hit them.'⁷² Also, in the third part of the book, 'A Likely Story', Esther's husband, Arthur Burlow remembers 'being swallowed alive by Jessie Munn's laughter'.⁷³ The inappropriateness of Jessie's laughter is shown when she decides to drown the kittens of the family cat, beloved by her younger son, Christy:

The cat began to wash her kitten. She broke into a crackling purr, her one eye winking and glowing at Christy, who leaned his head against the wall with a gesture of no less contentment.

The sight seemed to prick Jessie. Something, some faint irritation struggled up from lazy depths. "I must drown that kitten."

[...]

Smiling, Jessie spread one thick red hand on her knee [...] With broad amusement Jessie filled a bucket and drowned two of the kittens. Christy screamed, sharp demented screams, and when, not ungently, she tried to prise the survivor from his grasp, he bit her. [...] "You're a nice one –" but she couldn't meet the stony glare of the child. "All right, keep it – for the present." And she dropped the dead kittens in the ashcan.⁷⁴

Jessie's smile and her 'broad amusement' are unsettling not just because they are cruel (even given mid-century austerity) but because they are completely 'out of context' (in Garfinkel's sense of the word). Jessie's response to the sight of the cat warmly cleaning its offspring and her son, Christy's, gesture of contentment might reasonably be expected to be a smile. This would be, in Garfinkel's terms, an action that would 'fit and align' with and contribute to the context of the situation: a domestic scene in which the family are all participating: she and Joe chatting, her husband, Alec, shaving, and her young child present. But Jessie's smile is prompted by her intended violent action rather than the peaceful scene of the cat and Christy; in fact, the latter scene evokes a 'prick' of 'faint irritation'. Therefore the smile and humour exhibited by Jessie are inappropriate to the context of the situation, and disruptive in a similar way to Brind's bad talk. This reading of the scene is supported by its location in the book. Jessie's drowning of the kittens occurs just before the

71 Ibid., p. 33.

72 Ibid., p. 53.

73 Ibid., p. 210.

74 Ibid., pp. 33-34.

account Rumbold gives to Joe of his and Brind's experience in the Burmese camp during the war. In the light of Rumbold's account, the language of the above extract, which describes Christy's 'sharp demented screams' and his attempts to rescue 'the survivor' from his mother's grasp, appears to suggest that the barbarism of war has had a lasting impact on domestic life.

In the post-war period there was also deep ambivalence about the legacies of colonialism. The process of decolonisation from the end of the war onwards entailed a dismantling of the notion that Britain is a 'mother' to her colonial 'children'. In chapter one I linked the construction of the colonial subject and the construction of the child, arguing that in the nineteenth century the colonial subject is often placed in a childlike position in relation to European man and seen as a 'child' of the empire. Alan Sinfield's characterisation of the colonial subject – as a figure whose stereotypical characteristics and qualities need to be reasserted over and over, who always has to be 'savage' so that the European man may be 'civilized' – speaks to the contradictory and unstable figure of the child that develops during the Victorian period. The connection between the colonial subject and the figure of the child persists into the twentieth century and the 'mother country' metaphor is still used in the post-war period, although this view is unpopular on both the left and the (anti-immigration) right.⁷⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Griffin argue that '[t]he ambivalence of colonial discourse lies in the fact that [...] the colonial subject [is] both a 'child' of empire and a primitive and degraded subject of imperial discourse'.⁷⁶ This figuring of the colonial subject as both child and subject and thus in need of both

75 The view of Britain as the 'mother country' may be illustrated by a speech made in the House of Commons in 1954 by the Conservative Colonial Secretary, Henry Hopkins, who states that '[i]n a world in which restrictions on personal movement and immigration have increased we can still take pride in the fact that a man can say *Civis Britannicus sum* whatever his colour may be, and we take pride in the fact that he wants and can come to the mother country'. [Quoted in Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 38-39.] The opposite view is stated in the following speech to the Commons a few years later, in 1961, by Conservative MP, Cyril Osborne. He argues against allowing immigration on the grounds of 'the mother country tradition', stating '[t]hat argument is completely and utterly out of date. The mother country argument arose from the Kipling ideal, the imperialist ideal, which is now utterly rejected by hon. Members [sic] opposite and by the countries from which the immigrants come. We no longer talk of "Empire" now. We no longer dare use the term "Empire" and "Imperialistic ideals." It is now "Commonwealth". We talk about these countries being sister States. Therefore the "obligation of the mother" has gone [...]' (Cited in *ibid.*, p. 122.)

76 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Griffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2000, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 188.

protection and control is strikingly similar to the way in which adolescents are represented in the 1940s as both vulnerable victims and primitive, aggressive subjects.

The Joy-Ride and After addresses the presence of legacies of colonialism in British society in the 1960s. Joe's neighbour, Mrs Martineau is an elderly Miss Havisham figure who has not left her flat since her husband abandoned her sixteen years before. The book never makes it clear why Joe's parents or other neighbours have not taken charge of the situation, but we do find out that Joe is the only person Mrs Martineau will admit into her home. The book suggests that Mrs. Martineau and her absent husband, Victor, have been involved in the colonial enterprise. The trunks and boxes that litter her flat still have the stamps of the cities that the couple travelled through, including Delhi, Calcutta and Srinagar.⁷⁷ Joe finds an address label: 'Mr and Mrs V. Martineau, Southampton via Bombay'.⁷⁸ Mrs Martineau is mad: she has never unpacked the boxes because she is waiting for Victor to return; instead she has fashioned 'lanes' in between them and the furniture and she travels about using these, hiding in between pieces of furniture. She is paranoid about people trying to get into her house and obsessed with the idea that the cockroaches in the flat will 'eat [her] alive'.⁷⁹ Mrs Martineau's madness does not result in 'bad talk' but it does inhibit her ability to engage in functional talk because her madness blocks her own inference and interpretation and prevents other people from properly grasping her intentions.

It is important to note that Mrs Martineau's madness is not caused only by the inexplicable disappearance of her husband, an action that is completely 'out of context'. Her participation in the colonial enterprise is shown to be a significant cause of her madness and thus of her inability to engage in functional talk. For example, when she is ill and therefore more confused and confusing than ever, her preoccupation with the invasion of her space focuses in particular on the figure of an 'Indian'.

⁷⁷ Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 28.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

“That Indian,” she said, “he’s got a knife. He watched the bungalow all day Sunday. Why did he do that on his day off?”

[...]

All at once she started screaming, short and sharp like a rubber doll that was being squeezed. She flung herself at Joe, her hands beat at his chest, clawed up towards his throat. She kept crying, “The knife, Victor, the knife!” [...] ⁸⁰

Mrs Martineau’s hallucination of the knife-wielding ‘Indian’ recalls Thomas De Quincey’s description of the ‘Malay’ in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). Writing about De Quincey’s text, Nigel Leask argues that the Malay represents the haunting, infecting presence of the oriental other, a figure who invades the European domestic sphere by arriving at De Quincey’s Grasmere cottage and refusing to be killed.⁸¹ A similar sense of infection appears to be taking place in *The Joy-Ride and After*, especially because Mrs Martineau is unwell and has just been speaking to Joe about medicine when she has her hallucination (this is perhaps an allusion to De Quincey’s opium consumption). From Mrs Martineau’s point of view, the ‘Indian’ is the invading, infecting other. But the novel suggests that Mrs Martineau’s madness has been caused by the infectious racism of the colonial enterprise with which she was involved.

More than this, Mrs Martineau’s vision is framed by an episode that concerns Joe’s and Esther’s visit to the unnamed black doctor to collect her medicine, and a scene in which Joe runs away from Mrs. Martineau and encounters Jamaican immigrants sitting outside the ‘corner house’.⁸² The implications of this framing become clearer if we accept that Mrs Martineau’s hallucination, like the racist orientalist visions of De Quincey, figures the ‘Indian’ as an invasive, infecting Eastern other. If this is the case, then attention is drawn to the status of the Jamaicans and the black doctor as representatives of a modern, twentieth century post-colonial other; a category of people, in fact, that in 1963 had just been officially defined as

80 Ibid., pp. 72-73.

81 Nigel Leask, ‘Easts’ in Nicholas Roe, ed., *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 137-148, pp. 146-147.

82 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, pp. 64, 73.

non-British.⁸³ The racism encountered by black immigrants in mid-century Britain is summed up by Lise, the doctor's wife:

"[W]e've had some experience. They come here when they can't pay for their medicine, because he's kind and gives it them for nothing. My husband's very kind."

[...]

"Tramps and street women," said the doctor's wife. "And you don't ever forget *that* smell." She was laughing again, fixedly, at Esther. "But they wipe themselves where he's touched them, they wipe their dirt clean."

[...]

"You want his blood and his sweat to be that colour, you want him that all through, and you want him to feel it because then you feel so white, don't you, you feel like gold –" Her whole body was laughing, gusting with it [...]⁸⁴

The imagery of smell and touch, blood and sweat, dirt and wiping clean echoes the language of infection found in orientalist texts about 'the East'. Lise's description of white people's reaction to the black doctor also highlights the way in which white Europeans have defined themselves against the colonial subject. Again recalling Sinfield's characterisation of the colonial subject, who must always be 'savage' so that European man may be 'civilized', the doctor must be and feel black 'all through' so that white people can 'feel so white' and maintain their feeling of superiority ('feel like gold').

The most curious aspect of the passage, though, is Lise's compulsive laughter. It is inappropriate to the content of her talk, which describes experiences and ideas that one would expect to evoke sadness and anger rather than laughter. As in the case of Jessie Munn, Lise's verbal articulation here is entirely 'out of context'. Lise asks Joe why Mrs Martineau won't open the door to her husband; is it, she asks, "because he's a black man?":

She leaned towards Joe and Esther, laughing, as if they were children and she was sharing a joke with them.

83 Randall Hansen notes that there was no legal distinction between colonial subjects and British citizens between 1948 and 1962: until 1963 the former were considered by law to be full British citizens. (Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain*, p. 29.)

84 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, pp. 68-69.

“Lise,” said the doctor, and he was smiling too, and so was Esther, they were all smiling.⁸⁵

The passage makes it clear that Lise’s laughter is a disruptive and inappropriate articulation, which unsettles everyone else in the room and leaves them uncertain about how to act in this social situation. But the novel does not condemn Lise’s behaviour. Rather, her inappropriate verbal articulation is shown to be caused by the impact of the racism experienced by her husband, and indeed the *The Joy-Ride and After* seems to ask: what is the correct verbal response to racism? Like Brind’s bad talk or Jessie’s laughter, which are influenced by the barbarism of the war, and Mrs Martineau’s madness, which is represented as a disease she contracted from the colonial enterprise, Lise’s inappropriate laughter is shown to be the result of the racism in 1950s and 1960s Britain following the immigration of non-white colonial subjects as part of decolonisation. The implication is that the British Empire, which by the mid-twentieth-century had undergone rapid and irreversible decline, is continuing to exert a destructive, damaging legacy for all those involved in it: whether they are colonisers like Mrs Martineau and Victor, [ex-]colonial subjects like the doctor or, like Lise, British people witnessing first-hand the racism directed towards the people they know and love. This damage manifests itself in the disruption of verbal articulation and causes people to exhibit behaviour that is inappropriate or ‘out of content’ for the situations in which they find themselves.

Legacies of war and those of Empire, then, still have a strong influence on familial and societal relationships in the early-1960s. MacKay and Stonebridge note ‘the continuities between the pervasive mid-century atmosphere of domestic fascism and the anxieties about race, nation, gender and class that dominated the second half of the century’.⁸⁶ What *The Joy-Ride and After* suggests is that the post-war period is characterised by continuities of instability expressed in adult cruelty, violence and madness and through bad talk and inappropriate verbal articulations. Both *The Joy-Ride and After* and *The Middling* are full of the language of articulation; conversations about talk and the meanings of words; exchanges in which characters

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

⁸⁶ MacKay and Stonebridge, ‘Introduction’, in *British Fiction After Modernism*, pp. 8-9.

misunderstand one another, accidentally or deliberately, or in which neither party says what they really mean; relationships that are underpinned by habit, convention, loneliness or obsession, and in which information is told, or held back, to secure or undermine power. Barker's articulated fiction speaks to the atmosphere of violence and anxiety that continued after the war. Mepham argues that talk 'filled with anxiety and suspicion and doubt because something is going wrong' can lead to madness.⁸⁷ It is not just bad talk but any inappropriate, 'out of context' social response that can lead to madness. Barker's fiction suggests that these inappropriate articulations (connections, utterances) not only cause individual instability and breakdown but also result in the instability of society through the breaking of familial and social bonds. Barker's articulated fiction is thus concerned with the *disarticulation of citizenship* in 1960s Britain.⁸⁸

IV. Age Inversion

An important way in which the disarticulation of citizenship is represented in *The Joy-Ride and After* is through age inversion. In her book on age inversion in Victorian literature, Claudia Nelson notes the 'rhetorical tendency of that era, especially evident in fiction, to liken adults to children and children to adults'.⁸⁹ Considering 'the possible motivations and meanings of such generational border crossings', Nelson argues that 'the dismantling of chronological age is frequently a way of tracking power or its loss'.⁹⁰ She observes that the anxiety over the instability of age categories in the Victorian period recalls the uneasiness provoked by inversions of sexual and gender roles. Her proposal is that 'the queering of age has much in common with the queering of gender and sexuality' and she emphasises 'the doubt and social questioning necessarily involved in any inversion of a norm'.⁹¹ So age inversion in adult-child relationships, as well as having psychological implications, is

87 Mepham, 'Varieties of Modernism', p. 68.

88 My thanks to Lyndsey Stonebridge for this phrase.

89 Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults*, p. 3.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 11.

a metaphor for the instability, disorder or disintegration of social and political structures.

Barker's 1960s articulated fiction suggests that Nelson's reading of age inversion in the nineteenth century may be adapted to the context of the current discussion. In the mid-twentieth-century a belief that the stability of society was related to children and adults staying in their proper places and roles was coupled with worry that this was not happening. This anxiety was partly expressed in the moral panic about youth and juvenile delinquency I described in chapter two. Nelson argues that, due to Victorian child labour and prostitution, age inversion 'was already readily apparent to the Victorian observer, who had ample opportunity to note that traffic between the supposedly separate spheres inhabited by children and adults was an everyday matter'.⁹² While the mid-twentieth-century observer did not regularly encounter such literal age inversions, the child as 'father of the man' and the war-damaged 'adult as child' were familiar figures in the mid-century imagination. In the pages that follow I will show that age inversion in Barker's 1960s fiction is linked to or exacerbated by factors specific to the mid-twentieth-century, such as the newly-established 'parental' Welfare State and the precocity of the post-war generation. Although the age inversions I note in Barker's fiction are not always as explicit as those observed by Nelson, who refers to 'comments within a narrative that make the [adult-child] parallel explicit and inescapable', they are nevertheless examples of the roles of adult and child being reversed in order to represent dysfunction within social systems.⁹³ The inversion of age in *The Joy Ride and After* suggests wider instability and disorder and the disarticulation of state and citizen in mid-twentieth-century society.

For example, Joe is figured as the adult in his relationship with Mrs Martineau. He brings her supplies, tea, sugar, and medicine, and he is concerned about her welfare, worrying when she doesn't open the door one day, and going to the doctor on her behalf when she is ill. By contrast, Mrs Martineau, in her layers of clothing and knitted balaclava, is figured as a helpless and dependent baby: 'She rocked herself gently. In the balaclava bonnet and the swaddling clothes she looked like a dingy

⁹² Ibid., p. 6.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 3.

baby.⁹⁴ The infant-parent bond between them is also implied when, after Mrs Martineau is taken away, Joe is described as being ‘broken wide open’.⁹⁵ As well as suggesting childbirth through the idea that Mrs Martineau has been wrenched from inside Joe’s body, the language here also suggests that a familial bond between them has been disarticulated. The age-inverted relationship between Joe and Mrs Martineau points to social dysfunction because the mentally-ill Mrs Martineau has been left on her own with only Joe to care for her, and with no help from the state. The child, Joe, has had to take on social responsibilities usually carried out by the state or an adult. Further state dysfunction is shown when the ambulance does come to take her away, as I discuss later.

Another age inversion in *The Joy Ride and After* occurs between Alice Oram, a middle-class suburban housewife and her daughter, Grace. The second part of the novel begins just as Alice discovers that her husband, Frank is having an affair with a woman called Lilly Warren. Alice wants to express her anger violently but cannot:

She fell back on words. They came off her tongue, breathy at first, then like a flock of dirty birds – words decent women find they know when put to it. It was some relief to utter them until they started dropping back – slut and harlot and whore came plumping all round her. In the thick of it she caught sight of her daughter.⁹⁶

The emphasis here is on Alice’s use of words she had forgotten she knew, words that are unknown, strange, and alien. At first the words freed from inside her are light and fly away, an image which speaks to the idea that talking is cathartic and releases negative emotion. But Alice’s relief is undermined when the words she has expelled suddenly gain substance and return to attack and overwhelm her. The sense of return is important because when the ‘flock’ of dirty words she has used to describe Lilly Warren return, Alice is surrounded by these strange and alien forms.

After being interrupted by her daughter, Alice immediately switches back into her role of the ‘decent woman’ and ideal mother, expressing concern about Grace’s

94 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 50.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

safety when riding on her boyfriend's scooter. When Grace asks, "What do you mean by safety?" Alice replies:

"There's only one meaning that I know of."

"Having things stay the same? They can't. Even while you think they're the same they've started to change. There's no such thing as safety, it's a word without a meaning."

"Meanings came first, I thought, and the words after." Alice picked up the poker and broke the embers into flame.⁹⁷

The conversation between Grace and her mother emphasises Alice's lack of knowledge. Indeed, the story as a whole puts emphasis on the fact that Alice did not know about her husband's affair but her daughter did. Grace says: "I wanted to shout it at you. I got over it, of course. Someone had to be sensible. I decided not to say anything and I made the boys promise not to either."⁹⁸ This reverses the formula in which children are innocent and adults have knowledge. Alice feels that her ignorance makes her culpable, that she has failed in her role as an adult by not protecting her children from knowledge that she should have had: 'Not knowing was worse than foolish, it was a crime [...] She was to blame, she had no right not to know'.⁹⁹ The age inversion here disrupts and disorders the traditional family structure to such an extent that the adult who does not know becomes a criminal, somehow worse than the adult who commits adultery.

Alice's lack of knowledge is not just about the affair, however. Both of the above passages emphasise her ignorance and innocence about words: the unknown dirty words which are strange and alien; her unquestioning belief in the stability of language when she says that the word 'safety' has 'only one meaning'. This linguistic innocence anticipates the consequences of Alice's memory loss after she is struck by the car. The first words she hears after the accident are ones that she does not understand: 'She would have liked to make something of it, these were words and it was so long since she had heard any.'¹⁰⁰ And again: 'She tried to moisten her lips,

97 Ibid., pp. 139-140.

98 Ibid., p. 143.

99 Ibid., p. 137.

100 Ibid., p. 164.

words might have saved her if she could find the right ones. [...] They weren't the right words'.¹⁰¹ Following the accident, Alice is like a new-born child, without memory, language, or identity (she has no I.D. and loses her wedding ring). Conversely, Grace assumes the adult role: in the way she speaks to Alice; in the sense that she possesses knowledge her mother lacks and is the one being 'sensible'; and because after Alice's departure it is likely that Grace, and not her absent father, will assume responsibility for her brothers.

In *The Joy Ride and After*, then, Alice, an ideal middle-class mother and housewife, is represented as a child. It is important to note that this representation begins *before* the accident, suggesting that her safe, suburban lifestyle has made her child-like. She has lived all her married life on 'a pleasant road with grass verges,' where: 'almond and laburnum trees would soon come into bud. Nobody gossiped or kept watch through the curtains, the tradesmen came early. [...] [There was] no sign of life in the street'.¹⁰² Barker's sense here is of Alice being cocooned in a 'pleasant' place, far removed from poverty, crime, and the social change that Grace hints at in the passage above, and with a kind of static and deliberate innocence that is 'criminal'. The social disorder that is addressed by the mother-daughter age inversion in *The Joy Ride and After* is the infantilisation of middle-class women like Alice.

Nelson suggests that age inversions in Victorian literature illustrate dysfunctional family relationships and thus dysfunctions of the state as a large malfunctioning family. The age inversions in Barker's 1960s fiction do something similar. The child-like adults in the book force children into roles of adult responsibility in which they know more than the adults around them. In *The Joy-Ride and After*, age inversion in community and familial relations is a metaphor for dysfunction in the structures of early-1960s society. Through the age inversion in Joe's and Mrs Martineau's relationship in particular, the novel ties this social dysfunction to the failure of the adults in the community, such as Joe's parents, and to the failure of the state as parent. Joe thinks of his parents that: 'If they remembered [Mrs Martineau], it was always on Sundays and about this time.'¹⁰³

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 135.

103 Ibid., p. 52.

Jessie says of Mrs Martineau's flat: "I bet it's high in there. Mrs Stogumber wants to get the Sanitary."¹⁰⁴ His mother's mention of the state-controlled 'Sanitary' makes clear her view that Mrs Martineau is the responsibility of the state. Joe's father, Alec reinforces this view, saying: "This is the Welfare State, Joe. That means everyone's welfare. How do you think mine feels with that crazy old bird underneath us?"¹⁰⁵ For Joe's parents, Mrs Martineau is not their responsibility but that of the state, which is responsible for 'everyone's welfare'. The sense that the state should take the parental role is clear. But Joe is wary of state interference, thinking that '[i]f they took [Mrs Martineau] out of her burrow and locked her in some clean tidy place she'd die of fright and the right-thinkers could take the rap for that'.¹⁰⁶ Joe's use of the phrase 'right-thinkers' suggests his reservations (and Barker's?) about the idea of the Welfare State as a responsible, benevolent and caring parent. Indeed, the circumstances of Mrs Martineau's eventual removal from her flat vindicates Joe's anxiety about state interference, as I discuss later.

During the war it was necessary for the state to play a more dominant role in the domestic lives of its citizens. There was a greater degree of control over people's behaviour, whether they were fighting in Europe or on the Home Front. Not everyone was happy about this. Sinfield notes that the 1944 Mass Observation surveys 'showed a steady, unsurprised cynicism about the powers that be', especially among the working-class.¹⁰⁷ He concludes: 'So already, before the blitz, popular commitment to the British state was uneven.'¹⁰⁸ Sinfield argues that in Britain since the war '[t]he idea has been that we will all, or almost all, be persuaded to acquiesce in the prevailing order because we see that it is working generally to our benefit'.¹⁰⁹ 'To win the war,' he observes, 'people were encouraged to believe that there would not be a return to widespread injustice and poverty. The war exemplified (though not without contest) a pattern of state intervention and popular co-operation to organize production for a common purpose.'¹¹⁰

104 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

107 Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture*, p. 10.

108 *Ibid.*

109 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

110 *Ibid.*

But after the war there was still poverty and austerity because of rationing, and a sense of dissatisfaction that the wartime promises had not been kept. Susan Kingsley Kent observes that there was a 'discrepancy between an ideology that promised social equality and a reality of substandard housing, overcrowding, and dead-end jobs for a large percentage of Britons'.¹¹¹ State control became tighter with the introduction of the Welfare State. Of course, there were good intentions behind this and it had many positive consequences, but it still meant that the state continued to have a greater impact on people's domestic lives than before the war. Sinfield notes the sense of post-war dissatisfaction, arguing that 'in many ways the 1950s were an anxious, reactionary time' and 'from the middle of the decade fundamental economic and political challenge began'.¹¹² David Kynaston concurs, stating that '1950s Britain was [...] an authoritarian, illiberal, puritanical society. Not entirely, of course, but the cumulative evidence is overwhelming'.¹¹³ Kynaston describes the rigid, 'almost militaristic' nature of state Education, including the use of corporal punishment; the moral panic about youth and working women; the complete lack of sex education and high rate of illegal abortion; and the widespread silence about and prosecution of homosexuals.¹¹⁴ Kynaston's characterisation of post-war Britain as authoritarian and illiberal suggests the tensions that existed between the Welfare State and more conservative elements of society. Alongside the traditional idea of the British state as a benevolent, caring parental figure sits an image of British society as being like an authoritarian Victorian father.

In *The Joy-Ride and After* the authoritarian, bullying nature of British society is suggested not only in the behaviour of the individuals discussed above, but also in the conduct of employees of the British state, who are shown to have bullying tendencies. After Mrs Martineau has her hallucination about the 'Indian', she assaults Joe and he refuses to look after her anymore. Her care is taken over by another neighbour who soon calls the authorities. An ambulance arrives with two ambulance men and a nurse who tries to coax Mrs Martineau out of the flat: "Come

111 Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 324.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

113 David Kynaston, *Tales of a New Jerusalem, Family Britain 1951-57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 544.

114 *Ibid.*, pp. 546, 564, 533.

along now, dear,” said the nurse. “Not going to give any more trouble, are we?”¹¹⁵ There is a disparity between the nurse’s reassuring language and what she and the ambulance men are actually doing, chasing Mrs Martineau around the tunnels in her home to try to extract her from the flat so that she may be taken to hospital. In the final stages of her ‘capture’, Mrs Martineau is pursued around the house by the nurse, the ambulance men and, eventually, by boys and men from other houses, who ‘had swarmed down the steps’.¹¹⁶ The bullying nature of employees of the state is also seen in the final section of *The Middling* in the relationship between recovering alcoholic Ellie and her nurse, Hattie Straw, who puts sleeping powder in Ellie’s milk and constantly monitors her.¹¹⁷ Like the nurse in *The Joy Ride and After*, Hattie uses the pronoun ‘we’: “We’re tired, aren’t we?”¹¹⁸ This euphemistic expression is part of a register of aggressive pleasantness, which Barker suggests is not only disingenuous but also highly invasive and depersonalising. The patronising and infantilising language used by the state-employed nurses in Barker’s novels not only makes salient the idea of the state as a ‘parent’ and subjects or citizens as ‘children’ but also suggest that the state is a ‘bad’ parent because there is a disparity between its intentions and how state policy is being implemented at grass roots level.¹¹⁹ Further, the nurses’ use of the collective pronoun ‘we’ raises the issue of the state speaking on behalf of people as though they are children, thus undermining their personal agency. And because the Welfare State was introduced mainly to improve the living conditions of working-class people, the suggestion is that the people who are being ‘spoken for’ are mainly of that class.¹²⁰

In *Now the War Is Over* (1985), Paul Addison notes the continued inequalities in British society post war, drawing attention to ‘the divergence of working-class reality from the ideals of citizenship conceived by social reformers’.¹²¹ ‘Then as now,’ he argues, ‘it was a fiction that governments make society. Society makes

115 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 77.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

117 Barker, *The Middling*, p. 236.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

119 Barker’s sense of the duality of the state perhaps draws on the worries about state control and surveillance found in novels such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

120 Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture*, p. 10.

121 Paul Addison, *Now the War Is Over: A Social History of Britain, 1945-1951*, 1985 (London: Faber, 2012), p. vii.

governments, and unmakes them too'.¹²² Addison's argument speaks to two of the main proposals I have made in this chapter. First of all, his argument that the 'reality' of working-class lives differed from the 'ideals' of social reformers is suggested by Barker's fiction when it undermines the ideal of post-war equality for all by drawing attention to people like Mrs Martineau and the unnamed black doctor who are, respectively, victims of social neglect and racist attitudes. A second way that my argument chimes with Addison's is in the idea that 'society makes governments' rather than vice versa. This takes account both of Garfinkel's theory that a functioning society is created by the cooperation of individuals and of the suggestion in Barker's articulated fiction that society may be disrupted by individuals' *lack* of cooperation. *The Joy-Ride and After* suggests that working-class society is not functioning according to the ideals of Welfarism because of the psychological damage inflicted on its individual members by the violence of colonialism and the barbarism of the war. The motivation behind the creation of the Welfare State may be viewed as a desire to articulate the different areas of society, to make things work as one. If we accept this characterisation then Barker's 1960s fiction appears to represent the failure of the ideals of the Welfare State due to the disarticulation of its members as a result of the legacies of colonialism, war and poverty, and due to social reformers' own disarticulation from the 'reality' of working-class lives.

This last point is particularly significant for a study of Barker's writing and life. I suggested earlier that one reason for the gap in Barker's publication history between 1951 and 1963 was her need to work full-time to live because she came from a working-class background and had no other means of support. The sense that Barker was a working-class author, writing about the people she knew and the background she came from, is seen in Hicks's 1964 review of *The Joy-Ride and After*. He reads Barker's novel alongside Jane Hervey's *Vain Shadow* (1963) and writes that: 'The juxtaposition of the two books suggests that there are greater inequalities in contemporary England than might be expected in a welfare state. Miss Hervey's Winthorpes live in considerable luxury, with servants, cars, and [...] considerable financial resources. Miss Barker's Munns, on the other hand, live in squalor, if not in

122 Ibid.

downright poverty.¹²³ This contemporary observation draws attention to the fact that in more recent years Barker's writing has often been mis-characterised. In my introduction, for example, I quoted A.S. Byatt's claim that Barker 'attacks no large social issues' and Robert McCrum's argument that writers such as Barker made 'the house of English fiction [look] like a shabby, suburban Edwardian rectory' and produced work that lacked 'energy or originality'.¹²⁴ Put simply, these claims are incorrect. On the contrary, as I have tried to show in this chapter, Barker's 1960s fiction is driven by her anger about the inequalities of British life, and her sense that a new articulated form could convey these in a different way to the novel or the short story.

123 Hicks, 'Literary Horizons: How the Poor Live and the Rich Die', p. 30.

124 Byatt, 'Introduction', in Barker, *A Case Examined, John Brown's Body, The Gooseboy*, p. 2; McCrum, 'The Story of his Life'.

Chapter Four

The Old Woman, The Adolescent Girl and Masculinity in Barker's 'Ghost Stories'

Dear Miss Winant,
Thank you very much for sending us your invoice for FETCHED by A. L. Barker.

After many reads and much discussion, we have come to the conclusion that VIEW IN A LONG MIRROR is rather too macabre for us or for MODERN WOMAN, so I am returning it to you herewith.

Barbara Beauchamp, letter to Ursula Winant, 4th March 1952¹

In March 1952, Barker's agent received this letter from Barbara Beauchamp, fiction editor at *Modern Woman* and *Woman's Own*. This was not the only time that 'View in a Long Mirror' was rejected. Though Barker's agents were relatively successful in selling her stories to popular magazines, 'View in a Long Mirror' proved impossible to place and was returned unsold in the United States in December 1953 and in Britain in July 1954.² It was finally published as part of a short story collection, *Lost upon the Roundabouts* (1964). Why the story is rejected so emphatically, not just by *Modern Woman* but by other popular magazines, is the question that frames this chapter. One answer to this question is that the representation of aged female sexuality in 'View in a Long Mirror' places the story on the wrong side of the limits of social acceptability. Another answer is that Barker's 'ghost story' deconstructs the genre, thwarting the conventions and requirements of popular publications. Both of these explanations read 'View in a Long Mirror' as a transgressive, liminal text, a story that addresses taboo subjects and is itself taboo, and a narrative that addresses ideas of classification while itself resisting definition.

1 Barbara Beauchamp, letter to Ursula Winant, 4th March 1952, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

2 Ursula Winant, letters to Barker, 8th December 1953 & 14th July 1954, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC. By March 1952 Barker had chosen Richmond Towers Ltd as her new agency, with Marjorie Towers and Ursula Winnant (London) offering her stories in the UK and Barbara Brandt (New York) in charge of US sales. Between March 1952 and May 1954, this team secured publication of eight of her stories in *Good Housekeeping*, *Vanity Fair*, *Modern Woman* and *Woman and Beauty*. By comparison, after Barker left Richmond Towers Ltd (sometime after 14th June 1954) she continued without an agent until 1959, when she appointed Dorothy Daly of Curtis Brown Ltd. In this five year period Barker had only three stories published. See box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

With this in mind, I begin by bringing theories of liminality and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection to bear on 'View in a Long Mirror'. I argue that these ideas are essential to our understanding of the story's representation of the threat young reporter, Griff Palmer, associates with aged female sexuality. A contrast is established between the liminality of eighty-year-old Delie Rivers and Griff's youth and 'masculine' ambition, which I contextualise historically with a discussion of masculinity in 1950s Britain. However, oppositions between female/male and innocence/experience are later problematised, most obviously in the final image of the story, which reverses the gender roles in the well-known image of 'death and the maiden', staging abject female sexuality and threatening masculine subjectivity. This image, I go on to argue, invites a comparison between 'View in a Long Mirror' and a scene from *The Joy-Ride and After* in which Joe walks in on Esther masturbating. The latter text is also concerned with the perceived threat to masculinity posed by female sexuality and the female body as abject. In this case, however, the threat is from an adolescent girl rather than an old woman. Ideas of innocence and experience, of who should and shouldn't know, are key to the representation of female old age and adolescence as abject. Esther threatens Joe because she has precocious sexual knowledge, just as Delie's sexuality challenges Griff's masculinity. I propose that both women may be read in relation to the *femme fatale*, a figure through which questions of sexuality and knowledge become intertwined. Delie and Esther challenge the attempts made by Griff and Joe to find out the 'true' story and reveal their true identities. The threat posed by these women of marginal age is tied to their resistance to definition.

As my example from *The Joy-Ride and After* shows, Barker's representation of the liminal and abject female adolescent is not confined to her supernatural fiction, but from the 1970s onwards this figure appears repeatedly in Barker's 'ghost stories'. In sections three and four I turn my attention to these ghostly adolescent girls, reading Barker's 'Dark Fantasy' story, 'Charley' (1989) in the light of ideas of adolescence in the work of Freud and G. Stanley Hall, and in theories of liminality. These accounts describe the adolescent as a transgressive, powerful and potentially dangerous figure that evades classification. The *female* adolescent, unformed, 'plastic' and always in the process of becoming a subject, is represented as a

particularly problematic figure. For Geoffrey, the male academic narrator of 'Charley', the adolescent girl's resistance to classification poses a threat. Barker's preoccupation with the relationship between an academic male narrator and an adolescent girl suggests a reading of 'Charley' in relation to Freud's famous case study, 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)' (1905). This comparison sheds light on the tension between the male narrator's perception of the adolescent girl as unformed and incomplete and the idea that the masculine subject *requires* the female adolescent to be fragmentary in order to stabilise his own identity. Further, my examination of 'Element of Doubt' (1987) considers the representation of female adolescence as ghostly in Barker's fiction. Both of these 'ghost stories', I argue, illuminate the challenge posed by female adolescence to the stability of male adult identity, and to psychoanalysis.

My argument in the first four sections is that there is something haunting, unsettling, liminal, and abject about both aged and adolescent female sexuality as they are experienced by the male protagonists in Barker's 'ghost stories', and in her other fiction. The final section draws on these arguments in order to propose that 'View in a Long Mirror' deconstructs the ghost story form. I argue that the story is significant not only because it helps us to think about how Barker uses the ghostly in her work but also because it requires us to consider our expectations of a ghost story. For Barker, the ghostly is not about conventional 'ghosts' but about inability to classify, define and interpret. This is why old women and adolescent girls so often feature in her ghost stories. These female characters' resistance to interpretation stages the deferral of meaning in the ghost story. Further, the pervasive quality of the ghostliness of age is demonstrated by the fact that it is not contained by the ghost story genre and spills over into Barker's other fiction. Perhaps this is why her writing has so often been mis-read, mis-placed and rejected.

I. The Old Woman and Masculinity

'View in a Long Mirror' opens on a wet Tuesday morning in a suburban cul-de-sac as veteran reporter, Leslie Kinch and his apprentice, Griff, make their way to the home of Magdala, a long-forgotten actress, celebrated in the 1890s. Magdala is to be

featured in what Kinch calls '[a] little fillup on the Woman's Page – 'Twilight of a Goddess' or 'What was Naughty about the Nineties'.³ The men arrive at Magdala's address to find the house in disrepair. The door is opened by an elderly, fragile-looking woman who is obviously alarmed by the intrusion. She insists: "I'm not Magdala – Magdala's ill."⁴ Nevertheless, Kinch manages to secure an interview with the woman, who introduces herself as Delie Rivers, Magdala's understudy. Although he gathers some press-worthy gossip, Kinch is not persuaded by Delie and once outside he declares: "That was Magdala you saw."⁵ Griff, too, is unconvinced – but by the woman's statement rather than her identity. Unlike Kinch, who leaves to write up his article in the pub, Griff is not satisfied. Returning to the house via its overgrown garden, he encounters what he thinks is a grave. Determined to capture the truth, he enters the loggia at the back of the house and finds himself face to face with Delie. Griff confronts her about the grave and, losing his temper, shouts: "Magdala's dead! She's buried out there in the garden!"⁶ Finally, Delie agrees that Magdala is indeed dead, and buried in the grave Griff saw. At the end of the story Griff is elated, crowing: "I knew all along" [...] "Kinch was on the wrong track altogether. He thought you were Magdala".⁷

'View in a Long Mirror' emphasises the marginality of Delie's position. She lives alone, on a cul-de-sac, in a dilapidated house that is 'thickly furred with oilgreen ivy'.⁸ Griff thinks that: 'Whoever lived here [...] had pulled the bricks over their heads, shut their eyes and never looked out. [...] The house had a dead look; mealy-grey, paintless the wood; nothing livelier than a damp patch [...] could be creeping behind those windows.'⁹ The language here suggests something more than marginality. The image of a person 'pull[ing] the bricks over [her head]' imagines Delie as a liminal figure encased or even entombed in her home and thus separated from the rest of society. Arnold Van Gennep argues that liminality is a phase of transition during a rite

3 Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', c. 1951, in *Lost Upon the Roundabouts* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 10-27, p. 12.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, p. 17.

6 Ibid, p. 23.

7 Ibid, p. 26.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid, p. 12.

of passage that is experienced by a person who is rendered ambiguous. Those in the liminal stage may be segregated from the community, Van Gennep argues.¹⁰ Victor Turner develops this, asserting that 'liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness'.¹¹ Delie's confinement in her home resembles a liminal stage, not just because of her segregation but also due to the imagery of death in the passage, and the fact that Griff's image of Delie figures her as absent from the house and imagines her shutting her eyes and not looking out, suggesting both invisibility and darkness.

Turner defines a liminal or 'threshold person' as someone who 'elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space'.¹² In 'View in a Long Mirror' Delie is represented as a ghostly 'threshold person' who eludes classification: 'She wore a burgundy dress and a bright pink shawl, badly knitted on big needles. At first glance that was all you saw. The wool and velvet eclipsed her. [...] she was half-shadow already. A tall flimsy woman with a cloud of stained grey hair – it was a long time since she'd been flesh and blood. She was the stuff, now, that moths are made of.'¹³ As well as emphasising Delie's old age, weakness and lack of substance, this passage complicates her classification as human: she is 'eclipsed' by her clothes, 'half shadow' (and thus only half human?), no longer 'flesh and blood' but insect. The woman called 'Delie' also resists classification in the sense that she does not have a fixed identity as either Delie or Magdala. Although Griff calls her Delie, Kinch believes she is Magdala; it is never clear which is the case. Either way, this woman has been stripped of her role as understudy/actor/companion by old age and her friend's death and is in transition. According to Turner, a threshold person also evades temporal classification, appearing to be 'in and out of time', in-between the future and the past.¹⁴ Delie is cut-off from the living world and the future and inhabits the past. Not only is her house 'redolent of the past', she is reanimated by telling stories about the past and, when she is interrupted by the demands of the present, Griff notes that '[i]t was a

10 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 75.

11 Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

12 Ibid.

13 Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', p. 13.

14 Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

long way back from where she had been'.¹⁵ Delie's elision of both spatial and temporal classification figures her as a liminal figure who, like a ghost, is located in-between human and not-human, life and death, present and past.

Haim Hazan notes the equivalence between the elderly and initiates experiencing a rite of passage but argues that, due to 'the absence of a socially defined destination for [the elderly in] this transformative process', the parallel 'cannot be sustained'.¹⁶ Instead, Hazan argues, for the elderly 'a state of limbo becomes permanent, and transition is superseded by stagnation. Furthermore, while sometimes the blurring of category boundaries receives social legitimation, ageing remains associated with the untouchable and abominable'.¹⁷ Ageing, he concludes, 'is out of bounds, associated with demonic power'.¹⁸ Hazan's language suggests that the old are not just liminal but abject. In *Powers of Horror* (1982) Julia Kristeva argues that abjection is caused by 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'.¹⁹ According to this definition Delie is a figure of abjection: she disturbs system and order by eluding classification, and disturbs identity because hers is not fixed. Initiates going through a rite of passage are liminal for a set period of time, after which they are re-incorporated into society. But the elderly, as Hazan suggests, remain suspended in transition and thus become abject: in 'a state of limbo', 'untouchable and abominable', 'out of bounds'.

In contrast to the arrested, ambiguous figure of Delie, Griff is represented as being certain about his place in the world and his future. Aged seventeen, he is keen to establish his place at the centre of things as an 'ace reporter'.²⁰ As he ventures into Delie's garden Griff constructs a narrative of masculine success:

His ambition was to be the busy newspaper-man. So he would, one day. 'Send Palmer,' they'd say, 'Palmer can handle it.' 'Griffith Palmer,

15 Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', pp. 17, 14.

16 Haim Hazan, *Old Age: Constructions and Deconstructions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 81.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

20 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 19.

our special correspondent – ‘Palmer’s dispatch from Moscow.’
‘Palmer’s in Tibet, in Wagga-Wagga, in Timbuctoo.’

[...]

He struck aside into the shrubbery. Take a look round, he decided, that’s the first thing. His heart was thudding. Palmer’s first job. ‘Initiative, daring, and a brilliant piece of reportage put Palmer on the map at the very outset of his career...’²¹

The sentence ‘[h]e struck aside into the shrubbery’ suggests the idea of an explorer hacking through the jungle, an image which carries masculine connotations through its association with adventure stories and Colonial narratives.²² The commentary Griff imagines reinforces this reading, with its mention of far away, exotic locations. It figures him as a successful male figure, not just *a* busy newspaper-man but ‘*the* busy newspaper-man’, and therefore an idealised masculine type. Griff imagines himself having a clear, socially-recognised male identity with stereotypically ‘masculine’ attributes such as action (*‘busy newspaper-man’*), strength and ability to cope with adversity (*‘Palmer can handle it.’*), bravery (*‘daring’*), and career success (*‘on the map’*, which also alludes to Colonial conquest).

However, Griff’s sense of his masculinity is threatened and eventually undermined by Delie. Griff observes Kinch’s interview with Delie, in which she tells stories about Malgdala’s lover, Frank Fargo. It is implied that the stories contain a sexual element as they bring about a sexual awakening in Delie; she is described as ‘agitated’, ‘eager’, ‘all alive’, with a ‘loosened’ tongue – all signs of sexual arousal.²³ Later, Griff thinks that ‘Kinch had known how to touch her on the quick’, a phrase which also has sexual connotations.²⁴ Griff finds ‘the sight of this grey ghost whipped up’ to be ‘distasteful’.²⁵ The use of the word *distasteful* is significant because it relates to the senses and therefore to the abject. Kristeva argues that ‘[f]ood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.’²⁶ Griff’s ‘distaste’ suggests that he finds Delie’s aged sexuality abject, and therefore threatening.

21 Ibid., p. 19.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 16.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2.

Delie's story-telling also makes Griff feel child-like and, by implication, 'unmanly': 'Griff stood first on one foot, then on the other. It took years off him. He was back again at his mother's street-corner gossips, waiting, waiting, while the talk bubbled and rustled and laughter neighed out and pins crept up from his heels. He resented being made uncomfortable, made young again.'²⁷ As well as feeling physically uncomfortable, Griff is made uncomfortable in the sense that he is embarrassed by Delie's sexual excitement. More than this, Griff experiences discomfort because he is 'made' to feel something other than a man: a powerless child who must wait for his mother. His resentment is made clear in the negative representation of the women's 'gossip' he experienced as a child. The word gossip downgrades the status of the women's talk and the phrase 'laughter neighed out' suggests that it is animalistic and incomprehensible. This draws on gender stereotypes about female gossip being futile and insignificant in comparison to male talk. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet argue that male denigration of female 'gossip', a term that originates in the Old English term 'god sib' or godparent, is linked to the practice of women gathering together for a child's birth and 'men's fears of what unsupervised women might be saying to one another on such occasions'.²⁸ Griff's criticism of his mother's talk appears motivated by his dislike of being subject to female power ('waiting, waiting') and by the threat of the women's talk which 'rustled' like something alive but unseen.

Female power over men is again emphasised in Delie's description of her and Magdala's 'heyday' as actresses in the 1890s:

She leaned towards him, exultant. "You've seen creatures come round a lamp at night, furry important creatures, come in out of their own dark and bumble round and bat their wings and fry on the glass – " Her lips were moist now, and eager. "I've seen men do that. I've seen them coming round her, not wanting to, some of them, but drawn in each on his own string, ready to be led by it, tied by it, dangled on the end of it."²⁹

²⁷ Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', pp. 16-17.

²⁸ Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 109.

²⁹ Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', p. 25.

Delie's speech represents men as 'creatures' whose self-importance is undermined by her description of them as 'furry' and 'bumbl[ing]'. Men are figured as passive, helpless, lacking in agency, and easily controlled and manipulated, like dogs on leads or puppets 'dangled' on strings. The memory of male helplessness and the implication that some men were harmed ('fr[ied] on the glass') excites Delie: she is described as 'eager' and her lips are 'moist', again suggesting sexual arousal. It is significant that this narrative of late-Victorian female power occupies the same text as Griff's memories and experiences of female power in mid-twentieth-century Britain. I propose that 'View in a Long Mirror' makes a connection between these two historical moments and draws on their mutual concern about the weakening and 'feminisation' of masculinity. I want to read Griff's identification with 'the busy newspaper-man' and his response to female power and sexuality in relation to ideas of masculinity in 1950s Britain. Later I will explore the connection between the 1950s and the 1890s in relation to the figure of the *femme fatale*.

Brian Baker proposes that: 'The postwar generation of men, with no war to fight (unlike their fathers), brought their 'tough' masculinity back into the realm of the social and domestic.'³⁰ This kind of assertion of masculinity is what is represented in 'View in a Long Mirror' when Griff imagines his self-appointed task to get the 'truth' from Delie in the language of masculine Colonial conquest. An anti-feminine rhetoric existed in male discourse in the 1950s. Susan Kingsley Kent argues that male writers in 1950s expressed their anger 'over the state of things' through gender'.³¹ Susan Brook concurs, arguing that the 'Angry Young Men', were not united by their angry class resistance but by their anger towards women, and by their 'representation of masculinity as a mode of rebellion and authenticity'.³² Male authenticity is constructed against female inauthenticity so that the 'feminine' establishment is seen as hypocritical and thus two-faced and deceptive. Baker agrees with Brook's assessment of the 'Angry' novels, arguing that they were characterised by a

30 Brian Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000*, 2006 (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2008), p. 31.

31 Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power*, p. 324.

32 Susan Brook, 'Engendering Rebellion: The Angry Young Man, Class and Masculinity', in Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene-Harwood, eds., *Posting the Male: Masculinities in Post-war and Contemporary British Literature* (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2003), pp. 19-34, p. 23.

masculinity 'which defin[ed] its own independence and 'toughness' in relationship to a feminizing (or emasculating) authority – in the shape of the boss, the government, or the wife/girlfriend'.³³ Baker describes this process as 'Othering the feminine/feminizing the Other to define the masculine'.³⁴ I propose that this process of 'othering the feminine' is precisely what is dramatised in 'View in a Long Mirror'. Griff's experience of Delie's aged female sexuality as abject, and his comparison of waiting for her to waiting for his mother, represents Delie as a threatening figure of female authority, and other to Griff's masculine identity.

After eliciting a rambling confession from Delie, Griff tries to pin-point the facts of the story, attempting to reassert masculine control: 'Manfully he tried to get his thumb on the situation. "You just tell me how [Magdala] died – and why you buried her out there."' ³⁵ He challenges Delie: "I knew you weren't telling the truth. I knew all along. You can't fool newspaper-men."³⁶ Griff's 'manful' attempt to master the situation and his emphasis on Delie not being able to fool newspaper-men is significant. The gendered language opposes Griff's male desire for the facts of the story to Delie's concealment of the 'truth', which is figured as feminine. Griff, the male storyteller, wishes to assert control by uncovering the 'true' story but his version of events is undermined by Delie's insistence on ambiguity. She has the last word, the final assertion of control. 'View in a Long Mirror' builds up to a ghostly dénouement in which Delie describes to Griff the experience of looking at Magdala:

She looked up at him with a smouldering slyness. "You know, it was like seeing myself in a long mirror. That's what it was like. But not now. Not any more." And she laughed – the thin echo, off-key, of that glib stage-laugh which rings out to the last row of the gallery. "There was no coffin, you see, and the grave's a busy place."

Slowly, sweepingly, she stretched her arms above her head. All the slumberous invitation of the odalisque was in the gesture. The loose sleeves fell away from the yellow twigs of her bones, her smile was wide – too wide – and lipless. Shadows brimmed the deep eye sockets, there looked out the hollow lantern of a skull.

"I fancy there's a lot to choose between us now," she said.³⁷

33 Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film*, p. 31.

34 Ibid.

35 Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', p. 26.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., pp. 26-7.

Delie's balletic gesture and the image of the skull in this bizarre passage evoke the 'Danse Macabre', a late medieval allegory for the universality of death in which the person about to die dances with death before being carried off to the afterlife. One of the most well-known variants of the Danse Macabre is the often-sexualised 'death and the maiden' image of a masculine death figure carrying away and/or seducing an adolescent girl or young woman. The comparison between Delie's gesture and the 'invitation of the odalisque' (a female slave or concubine) emphasises her sexuality. The description of her deep skull-like eye sockets and her bones as 'yellow twigs' suggests death. This combination of sex and death evokes the 'death and the maiden' motif in particular, rather than a more general Danse Macabre image.

The crucial aspect of Barker's image of an old woman performing a sexualised dance to a young man is that it calls to mind, but reverses, the motif of death and the maiden, presenting death as female and 'the maiden' as male. The image also inverts the opposition between sexual innocence and experience. Griff takes on the role of the 'innocent' maiden and Delie becomes death, a figure of experience and evil. This reverses traditional assumptions about the sexual knowledge of men and women, where the woman is sexually innocent in comparison to the man's sexual experience. The inversion is even more notable because of Delie's old age. Her sexual knowingness subverts the idea that old people, particularly old women, are not sexual. Aged female sexuality, like that of adolescent girls (as I discuss later), may be seen as illicit or transgressive because these age categories are 'other' to the adult, and are not seen as possessing adult sexual desires and functions. Sally Chivers argues that '[e]lderly bodies do not usually exercise sexual desire for the socially sanctioned end of procreation, so any discussion of sexuality and the elderly forces recognition of sexual desire for its own sake'.³⁸ The inversion of innocence and experience in 'View in a Long Mirror' is likely to have shocked the average reader of *Modern Woman* in 1950s Britain, a society that was particularly conservative about any sexuality that differed from the norm (homosexuality, for example). Further, like

³⁸ Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2003), p. xxiv.

many 'death and the maiden' images, Barker's image implies that Delie will seduce and carry away Griff. Thus the threat posed to Griff's masculinity by Delie's aged female sexuality is potentially psychical as well as psychological. The image at the end of 'View in a Long Mirror' is a metaphor for the way that female power and sexuality threatens masculine identity, which in turn figures women as 'other'.

In addition to putting emphasis on gender-inversion, the reversal of innocence and experience, and the threat of female sexuality, the passage from 'View in a Long Mirror' makes a direct comparison between the aged female sexualised body and a corpse, thus staging its abjection. For Kristeva, the corpse is the most abject, 'the most sickening of wastes' because it eradicates the border between self and other, life and death: '[i]t is death infecting life'.³⁹ Barker's story dramatises this abject disruption of order. Delie's smile is 'too wide – and lipless' and shadows brim her eye sockets. The language of excess and overflow in 'too wide', 'lipless' and 'brimmed' suggests a lack of containment, where what is inside the body or the grave breaks out. Inversely, the phrase 'the grave's a busy place' suggests a breakdown in the materiality of the body, with elements that should remain outside getting in. The corpse and the aged female body appear as one when death, here figured as shadows and a hollow skull, 'look[s] out' at Griff from inside Delie's living body. This unity recalls Delie's role as Magdala's understudy, her mirror-image or 'view in the mirror', emphasising the uncertainty about which woman is alive and which is dead. Barker's image stages abjection because it troubles distinctions between inside and outside, living and dead and self and other. The image is also ghostly according to Hélène Cixous's description of the ghost as a figure that 'erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead'.⁴⁰ Perhaps this abject, ghostly representation of aged female sexuality is what rendered Barker's story 'too macabre for us or for MODERN WOMAN'? In the following section I build on my discussions of 'the othering of the feminine in order to define the masculine' and Barker's gendered reversal of the innocence/experience opposition, arguing that

39 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 3-4.

40 Helen Cixous, 'Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimlich (The "Uncanny")', 1976, quoted in Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 18.

The Joy-Ride and After stages a gender-inversion that is similar to the one in 'View in a Long Mirror'.

II. Knowing

In *The Joy Ride and After* Joe's perception of Esther Munn's adolescent sexuality is also represented in terms of abjection and as a threat to male subjectivity. While searching for his little brother's missing kitten, Joe walks in on Esther masturbating:

He hadn't been expecting that and he got quite a shock. That mimm neatness of hers was gone, she was sprawled like a rag doll, half rubbed out under the tousled bedclothes. [...]

"The kid's lost his kitten." If he could have stopped looking at her, stopped seeing her all broken down into something soft and dirty and knowing – that was the worst of it, the knowing – she and the raddled bed and the smelling room, they knew.⁴¹

Like Delie in the final image of 'View in the Long Mirror', Esther is represented as abject when perceived through male eyes. She disturbs identity, becoming 'like a rag doll', 'something soft and dirty', a thing rather than a person. The passage describes a breakdown of corporality that is strikingly similar to Delie's disintegration. Esther is 'half rubbed out' and 'all broken down', phrases that imply a breaching of the borders of her body so that it merges with the bed, becoming composite and ambiguous. Joe's reaction to Esther further suggests a reading in terms of abjection. He feels nausea: 'Joe felt the curdling in his stomach, he needed to run to the back of the workshop and spit'.⁴² Faced with the abject, Kristeva writes: 'I experience a gagging sensation and [...] spasms in the stomach, the belly'.⁴³ But Joe also feels that '[h]e wanted to watch', 'he had to see'.⁴⁴ Joe's dual reaction speaks to Kristeva's idea of 'jouissance', the notion that while the subject finds the abject repugnant, (s)he is at the same time drawn to it by fascination and desire.⁴⁵ Kristeva argues that the subject

41 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 61.

42 Ibid. This recalls Pinkie's disgust about sex in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938).

43 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

44 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, pp. 62, 63.

45 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9.

is 'in perpetual danger' from the abject, which is 'something rejected from which one does not part'.⁴⁶ I want to keep in mind this sense of the subject's constant desire for/threat from the abject as I turn to the question of Esther's sexual knowledge.

'Knowing' is an important word in the passage. For Joe, 'the worst of it' is 'the knowing'. In Joe's mind Esther has merged with 'the raddled bed and the smelling room' so that all three have a shared consciousness, they 'know'. This implies a threat. Esther's sexual knowledge threatens Joe and gives her power over him: 'it was her stint small body that dominated his. He thought of it, bird-boned and puffy [...] with a shudder of *abject* longing.'⁴⁷ The passage also suggests that Joe is somehow implicated in what he has seen. (I discuss this further below.) As in 'View in a Long Mirror', there is a gender-inversion here: the female is sexually knowing/experienced and the male is sexually innocent/inexperienced. Joe departs from the stereotype of the highly-sexed adolescent boy. He is afraid of sex, and appears to have no sexual knowledge until he sees Esther masturbating, after which he is 'sick cold and furious [...] insulted with the truth'.⁴⁸ In contrast to Joe's 'innocence', Esther is represented as sexually 'knowing'. Before coming to live with Joe's family, she lived with Flo Keppel, a former actress turned prostitute, and was involved with the men who came to the house. Esther blackmailed one of Keppel's customers and bought a red coat with the proceeds: "[Keppel] called them all 'Peter' – she liked to think there'd only been the one – but I found out who he was and where he lived." She touched the red coat with affection. "That's how I bought this."⁴⁹ It is never clear whether Esther blackmailed the man with the information that he visited a prostitute, or with the knowledge that she and he had had sex. Either way, Esther's sexual knowledge is implied, and is symbolised by the red coat, which marks her out as a girl to follow in the street.⁵⁰

After Joe sees Esther masturbating she becomes ghostly, possessing his mind: '[w]hat he couldn't forget that night was Esther. Not that he thought about her, she

46 Ibid., pp. 9, 4.

47 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 91 (my italics).

48 Ibid., p. 63

49 Ibid., p. 93.

50 Here *The Joy-Ride and After* anticipates a later and better known text, 'Don't Look Now' (1971) by Daphne Du Maurier, in which a father follows a red-coated figure he believes to be his recently-deceased daughter through the streets of Venice.

just moved into his mind and stayed. She knew about everything he did'.⁵¹ Her presence in his mind is one over which he has no control: '[h]e couldn't get away [...], wherever he went she would be there first'.⁵² One evening, he finds himself following a girl in a red coat: '[t]hat bright crackerjack daub was a far shout from Esther Munn', he thinks.⁵³ He follows her through the streets, up a fire escape and onto the roof of the Khedive Cinema. Just before he encounters the girl face-to-face, Joe hesitates:

Joe remembered his excitement and hope and longing for something the red coat had seemed to promise. He couldn't even be sure now what that was. All his dread of her kind had come back, of the faceless girls against the park railings, of the things that asked to be done, of the sweet itch and crawl of his skin at the nightmare of doing them. Drymouthed, he stood staring at the red coat. The girl sighed, shifting into the angle of the doorway. A faint light fell across her cheek – she was Esther Munn.⁵⁴

Joe's pursuit of the red-coated girl through the streets, Esther's 'unmasking' in the light of the doorway: *The Joy-Ride and After* deploys the conventions of classic Film Noir and, in doing so, evokes the figure of the '*femme fatale*'. I want to read Esther as a *femme fatale* figure. She is sexually knowing and 'knows' Joe in an almost supernatural way, drawing him towards her by eliciting 'his excitement and hope and longing'. She is also unknown: Joe follows her without realising her identity, and figures her as a representative of 'her kind' like 'the faceless girls'. It is this combination of sexual knowingness, supernatural powers, and mystery that suggests a reading of Esther in the light of the archetypal figure of the *femme fatale*.

For Mary Ann Doane, the *femme fatale* is a 'figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma' because 'she never really is what she seems to be' and thus 'harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable'.⁵⁵ The *femme fatale*, it seems, is an abject figure that disturbs identity and evades definition. In *The Joy-Ride and After*, Joe's pursuit of Esther draws

51 Barker, *The Joy-Ride*, p. 81.

52 Ibid., p. 86.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 90.

55 Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 1.

attention to the difference between what she seems to be and what she is. The question of who she is and what she knows is always in doubt; she lies throughout the book and delights in concealing as well as revealing knowledge. Earlier I noted that when Esther merges with the bed and the room she presents an undefined threat in which Joe is implicated. Joe's sense of entanglement derives from the instability of Esther's identity. Because she cannot be known she appears uncontained. Esther also disturbs Joe's identity in the sense that she 'move[s] into his mind' and diminishes his autonomy. As in Kristeva's notion of 'jouissance', Joe is drawn to Esther with 'excitement and hope and longing' but at the same time repelled by what she stands for: 'the things that asked to be done' and 'the sweet itch and crawl of his skin at the nightmare of doing them'. Esther's power over Joe stages the 'perpetual danger' to the subject from the 'sweet itch' of the abject.⁵⁶ This enticing and unsettling grasp resembles the power attributed to the figure of the *femme fatale*, a power gained by her resistance to male attempts to define and 'know' her.

Doane's description of the *femme fatale* also speaks to the characterisation of Delie Rivers, another woman who 'never really is what she seems to be' and poses an uncontainable threat to male subjectivity. Earlier I noted that the gendered language in 'View in a Long Mirror' suggests an opposition between Delie's 'feminine' ambiguity and concealment and Griff's 'male' desire to track down and reveal the 'truth'. Doane argues that by 'transforming the threat of the woman into a secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered, the [*femme fatale*] is fully compatible with the epistemological drive of narrative, the hermeneutic structuration of the classical text'.⁵⁷ The 'imbrication of knowledge and sexuality' noted by Doane in relation to the *femme fatale* may be seen in Barker's fiction.⁵⁸ Female knowledge, secret and threatening, becomes sexualised and men's attempts to find out what women know are characterised by Freud's 'epistemophilic instinct'.⁵⁹ Griff's pursuit of the 'true' story recalls Joe's stalking of Esther. Both locate

56 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9.

57 Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, p. 1.

58 Ibid.

59 Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', p. 245.

the object of their desire in the body of a woman, and both are excited by the idea of revealing the story or unmasking the identity of the women they chase.

The sense that women are ‘secret’ and must be ‘unmasked’ speaks to notions of female inauthenticity in 1950s British society and culture, and to the power to deceive possessed by the performing woman in the 1890s. Through its comparison of female power in the Victorian theatre to the power of Griff’s mother at mid-century, ‘View in a Long Mirror’ makes a connection between the 1890s and the 1950s, drawing on their mutual concern about the weakening and ‘feminisation’ of masculinity. *The Joy-Ride and After* also registers mid-century ideas of the deceptive woman through its allusions to Film Noir and the *femme fatale*. In the 1950s the ‘feminine’ establishment is seen as hypocritical, two-faced and deceptive. According to Doane, a similar sense of female inauthenticity is present in discourses of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the cinema, which ‘ally women with deception, secretiveness, a kind of anti-knowledge or, on the other hand, situate them as privileged conduits to a – necessarily complex and even devious – truth.’⁶⁰ It is significant that the *femme fatale* emerges in the late-nineteenth century and, according to Doane, ‘is a clear indication of the extent of the fears and anxieties prompted by shifts in the understanding of sexual difference’ in this period.⁶¹ This historical placing calls to mind Delie’s involvement in the theatre of the 1890s. Kerry Powell argues that Victorian masculinity was threatened by the female actress and that, in order to dilute this threat, she was reconstructed ‘as a renegade female, one fundamentally different from normative wives and mothers, marginally “feminine” if feminine at all, quite possibly inhuman’.⁶² This construction of the ‘inhuman’ performing woman has striking similarities to the characterisation of the *femme fatale*, or ‘fatal woman’, a figure often aligned with ghosts, vampires, witches and other supernatural figures.⁶³ It calls to mind the representation of Delie as ‘half shadow’ and no longer ‘flesh and blood’, and her description of Magdala’s almost

60 Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, p. 3.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

62 Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 4, 3.

63 Heather L. Braun, *The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790-1910* (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), p. 4.

supernatural power to draw men around her like flies, also evoking Esther's ghostly inhabitation of Joe's mind. Delie and Esther are both associated with performance. Esther performs the identity of the girl in the red coat; Delie built a career on being Magdala. In the minds of the men who observe them both women are associated with deception and are elusive because of the doubt about their identities.

I propose that the age of Barker's sexually-knowing and unknowable female characters is one cause of their ghostliness. Delie's old age is certainly significant in 'View in a Long Mirror'. It contributes to her liminality and Griff's sense of her as abject. But the fact that the language of the passage that describes Delie's sexualised dance is so similar to that of the description of Esther masturbating in *The Joy-Ride and After*, and that both images of female sexuality are witnessed by men, suggests that Delie's *old* age may not be the story's primary concern. Instead, Barker is preoccupied with the ghostliness of marginal age categories: adolescence as well as old age. Part of what makes a ghost terrifying is its knowledge and inhabitation of 'the other side', its disregard for the border between known and unknown worlds. The liminal categories of female old age and adolescence are represented as being abject and ghostly because they resist male definition, and also because the idea of aged and adolescent women being sexually 'knowing' rather than sexually innocent is especially threatening to masculine identity. In 'View in a Long Mirror' and *The Joy-Ride and After*, then, both aged and adolescent female sexuality are ghostly. But, as I show in the pages that follow, it is the adolescent girl in particular who continues to be represented as a problematic and haunting figure in Barker's later ghost stories.

III. The Ghostly Adolescent Girl

The girl, or whatever it was we had stopped for – I did wonder – materialized, and I continued to wonder. She was not immediately definable as human.

[...] Her features were a blur, indeed she was blurred from head to foot.
Barker, 'Charley'⁶⁴

64 Barker, 'Charley', in Chris Morgan, ed., *Dark Fantasies* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1989), pp. 53-70, pp. 54-55.

Things are or become spectral, haunted and haunting when there is an inability to identify, define and interpret them, when they exist or appear at a limit, in transition, or without clear definition as one thing or another. Ghosts haunt. Texts haunt. And, in Barker's fiction, female adolescence haunts. Coming face to face with an adolescent girl is represented as an encounter with something that can't quite be identified, something blurred, neither wholly adult nor wholly child. Theories of haunting emphasise the ghost as an ambiguous, transient figure, neither dead nor alive but moving between states and passing through boundaries. These conceptions of the ghostly speak to adolescence, the period in a person's life when she crosses from childhood into adulthood, existing between one state and the other. Adolescence is also the point at which a person's body quite literally becomes unfamiliar or uncanny as it grows, develops and changes. As such, adolescence is a discrete developmental category, different to both adulthood and childhood, which challenges the limits of identification and interpretation. *Female* adolescence provides a particular challenge in Barker's fiction. In her 'ghost stories' of the 1970s and 1980s the adolescent girl viewed from a male perspective is represented as liminal and abject, and associated with the supernatural. In this section I read Barker's 'dark fantasy' story, 'Charley' (1989) alongside anthropological and psychoanalytical accounts of adolescence, arguing that the ghostly instability of female adolescence troubles the rational desire to classify and define exhibited by Barker's male academic narrator.⁶⁵

Catherine Driscoll argues that 'adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behaviour, or identity, because it has always meant the process of developing a self [...] rather than any definition of that self'.⁶⁶ In addition to pointing out the instability of the term, she also emphasises that the experience of being adolescent is figured as unstable:

Despite changes in understanding childhood and youth and the distinctions between them, adolescence continues to be conceived as

65 Chris Morgan, editor of the collection in which 'Charley' was published, describes a 'dark fantasy' as being 'at the opposite end of the spectrum from graphic horror [...] its horror is more often suggested than spelt out'. (See: Chris Morgan, 'Introduction: No Slime, No Chain-Saws', in *Dark Fantasies*, pp. 9-10, p. 9.)

66 Driscoll, *Girls*, p. 6.

a disruption of childhood and prior to a projected adulthood. Adolescence also functions as an explanation of the indispensable difficulty of becoming a subject, agent, or independent or self-aware person, as well as a periodization that constructs both childhood and adulthood as relative stabilities. Understanding this difficult adolescence as universal trauma is a twentieth-century Western idea that retrospectively constructs childhood as a period of stability, heightening both the crucial intensity of adolescence as transformative passage and the distance between childhood and maturity.⁶⁷

Driscoll's observation that in the twentieth century adolescence was seen to represent the trials of becoming a modern subject recalls the connections between adolescent experience and modernist experience that I proposed in chapter one. Neubauer argues that the modern age discovered in adolescence 'a mirror of its own uneasiness with its heritage, its crisis of identity, and its groping for a new one'.⁶⁸ Following Neubauer, I likened the rapid, forceful change of modernist experience to the instability of adolescence. Driscoll's description of the adolescent stage as a 'transformative passage' speaks to the idea of adolescence as a liminal state between childhood and adulthood. She observes that the category is characterised by a lack of definition and that adolescence has historically been associated with states of disorder, transition, and trauma. I want to explore further Driscoll's characterisation of adolescence, first, with reference to the work of Freud and Hall and, second, in relation to the theories of liminality outlined earlier in the chapter.

Both Freud's theory of infantile sexuality and Hall's 1904 study of adolescence figure adolescence as a stage akin to a 'universal trauma' or identity crisis. For Hall, '[a]dolescence is a new birth', a period of rapid development 'suggestive of some ancient period of storm and stress when old moorings were broken', and a stage at which '[c]haracter and personality are taking form, but everything is plastic'.⁶⁹ Hall argues that the turn of the century was mankind's adolescence, writing that 'man is rapidly changing. [...] all that we call progress is more and more rapid. Old moorings are constantly broken; adaptive plasticity to new environments [...] was never so

67 Ibid.

68 Neubauer, *Culture of Adolescence*, p. 10.

69 G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, Volume I, 1904 (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1931), pp. xviii.

great'.⁷⁰ For mankind as for the adolescent the transition from childhood entails rapid growth, the breaking of 'old moorings', and malleability. Hall's account of subject formation in the individual and in mankind has similarities to Freud's, particularly in the sense that the 'childhood' of an individual or society is characterised by a relative stability which is then ruptured by the onset of puberty and the 'storm and stress' of adolescence.

In 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis' (1940), Freud argues that the psychical phenomena associated with sexual activity in early childhood reach a peak when the child is about five and then takes a break, not returning until the onset of puberty. 'During this break', he argues, 'everything stands still: much is unlearned and recedes again. Once this so-called latency period has run its course, sexual life advances into puberty – we could say it comes into bloom again'.⁷¹ Freud clearly states that the move into puberty involves the reactivation of the psychical phenomena of early childhood. For example, discussing the castration complex, he argues that 'all the competing emotional impulses and reactions that were activated [in infancy] then remain preserved in the unconscious, ready to disrupt the later development of the ego after puberty'.⁷² Freud's understanding of the period after puberty as a phase of disruption is noted by Driscoll, who observes that he saw adolescence as 'a complicated clash between new sexual capacity, already conflicting and often inexpressible fears, ideals, and desires built up and elaborated in childhood'.⁷³ Hall's account of adolescence as a period of 'storm and stress' recalls Freud's characterisation of the stage as disruptive and marked by conflict. Both Hall and Freud see the adolescent experience as one of disorder, instability and transition – and potential trauma and crisis.

Hall's sense of adolescence as 'plastic' speaks to Barker's representation of the adolescent girl in 'Charley'. The story concerns a middle-aged married couple, Geoffrey and Adele, who encounter a female adolescent hitchhiker named Charley while driving across Bodmin Moor in Cornwall. Although it is June, the weather is

70 Ibid., p. vii.

71 Freud, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis', pp. 8-9.

72 Ibid., p. 46.

73 Driscoll, *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Berg, 2011), p. 11.

awful; the wind-screen-wipers can barely keep up with the torrential rain and the road is enveloped in thick fog:

Suddenly an object which was not a sheep nor anything which might be anticipated on the moor appeared within our restricted range of vision. It looked like a stray balloon and I had no time for speculation, being occupied with the car which was picking up speed down an unseen gradient. I braked and changed gear. A second glance informed me that the balloon was inscribed with the rudiments of a face. I realize now how unformed and in every sense ready to conform to any shape the features were. [...] I was undecided as to whether this manifestation was human or human artefact.⁷⁴

The language of the passage, narrated in Geoffrey's academic register, sets up a comparison between Charley and an apparition or ghost. Much is made of her immateriality and shapelessness or, to use Hall's terminology, her 'plasticity'. The first time she is spotted she is simply 'an object'. Soon afterwards Geoffrey describes her as 'a stray balloon', and then notes that: 'the balloon was inscribed with the rudiments of a face'. Geoffrey's comparison of Charley to a balloon evokes a ghostly floating object.⁷⁵ Charley has only 'the rudiments of a face', with features both 'unformed' and 'ready to conform', suggesting an inanimate being, a pliable object rather than a human. Geoffrey's perception of Charley associates the adolescent girl with the supernatural and signals that she is in a liminal state, between one defined stage and the next.

When we first encounter Charley her liminality is signalled by her emergence from the mists of Bodmin Moor, itself a liminal location. Moorland is a liminal space, a border between two towns or regions, a space one crosses to get from one place to the next. It is deserted, wild and rugged, not a place to inhabit or to linger, and is often associated in myth and literature with supernatural and dangerous elements.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Barker, 'Charley', pp. 53-54.

⁷⁵ Geoffrey's sighting of a balloon with a face calls to mind the image of the floating head of a headless horseman, a ghost tale commonly associated with moors.

⁷⁶ Note, for example, the moors in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Dartmoor as the territory of the phantom beast in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901). Bodmin Moor in particular has accrued a number of ghostly connotations through its ancient stones, associations with Arthurian legend, history of smuggling and highwaymen, and through a series of murders and hangings said to have taken place on the moors. It is also the location of Jamaica Inn, a coaching house used by Daphne De Maurier as the setting of her 1936 novel of the same name. Barker

As well as being encountered in a liminal place, Charley is encountered in state of liminality, having left one place but not yet arrived at another. She has run away from a dysfunctional home in London, where she lived with a woman whom she suggests is a prostitute: 'she takes in lodgers. Men. That's how she makes her living. Know what I mean?'⁷⁷ She travelled to Cornwall, she says, to see her grandmother in Dawlish, who was dead when Charley arrived.⁷⁸ So when Geoffrey and Adele encounter Charley she is homeless and in a state of transition. Throughout the story she is constantly on the move.

For Van Gennep, Turner, and Douglas, the adolescent is characterised by ambiguity and evades classification. Adolescence is disruptive both to the adolescent herself and to her society. Adolescents in the liminal phase may be seen as being situated between worlds, in a death-like state. Douglas, in *Purity and Danger*, recognises the 'dangerous, criminal' characteristics of the 'outcast' in what she calls 'the marginal period'.⁷⁹ 'We recognise', Douglas argues, 'that [disorder] is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power.'⁸⁰ She builds on this, arguing that those in an ambiguous state of being are perceived as 'out of place', and thus polluting and dangerous. Initiates in the postliminal phase 'have been in contact with danger... have been at a source of power' and may be treated 'as if they were themselves charged with power, hot, dangerous'.⁸¹ Adolescence is a time when the usual sanctions are lifted; initiates may be subject to harsh treatment, or permitted to carry out criminal acts, after which may be seen to have special powers or a sacred status. Thus, adolescence is conceived as being a stage of life in which people are out of time and place, disrupted and disruptive, and powerful and dangerous. 'Charley' explores the dangers and powers of female adolescence, representing the adolescent girl as a liminal, ghostly figure associated with the supernatural and with danger. I noted earlier that ghosts are ambiguous, transient figures, neither dead nor alive but moving between states

was fascinated by the landscape, history, literature and mythology of Cornwall. As I discuss in the following chapter, she wrote about the presence and power of the region in her final novel, *The Haunt*.

77 Barker, 'Charley', p. 59.

78 Ibid.

79 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 97.

80 Ibid., p. 95.

81 Ibid., p. 98.

and passing through boundaries. Read in this way, the ghost and the adolescent share many of the same liminal characteristics, and this may explain the connection Barker makes between female adolescents and the supernatural.

A good deal is made of the fact that Charley is unformed and in transition. Geoffrey observes that:

She was not immediately definable as human. The permeating drizzle and the vaporous air would have metamorphosed anyone exposed to it for more than a few moments and this unfortunate had obviously been exposed to it for hours.

She was not equipped for the moor, even in clement weather. So far as I could judge, she wore a robe of unenlivened cheesecloth, caught up by a string around her neck and hanging to her ankles. Her hair was long, the colour of wet straw. Her features were a blur, indeed she was blurred from head to foot.⁸²

Van Gennep argues that during the liminal phase the ritual subject or 'passenger' is characterised by ambiguity.⁸³ For Turner, '[t]he neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate' and must be 'clay or dust', a being 'whose form is impressed upon them by society'.⁸⁴ The idea of the liminal figure as a 'passenger' is important to my analysis of Charley because she is literally a passenger in Geoffrey and Adele's car. In addition, Turner's notion that the liminal figure is 'clay' chimes with Hall's notion of adolescent 'plasticity' and with Geoffrey's interpretation of Charley as 'unformed'. For Geoffrey, Charley is 'not immediately definable as human'. Her exposure is emphasised and the passage suggests that the 'permeating drizzle' and 'vaporous air' have acted upon her, with words such as 'materialized' and 'metamorphosed' suggesting a change of state. In a white 'robe', with her long blonde hair, Charley resembles a ghost.

She is also a stranger. Charley's status as a hitchhiker exploits the horror film trope of the dangerous stranger, suggesting the possibility that she harbours malevolent intentions. Van Gennep and Turner note that both initiates and strangers are thought to have special powers. Van Gennep notes the similarities between

⁸² Barker, 'Charley', pp. 54-55.

⁸³ Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p. 94.

⁸⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 103.

ceremonial patterns relating to the stranger and those concerning adolescence, observing that: 'For a great many peoples a stranger is sacred, endowed with magico-religious powers, and supernaturally benevolent or malevolent.'⁸⁵ Arriving strangers are often initially separated from the society that they are visiting, Van Gennep observes, and he compares this to the segregation of an adolescent undergoing initiation, arguing that, like the stranger, the initiate who has passed 'through the sacred world [...] retains a special magico-religious quality'.⁸⁶

In 'Charley' Adele insists that Charley must stay with them at their rented house, and this 'homecoming' (Geoffrey and Adele have rented the house on previous occasions) is figured as a stage of incorporation for Charley: 'She waited on the threshold, steaming slightly.'⁸⁷ Crossing the 'threshold' and leaving her liminal state, Charley is 'hustled' upstairs by Adele, bathed, and clothed in Adele's dressing gown.⁸⁸ The bathing and clothing resemble a ritual practice, suggesting that Charley has been fully incorporated into the house, and into the couple's life. But the story emphasises the fact that Charley is never entirely incorporated and remains liminal. Charley expresses her intention to leave, asking Geoffrey: 'What will you do after I've gone?'⁸⁹

Charley's lack of incorporation is significant because it means that she remains liminal, in a permanent state of transition, qualities associated with the adolescent girl. I noted earlier that the adolescent experience represents that of becoming a modern subject. By contrast, argues Driscoll, the adolescent girl is conceived as a figure that fails to become a subject: 'the principle characteristic of [the modern] girl was her failure at a dominant model of individual subjectivity – this is not to say that young men actually achieved the coherence desired by that model but that the modern girl was positioned as delineating what was excluded from that movement toward maturity'.⁹⁰ The crucial point here is that the adolescent girl, by 'failing' to become, is always in the process of becoming. She is transitory rather than

85 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, pp. 26-27.

86 Ibid., pp. 81-82.

87 Barker, 'Charley', p. 61.

88 Ibid., pp. 61-62.

89 Ibid., p. 70.

90 Driscoll, *Girls*, p. 58.

stable, formed, or coherent. For Freud and Hall, Driscoll suggests, the adolescent girl's identity is somehow ahistorical, portrayed as 'in transition' and 'unfinished' in relation to the process of personal development.⁹¹ Indeed, Hall argues that 'woman at her best never outgrows adolescence like a man does'.⁹² Thus the adolescent girl is in stasis, 'await[ing] moments of transformation from girl to Woman'.⁹³ This appears to be very like being stuck in limbo – or being a threshold person in the liminal phase of a rite of passage, described by Turner as out of time, in-between the future and the past. Earlier I noted that according to Hazan the parallel between the old and initiates undergoing a rite of passage 'cannot be sustained' because while adolescents are reincorporated after the transitional period, old people remain in limbo and 'out of bounds'. I propose that Hazan's parallel may be sustained in the case of female adolescents, who are always in the process of becoming and remain 'out of time'. In the following section I read the adolescent girl in Barker's 'ghost story', 'Charley' alongside Freud's 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)' (1905), another narrative that figures an adolescent girl as transitional, unstable, incoherent and unfinished. A comparison of these texts helps to shed light on the preoccupation in Barker's fiction with the relationship between the adolescent girl and the male academic. Further, 'Element of Doubt' illuminates the representation of female adolescence as ghostly in Barker's fiction.

IV. 'Charley' and 'Dora'

In his Foreword to 'Dora' Freud emphasises the incompleteness of his case study. He explains that the results of the case history:

remained incomplete in more than one respect. The treatment was not continued to its planned goal, but interrupted at the wishes of the patient once a certain point had been reached. By that time some mysteries in the patient's illness had still not been dealt with, and others illuminated only very imperfectly, while the continuation of the

91 Ibid., pp. 6, 47, 57.

92 Hall, *Adolescence*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 54.

93 Driscoll, *Girls*, p. 57.

work would certainly have advanced in all areas to the final elucidation. So here I can offer only the fragment of an analysis.⁹⁴

The language of Freud's account recalls the ambiguity of Geoffrey's descriptions of Charley. Dora's case history, Freud states, is 'incomplete', 'interrupted', imperfect, only partially elucidated and thus fragmentary. Elsewhere in 'Dora' Freud suggests the incompleteness of the case study is due to the incompleteness of the patient. He represents Dora herself as unfinished in the sense that she is stuck in adolescence. For neurotics such as Dora, Freud argues, 'accidental influences of life', such as the incident with Herr K., 'disturb the development of normal sexuality' so that, like water, it 'is driven back into older courses previously destined to be abandoned'.⁹⁵ Driscoll argues that: 'Freud's neurotic and hysterical girls are [...] people who have failed to accomplish the repressions and cathexes necessary for maturity (thus remaining adolescent)'.⁹⁶ And, for Freud, because Dora ends her analysis early rather than continuing it 'to its planned goal' she remains unfinished.

Following Toril Moi's work on 'Dora', Lis Møller suggests that Freud's case study is a struggle between 'Freud's (male) desire for closure and totality, [...] for the answers Dora supposedly withholds' and Dora's model, which is 'unfinished, diffuse, and fragmentary'.⁹⁷ Møller's argument is supported by the fact that, while Freud puts emphasis on the incompleteness of 'Dora', he maintains that 'the continuation of the work would certainly have advanced in all areas to the final elucidation'. Elsewhere suggests that he has, in fact, succeeded in producing something whole: 'I have completed that which was incomplete'.⁹⁸ At the same time, the incomplete and unfinished quality of Dora the female adolescent is emphasised. She is represented by Freud as a subject who needs to be explained to herself and to others by Freud, the male 'narrator'. Driscoll argues that psychoanalytic narratives have an interest in presenting the adolescent girl as unfinished and in need of completion. She proposes

94 Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)', 1905, in Phillips, ed., *The Penguin Freud Reader*, pp. 435-540, p. 439.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 471.

96 Driscoll, *Girls*, p. 60.

97 Lis Møller, *The Freudian Reading: Analytical and Fictional Constructions*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 14.

98 Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)', p. 440.

that the critical observation of women such as Dora was aimed at ‘maintaining a manageable (scrutinizable) girl/Woman identity. This self-fulfilling agenda required the instability of feminine adolescence’.⁹⁹ Driscoll’s idea that the male narrators of psychoanalytic narratives *require* the adolescent girl to be unstable speaks to the representation of female adolescence in ‘Charley’ and ‘Element of Doubt’. As I have tried to show, female adolescence seen from a male perspective in Barker’s fiction is represented as transitional, incoherent, and changeable, and this emphasises the male character’s role in and motivation for constructing this particular account of female adolescence.

In ‘Charley’, the motivation for Geoffrey’s attempts to decipher, define and classify the female adolescent is assigned to his role as an academic researcher. The first impulse of his wife, Adele is to help Charley but Geoffrey is sceptical about the stranger, disbelieving her story and seeing her as ‘an opportunist’.¹⁰⁰ Barker’s story sets up a contrast between Adele’s reaction to Charley and Geoffrey’s absolute lack of empathy, which is represented by his overly formal language and his use of facts. For example: ‘[i]n weather like this it is inadvisable to stop on the road. Visibility is less than five yards’, and again: ‘[a]nyone who chooses her mode of travel must expect disagreeable repercussions’.¹⁰¹ Geoffrey’s disbelief of Charley’s story recalls Freud’s refusal to believe Dora’s account of being kissed by her father’s friend, Herr K. in ‘Dora’. Famously, Freud asserts that this encounter ‘should have produced a clear sensation of sexual excitement in a fourteen-year-old girl’.¹⁰² Feminist critics have argued that Freud lets his assumptions about female sexuality prejudice his reading of Dora, and have compared Freud’s imposition of his interpretation on Dora to Herr K.’s unwanted sexual advances.¹⁰³ Geoffrey’s sexual attraction to Charley, which is made apparent later in the story, is shown to affect his judgement and lead him to interpret her in sexual terms. For example, referring to ‘the business’ of Charley’s name, he states:

99 Driscoll, *Girls*, p. 119.

100 Barker, ‘Charley’, p. 56.

101 *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 58.

102 Freud, ‘Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)’, p. 452.

103 Møller, *The Freudian Reading*, p. 14.

She was not to know that it has been applied as a vulgarism for woman's breasts and sexual organs. It has had a variety of meanings, has been taken to refer to the small pointed beard as worn by Charles the First, to describe a state of fear and apprehension, a credulous fool, and conversely – deriving from 'charlatan' – a deceiver, mountebank and country quack, [...]. However she had acquired it, the name suits her.¹⁰⁴

Geoffrey's analysis of Charley's name calls to mind Freud's well-known interpretation of the symbolism of Dora's mother's jewellery box in her first dream. In Dora's dream '*A house is on fire*' and '*Mama wants to rescue her jewellery box, but Papa says: I don't want me and my two children to burn to death because of your jewellery box*'.¹⁰⁵ Freud puts his interpretation to Dora as follows:

[...] You may not know that 'jewellery box' is a popular expression used to refer to something you recently alluded to when you talked about the handbag, that is to say, the female genitals.
 'I knew *you'd* say that.'
 That means *you* knew it.¹⁰⁶

The resemblance in the language of Geoffrey and Freud is significant: Geoffrey states that '[Charley] *was not to know* that [her name] has been applied as a *vulgarism* for woman's breasts and sexual organs'; Freud says to Dora: '*You may not know* that 'jewellery box' is a *popular expression* used to refer to [...] the female genitals'. In both cases the male narrator suggests that the adolescent girl is not likely to have the sexual knowledge required to interpret the symbolism but he actually thinks that she does possess this knowledge: Freud has noted Dora's sexual knowledge; Charley has told Geoffrey that she lived in London with a prostitute.¹⁰⁷ Each male narrator asserts what he thinks he knows over what the adolescent girl does 'not know', insisting that his is the correct interpretation. Freud takes Dora's denial of his interpretation ('I knew *you'd* say that') as further confirmation that his reading of her dream is indeed correct, writing in a footnote that Dora's protest is '[a] very common

104 Barker, 'Charley', p. 59.

105 Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)', p. 487 (italics in original).

106 Ibid., p. 491 (italics in original).

107 Barker, 'Charley', pp. 468-469.

way of rejecting an item of knowledge arising from the repressed'.¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey continually interrogates Charley's story and is determined to catch her out in a lie: 'It occurred to me that she had spun this tissue of lies to obscure and defend some grain of truth'.¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey's sense of Charley's 'tissue of lies' is not unlike Freud's statement that Dora is 'deliberately holding back' some parts of her story.¹¹⁰

The similarity between Freud's reading of Dora and the representation of Geoffrey's interpretation of Charley suggests that Barker's story engages with Freudian psychoanalysis. As I noted in chapter two, although the archive does not confirm that Barker read Freud it is likely that this was the case. Considering her particular interest in female adolescence it is probable that Barker had either read Freud's 'Dora' or, at the very least, was aware of some of the content of the case history. If we agree that 'Charley' engages with Freud's 'Dora' then it is clear that Barker makes a critical engagement. Her interest seems to be in the conflict between what the male academic narrator desires (a coherent and complete story) and what the adolescent girl provides (something fragmentary and incomplete). In this sense 'Charley' recalls earlier representations of female adolescence in texts such as *The Joy-Ride and After* that emphasise the gendered aspects of the way in which narrative is constructed. But Barker goes further than this in 'Charley' and, as I discuss below, in 'Element of Doubt' by explicitly connecting the adolescent girl with the supernatural. On the one hand, the representation of female adolescence as ghostly in Barker's fiction suggests that there is something about the complex, fragmentary and unfinished nature of female adolescence that cannot be understood from the 'rational' academic male perspective. Psychoanalysis is not able to provide a satisfactory account of the female adolescent, representing this figure as 'in transition' and 'unfinished' and a 'failed' subject. Barker's male academic narrators are similarly unable to rationally define and interpret the female adolescent. On the other hand, reflecting on Driscoll's idea that the adolescent girl is *required* to be unstable by the male narrators of psychoanalytic narratives, the representation of female adolescence as ghostly in Barker's fiction may be seen as a staging of the

108 Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)', p. 511.

109 Barker, 'Charley', p. 67.

110 Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)', p. 444.

process Brian Baker calls 'Othering the feminine/feminizing the Other to define the masculine'.¹¹¹ In other words, the adolescent girl is figured as ghostly not because she cannot be understood rationally but because she is required to be irrational, indeterminate, fragmentary and unfinished in order for the masculine to be rational, definite, complete and whole. Further, the ghostly is figured as female because the connection of supernatural elements to the feminine 'other' allows the ghostly to be distanced from masculine identity.

Both 'Element of Doubt' and Barker's final novel, *The Haunt* are preoccupied with the ghostliness of female adolescence. In 'Element of Doubt' Irving, an academic, has been invited to give a prestigious lecture on behalf of his University and is writing his talk. His colleague, Midgeley has recently died, leaving Irving in possession of his final paper. For Irving, there is 'something unsafe' about Midgeley's paper, 'a veiled general threat which Irving felt he should analyse. If analysis was possible'.¹¹² Strangely, Irving begins to associate the threat he perceives in Midgeley's paper with his children's 'nursegirl', Alice: '[they] were mingled in his thoughts'.¹¹³ Soon afterwards, poltergeistic activity begins to occur in Irving's house: his lecture notes fly around the kitchen 'like seagulls – circling'; a pan misses his wife's head by inches; and a carving knife flies at his daughter.¹¹⁴ These events are associated with female adolescence: "There's a belief – a superstition – that certain happenings – disturbances – are activated by the physical presence of someone your age. Someone who is growing up.' [...] 'It's considered to be a difficult time.'¹¹⁵ In *The Haunt* the same comparison between female adolescence and the supernatural is made (in response to another pan flying across another kitchen) by the aptly-named Mrs Soulsby: 'The girl's pubescent, it sounds as if there's a poltergeist at work' and 'A teenager undergoing physical disturbance'.¹¹⁶ Both passages emphasise that the ghostly happenings are triggered by the disturbance of the physical changes of adolescence, the difficulties of growing up. What makes adolescents ghostly is their

111 Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film*, p. 31.

112 Barker, 'Element of Doubt', 1987, in *Element of Doubt: Ghost Stories* (London: Vintage, 1992), pp. 77-90, p. 78.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

114 *Ibid.*, pp. 84-87.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

116 Barker, *The Haunt*, 1999 (London: Virago, 2000), pp. 59, 62.

transitional position at the limit between childhood and adulthood. Like ghosts, they move between states and pass through boundaries, resisting identification and challenging adult attempts to define them.

Understood in these terms, female adolescence appears to be very close to Kristeva's definition of abjection. Indeed, expressing her surprise that Kristeva does not link adolescence and abjection herself – Kristeva wrote an essay on adolescence only a few years after *Powers of Horror*¹¹⁷ – Karen Coats argues that the concepts 'are structurally and logically compatible for several reasons':

At the level of the social, we think of adolescence in terms of the way it, like abjection, breaches and challenges boundaries. It is an in-between time, a time where what we know and believe about children is challenged, and where what we hope and value about maturity is also challenged. Adolescents are both more and less sophisticated and knowing than we want them to be. They challenge the borders of identity, trying to become adult without becoming adulterated.¹¹⁸

Coats's formulation of adolescence is significant because of its emphasis on the challenge that adolescence poses to adult identity. Adolescents disrupt our ideas of childhood, maturity, and knowledge. They push against the boundaries of adulthood, destabilising this category of age. It is therefore apt that Barker's 'ghost stories' of the 1970s and 1980s are preoccupied with female adolescence. In Barker's fiction the adolescent girl challenges not only adulthood but masculinity and, as 'Charley' shows through its engagement with 'Dora', proves challenging for Freudian psychoanalysis. In the final section I return to 'View in a Long Mirror', arguing that Barker's 'ghost story' troubles the limits of the genre, first, through its focus on the ghostliness of telling stories and, second, by way of the challenge to interpretation posed by Delie Rivers.

117 See: Kristeva, 'The Adolescent Novel', 1990, in John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin, eds., *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, 1990 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 8-23.

118 Karen Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), p. 142.

V. The Ghostliness of Age

[T]he question of spectres is a question of speaking of that which presents itself or touches upon itself at and in excess of the limits of definition. To speak of the spectral, the ghostly, of haunting in general is to come face to face with that which plays on the very question of interpretation and identification, which appears, as it were, at the very limit to which interpretation can go.'

Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings* ¹¹⁹

Female old age and adolescence are liminal and abject categories of age which, as I have tried to show, resist definition, evade classification, and are connected with disorder, instability, fragmentation and contamination. The lack of demarcation associated with these age categories in Barker's fiction renders them ghostly. The ghost story is an appropriate genre for the representation of elderly and adolescent females because it tends to deal with what resists reason and rational taxonomy and is often used to challenge the impulse to interpret and define. Writing about the position of the ghost story in the nineteenth century, Patricia Coughlan notes 'the role of non-realist narrative forms [including the ghost story] in interrogating the status quo by tacitly rejecting its claims to full rationality'.¹²⁰ Ghost story criticism has tended to be particularly preoccupied with questions of definition and classification, separating 'classic' ghost stories from 'psychological' examples in which ghosts, as Virginia Woolf puts it, 'have their origins within us'.¹²¹ The desire to classify reflects what Julia Briggs calls 'the many difficulties encountered in studying an area at once vast, amorphous, and notoriously difficult to define. [...] one hardly knows where to start, or – even more essentially – where to stop'.¹²² This suggests that ghost story criticism is itself caught up in the expansiveness of the ghostly and, indeed, attempts to read the ghost story often extend to enquiries into practices of interpretation, as

119 Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings, Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. x-xi.

120 Patricia Coughlan, 'Doubles, Shadows, Sedan-Chairs, and the Past: The "Ghost Stories" of J. S. Le Fanu', in Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill, and Brian J. Showers, eds., *Reflections in a Glass Darkly: Essays on J. Sheridan Le Fanu* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011), pp. 137-160, p. 143.

121 Woolf, 'Henry James's Ghost Stories', 1921, in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol 3*, ed., Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1988), p. 324.

122 Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 7.

Shoshana Felman notes when she argues that critical debate is subject to a kind of haunting.¹²³ There has also been a problematising of terminology used to describe the genre. Srdjan Smajić points out ‘the semantic instability of terms indispensable to the study of ghost stories’.¹²⁴ After Derrida, the words spectre and haunt apply not just to ghost stories but to all texts. As Wolfreys puts it: ‘all stories are, more or less, ghost stories. [...] all forms of narrative are, in one way or another, haunted’.¹²⁵ So there is a sense in which, whenever one tries to read the ghost story, or indeed any story, one gets caught up in the pervasiveness of the ghostly.

‘View in a Long Mirror’ registers the uncontainability of the ghostly by staging the way in which story-telling and reading invoke ghosts. Barker’s text is concerned with the telling and reading of story as ghostly activities. When Kinch interviews Delie, her story has a reanimating effect: ‘And she told. The past went to her head like wine. It loosened her tongue, she began to nod and rustle and priss her lips. She was all alive – with the small inimical life of a wire spider.’¹²⁶ Delie is like a spirit medium, the conduit through which stories of the past return. But though story-telling intoxicates and animates her body, makes her ‘all alive’, the story it produces is a ghostly copy, cold, hostile and malignant, a ‘wire spider’ rather a live one. As I discussed earlier, Griff’s aversion to this ghostliness is clear: ‘to Griff it was distasteful, the sight of this grey ghost whipped up by scandals that were dead and spites which should have been buried.’¹²⁷ But Griff’s distaste is in conflict with his desire to know Magdala’s story, to unearth her secret.

Griff’s search for the story is figured as a hunt for the truth: ‘he smelt a story. [...] Griff would no more ignore a whiff of story than a young hound a whiff of fox’.¹²⁸ Kinch tells Griff he should “learn to smell out news”.¹²⁹ Narrative truth is conceived as something tangible that can be tracked down and seized hold of, provided one

123 Felman, ‘Turning the Screw of Interpretation’, p. 99. Felman calls this process a ‘ghost effect’ in which, she argues: ‘peculiar echoes of the text [...] reemerge in the very language of the critics’ (Ibid., p. 100.)

124 Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 14.

125 Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, p. 3.

126 Barker, ‘View in a Long Mirror’, p. 16.

127 Ibid., p. 16.

128 Ibid., p. 19.

129 Ibid., p. 10.

'reads' things, via sensory perception, in the right way. Kinch, although he uses words associated with the senses such as 'evoke' and 'redolent', cannot read Delie – his ability to spot clues and 'smell out news' is shown to be compromised.¹³⁰ Griff feels he is a better reader: "Griff didn't read [Delie] the way Kinch did".¹³¹ But Griff, too, is unable to read Delie. His comparison to a young hound is fitting; over-excited and eager, he rushes into confrontation and attempts to pin down the 'truth' of the story, the meaning of the grave. When he accuses Delie of burying Magdala in the garden, she looks at Griff with 'no fear in her eyes, only a blank level stare'.¹³² Griff reads Delie's blankness as defeat in response to the truth of his accusations, but blankness rather signals his inability as a reader to hunt down and grasp hold of any one 'true' meaning. His reading instead reveals the ambiguity and ghostliness of Delie's narrative: '[Delie's] mouth had fallen open, so had her hands, palms out, the fingers a little curled like empty claws. That was how she looked – empty'.¹³³ The repeated images of emptiness in this description, the open mouth, the open hands, the empty claws, suggest that meaning always escapes just as it is being grasped.¹³⁴ Barker's ghost story, like Griff's hunt, does not end with a moment of revelation. Instead, 'View in a Long Mirror' stages the way in which meaning in the ghost story is continually deferred and finally slips away.

Like 'Domini', 'View in a Long Mirror' uses all the motifs of the ghost story to excess: a haunted house, a ghostly woman, spiritualism, possession, a secret grave, live burial. This excessive quality extends from the content of the story to its language as shown by Barker's description of a room in Delie's house:

Fifty years ago, when the desire was for knobbed and fringed and potted things, this room left *nothing* to be desired. The chairs were bowlegged and poker-backed, the walls bristled with art reproductions in fretwork frames, and seaweed fronds in shell surrounds. There was wax fruit and Japanese paper fans and a palm. *Nothing* that could be teased and frilled or bobbed and fluted was left plain – *nothing* that

130 *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 14.

131 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

132 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

133 *Ibid.*

134 'Claws', of course, also suggest the fox, the cunning object of the hunt.

could be inlaid or fretted out or painted over. The lily was gilded, so were the fire-tongs. And on them all was the bloom of disuse.'¹³⁵

The story is excessive in that it fails to contain its effects. The number and variety of devices used in this passage make it very hard to read. Every sub-clause bar two features assonance on the letter 'o' and this, in addition to the alliteration of 'f' and 's' and repetition of the word 'nothing' combine to produce an effect of euphony which, though it appeals to hearing, conveys a lack of meaning – the metaphorical emptiness of the room. The lack of containment in this passage and in others like it suggests that the narrative Barker wants to tell is not, in fact, a ghost story but a story about the search for a story, telling stories and interpretation. My suggestion is that in her attempt to tell this story Barker deconstructs the ghost story as she writes it.

The ending of 'View in a Long Mirror' emphasises the story's concern with the uncontainability of meaning and the limit of interpretation and definition. I proposed earlier that in the 'death and the maiden' passage the phrase 'the grave's a busy place' as well as the language of overflow ('brimmed', 'lipless') signal the erasure of distinctions between inside and outside. Further, I suggested that the image of Delie's face as a 'hollow skull' figures her living body as both containing and being contained by death. Thus she is likened to a ghost, a figure which, in Cixous's words, 'erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead'.¹³⁶ The unsettling of distinctions between inside and outside and living and dead is what makes the image at the end of the story 'macabre'. The image is ghostly, too, because it provokes and at the same time refuses interpretation. Describing Derrida's concept of the spectral, Wolfreys writes that to talk of haunting is to encounter that which 'plays on the very question of interpretation and identification' and emerges 'at the very limit to which interpretation can go'.¹³⁷ The final scene of 'View in a Long Mirror' can be read as just such a play on the question and limit of interpretation. Delie's last statement, "I fancy there's a lot to choose between us now", may be reduced to the command 'choose between us'. But this identification is impossible for the reader to make because we do not know if the woman is Delie or Magdala, if Magdala even

135 Barker, 'View in a Long Mirror', p. 14, my italics.

136 Cixous, 'Fiction and its Phantoms', in Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, p. 18.

137 Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, pp. x-xi.

had an understudy, nor if the grave is filled or empty. Instead, the story ends with a moment of ambiguity, a call for further interpretation.

'View in a Long Mirror', then, ends with an image that troubles the limits of interpretation and unsettles distinctions between binary oppositions. This image could be the reason for the story's rejection. Beauchamp writes, we recall, that the story 'is rather too macabre for us or for MODERN WOMAN'. Her use of 'macabre', a word that the Oxford English Dictionary defines as 'disturbing because concerned with or causing a fear of death', suggests she is indeed referring to the image at the end of the story.¹³⁸ But surely this would not be enough to justify rejection? Events that defy interpretation are essential to the ghost story; the genre concerns the limit between life and death. Furthermore, 'macabre' ghost stories were in demand in mainstream markets during this period: the first Pan Book of Horror, for example, was published in 1959. I suggest that the reason for rejection is not that Barker's text is macabre, but that it is excessive: 'too macabre', too ghostly, too much. 'View in a Long Mirror' thwarts the conventions of the ghost story, and certainly would have challenged the expectations of the genre held by the editor of a 1950s popular magazine. What is haunting about this text is not just the content, as we expect, but the language. The story disturbs our understanding of the ghost story by haunting the wrong things. It therefore cannot be contained within the boundaries of what we call 'the ghost story' and becomes unplaceable – and unable to be placed in any magazine.

The unplaceability of 'View in a Long Mirror' speaks to the difficulties critics have encountered while trying to 'place' Barker's fiction. The lack of containment suggested by the imagery of 'View in a Long Mirror' is matched by the story's troubling of generic classification. In my introduction I proposed that ideas of liminality are useful for thinking about Barker's position in relation to the London literary scene at mid-century. Like the ghost story, Barker occupies a contradictory position: she is both mainstream and marginal. On the one hand, she understands completely the conventions of the ghost story genre and the reader's expectations. This is shown most obviously in her ability to adapt her writing for mainstream

138 "macabre". Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford University Press. <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/macabre> [accessed September 22, 2012].

publications; she could always write a story that fitted into the theme of a particular anthology or responded to a new trend. On the other hand, Barker's ghost stories frequently challenge expectations of what the ghost story should be and a sense of the ghostly pervades her other fiction. As I have suggested, the ghostliness of aged and adolescent female sexuality cannot be contained within the limits of Barker's 'ghost stories' but expands into texts such as *The Joy-Ride and After*, contaminating Barker's *oeuvre*. As a result, her work has been misclassified, rejected and pushed to the margins. The rejection of Barker's story thus speaks to her position as a liminal writer. Barker is a figure, perhaps, who haunts the margins of the mainstream.

Chapter Five

Age, Place, Past time and Form in *The Haunt*

Growing older is this: coming down to earth, your own bit of it and running round it in narrower and narrower circles, sniffing, checking, keeping hold, like a dog on a quicksand, a rat on a sinking log.

You are not the same person, not so soon pleased – yet sooner content. You have begun to trace the sources and now work back to them – a sign of failure. The world can be felt shrinking, you don't want to know about the periphery. Finally there'll be the ring from a candle to accommodate you – easily snuffed out in the end.

Barker, 'Commonplace Book' (black loose leaf memo notebook), c. 1964-73¹

This passage from Barker's commonplace book contains several negative stereotypical images of ageing. The phrase 'you don't want to know about the periphery' suggests self-absorption and detachment from the world. There is a suggestion in the word 'content', placed in opposition to 'pleased' of an increasing preoccupation with day-to-day comforts rather than new experience or a complex emotional life. The phrase '[y]ou are not the same person' confirms this change of identity. Ownership of place is suggested by 'your own bit of' earth, but this is undermined by the idea of 'coming down to' this territory and the ever-narrowing circles, which suggest restriction rather than empowerment. Concern about loss of freedom is certainly evident. The paralysis implicit in the similes of the dog and the rat and the image of the world 'shrinking' portray old age as a restrictive, frightening experience. It appears to be a stage in life during which one exists in suspension between life and death, not progressing forwards but engaged in repetitive, futile action. Lack of progression is also suggested by genealogical ideas of tracing and working back to 'the sources'. And because Barker uses a definite article ('the') rather than continuing in second person ('your') it is not clear whether the sources being traced belong to an individual or a collective history. For Barker, then, ideas of ageing

¹ Barker, 'Commonplace Book' (black loose leaf memo notebook), c. 1964-73, p. 10, box 6, folder 7, HRHRC.

intersect with concerns about place and past time. These concerns are particularly important to Barker's final book, *The Haunt* (1999), which is the focus of this chapter.

Barker was about fifty when she wrote this passage in her commonplace book.² Despite her rather cynical take on getting older, she lived for another thirty years and wrote twelve more books before dying on the 21st February 2002, aged eighty-four. Written when she was in her late seventies, *The Haunt* sketches a nuanced and complex picture of ageing, partly derived from Barker's own experiences in later life. This chapter is informed by a distinction between ideas of 'getting' old and 'growing' old, notions which, according to William L. Randall and Elizabeth McKim, respectively carry associations of passivity and action. They argue that ageing, when conceived as passively 'getting' old, 'is a tragedy of accumulating deficits, diminishing reserves, and deteriorating attractiveness and strength: nothing more than denouement'.³ By contrast, narratives of 'growing' older emphasise movement and progress rather than decline and resolution. The passage Barker wrote in middle-age, though it begins with the phrase 'growing older', is primarily a narrative of passive ageing and decline, 'getting old'. By contrast, *The Haunt* tells stories of growing old as well as getting old, portraying ageing as a process of development *and* a process of decline, and suggesting that although new stages of life may offer novel experiences and ways of thinking, the idealisation of retirement or the notion of an ideal old age are as superficial as the conception of the ideal child. With its suggestion of the potential for growth in ageing, *The Haunt* may be read as an example of what Margaret Morganroth Gullette calls 'progress narrative', a genre 'in which the implicit meanings of aging [include] survival, resilience, recovery, and development'.⁴ On the other hand, *The Haunt* is preoccupied with the way in which history loops back on itself and the ways in which the experiences of one generation may 'live on' in the next. With this in mind, ideas of 'growing' old and 'progress

² Barker wrote the passage in the commonplace book she used between 1964 and 1973, meaning that it is likely she wrote it when aged between 46 and 55.

³ William L. Randall and Elizabeth McKim, *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4.

⁴ Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged By Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 17. Gullette acknowledges the limitations of the term 'progress narrative', conceding that 'the life-course opposition of progress and decline constrains narrative options in our culture' but argues that until the binary is dismantled 'progress narrative' is 'the only apparent alternative to decline'. (Ibid., p. 19.)

narrative' must be used with caution because, as well as running the risk of idealising old age, they carry the sense of a teleological progressive history which seems ill-suited to the preoccupations of *The Haunt*.

I begin with Barker's response to ageing, first, because of the associations she makes between age and place and space and, second, because her view of ageing is typical of the way in which many adults think about getting older. In the first section of what follows I consider why old age and childhood are so often conceived of using spatial language, proposing that this figuring reveals an anxiety about the borders between different categories of age. The 'country' of old age, I argue, is often figured as 'foreign', other to adult identity; as Barker puts it, '[y]ou are no longer the same person'. This othering of old age mirrors the constructions of the child as 'other' examined previously, and therefore develops earlier arguments about the way in which the child is constructed in relation to, and against, adult identity. I go on to address concepts of age, place and space in *The Haunt*, arguing that the novel is concerned with the ways in which the spaces of adult and child are delineated and maintained. These ideas are explored through the pairing of newly-retired Owen Grierson and his next-door neighbour, six-year-old James Hartop. The role reversal in this relationship troubles the boundaries of categories of age: the space of childhood is invaded by the adult and vice versa. Thus, the relationship between Owen and James explores oppositions of young and old by rendering the spatial barriers of age unstable.

Just as age and ageing are conceived of in terms of place, so place is understood in relation to human ageing and relationships between past and present. The second section considers the ways in which places and people may be haunted by their historical past. *The Haunt* contains a number of stories that gradually overlap, episodes in the lives of an assortment of characters of various ages.⁵ Connecting these human life stories, a narrative of Cornwall as an ancient place of

⁵ A few of these characters are native to Cornwall: a young boy, James Hartop and his mother, Angela; Betty, a teenage hotel maid; and, in the central story, the elderly Miss Pendennis, encountered by hotelier Ernie Clapham during a boyhood holiday. Most are guests at the Bellechasse hotel: painter Charlie Olssen; Senga, a journalist from London; Maurice Piper, an agony uncle; paranormal investigator Felicia Soulsby and her husband, George; holiday-makers, Antony and Pam Wallington; and disabled antiquarian, Gilbert Eashing.

'primordial forests' runs through the novel. Barker's epigraph for *The Haunt* reads: 'At the heart of our woods still lies the germ of the great forest', an image that resembles Freud's metaphor of the mind in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). The 'germ' of *The Haunt* is a story set in the Second World War which concerns the death of a German pilot on the site of the Bellechasse hotel, where much of the action of Barker's novel takes place. This story and the book's original title, *The Place*, reveal *The Haunt's* preoccupation with how traces of the ancient and primitive survive in the modern, domesticated landscape and the ways in which people may be haunted by the barbarism of past history.⁶ Drawing on ideas of the inherited shared unconscious, I introduce Barker's notion of 'retropulsion' or 'pushing backwards', the sense of being involuntarily plunged backwards into the past. This is similar to the idea of the repression and return of the individual and collective past in psychoanalysis and the modernist notion of involuntary memory. Through moments of retropulsion, *The Haunt* stages the ways in which the past returns in moments, and time loops and repeats. Finally, the book problematises the equivalence of the child with the primitive, aggressive unconscious.

The third section focuses on one particular 'moment', a passage in the novel when Owen experiences what appears to be a Romantic epiphany. I propose that the novel's engagement with Romantic views of selfhood is signalled by James, a hooting 'Boy of Winander' figure. Taking Barker's cue I read *The Haunt* in the light of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, arguing that the novel engages critically with Wordsworthian constructions of childhood. James's presence during Owen's epiphanic experience makes it difficult to read: is this a genuine moment of movement and change for Owen? Or is the idea of Romantic epiphany undermined and revealed to be superficial and inert? I argue the latter, proposing that just as *The Haunt* calls into question the function of the idealised child in Wordsworthian 'spots of time', so Barker's novel problematises Owen's conception of an 'ideal' old age full of new insights and experiences.

In the final section I revisit Barker's notion of 'retropulsion', arguing that this idea sheds light on the assumed connections between old age, physical immobility

⁶ Barker, Draft of *The Place*, March 1997, box 3, folder 3, HRHRC.

and mental stasis. These ideas are examined through the character of Gilbert Eashing, who embodies what Haim Hazan calls the 'structural immobility' of old age. The construction of old age as static and intransigent is challenged by an anti-retropulsive moment in *The Haunt* in which the present cuts through Eashing's solipsistic focus on the past. This is triggered by Eashing's friendship with Betty, suggesting the importance of intergenerational relationships to both children and the aged. I go on to examine the distance between *The Haunt* and a 'typical' book of old age, suggesting a connection between Barker's experiences of ageing and her rejection of the conventions of fiction written by older people. Alongside this I discuss the book's staging, through its formal structure, of the relationships between the past and the present of ageing identity, showing how the form of *The Haunt* puts emphasis on the imbrication of different stages of life (childhood, middle-age, old age) rather than their opposition to one another. *The Haunt* resists and undermines stereotypes of old age and childhood, and thus enables us to draw a more complex and rounded picture of these stages of life.

I. Age and Place

In *The Go-Between* (1953), a novel about his childhood, L. P. Hartley writes: '[t]he past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'.⁷ May Sarton adapts the phrase, observing in *As We Are Now* (1973) that 'old age is [...] a foreign country with an unknown language'.⁸ In this section I propose that the language of age is one of place. I argue that much writing about old age employs a metaphorical language that conceives of ageing spatially, and that older people are associated with particular spaces and places. As suggested in earlier chapters, this is also true of childhood, a phase of life conceived of in spatial as well as chronological terms. Both old age and childhood are figured as 'foreign' countries, separate realms, marginal stages of life that are assigned their own particular places and spaces. Viewing childhood and old age in relation to place emphasises the ways in which both categories have been

⁷ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 1953 (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 5.

⁸ May Sarton, *As We Are Now*, 1973 (London: Women's Press, 1992), p. 17.

constructed as 'other' to middle-aged adult identity, 'foreign' places that are separated or closed off from 'normal' adult experience.⁹

We find the language of place in narratives of old age in popular culture, in academic writing that takes ageing as its subject, and in literary accounts of ageing. In his research on the use of spatial metaphors as images of ageing, Andrew Blaikie highlights phrases such as 'life's journey', 'going downhill', 'reaching a crossroads' and 'mapping retirement'.¹⁰ Two recent examples from academic writing about the elderly include the phrases 'boundaries of transitions', 'late life as a negotiated terrain', 'pathways across the lifecourse' and 'mapping the contours' of care; they discuss the 'landscapes', 'sites' and 'shifting topology' of care and the idea of 'ageing in place'.¹¹ Blaikie argues that ageing identity is framed by place, with particular places such as seaside resorts and nursing homes being associated with the elderly.¹² Indeed, titles of novels about ageing often signal their preoccupation with a particular place: Elizabeth Taylor's *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont, Gorleston* by Henry Sutton, or Penelope Lively's *The Road to Lichfield*.¹³

Children are also expected to reside in particular places, and spatial language and preoccupation with place feature in writing about and for children. The phrase 'world of childhood' is common in popular culture, and academic studies of childhood often discuss the child in relation to particular environments: the home, the nursery, the school, the playground, and the garden. Susan Honeyman points out that children in literature are often situated in particular places, observing that: '[f]ictional children... often have a magical place to visit, inhabit, explore, or even rule. [...] The most popular landscapes are the garden and remote island, but all of these childhood spaces share one quality – they are clearly bound and inaccessible to

9 I use the term 'middle-aged' adults to mean adults who are neither children nor old people. These adults might also be called 'mainstream' in the sense that their position is opposed to the marginal positions of children and old people.

10 Andrew Blaikie, 'Imagined Landscapes of Age and Identity', in G. J. Andrews and D. R. Phillips, eds., *Ageing and Place* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 164-75, pp. 164-165.

11 See Amanda Grenier, *Transitions and the Lifecourse: Challenging the Constructions of 'Growing Old'* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2012), pp. 9, 11, 12; Christine Milligan, *There's No Place Like Home: Place and Care in an Ageing Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 9, 8, 20, 1.

12 Blaikie, 'Imagined Landscapes of Age and Identity', p. 169.

13 Mike Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), pp. 20-21.

adults'.¹⁴ As observed earlier, under the influence of Wordsworth's *Ode* the Victorians imagined childhood as the Garden of Eden, a place to which adults cannot return, a stage of life they have lost. Honeyman argues that '[a]dults imagine such inaccessible spaces in order to be the exception to the rule- the adult who has access'.¹⁵ She proposes that 'we spatialize childhood to receive us by creating escapist fantasy worlds. Such spaces reflect an increased awareness of the inaccessibility of that inner identity we call childhood'.¹⁶

Both childhood and old age are imagined as places closed off and separate from middle-aged adult experience but, unlike childhood, old age is not likely to be a place in which fantasies of visitation, inhabitation and exploration are based. Whereas adults desire to access realms of childhood, they do not wish to enter the spaces and places of old age. Haim Hazan argues that even though 'a host of socio-psychological forces operate to remove aged people from the rest of society and to assign them to a symbolic and physical enclave [...], the awareness that most of us will eventually occupy that enclave is ever-present. The sense of continuity of self is betrayed by the fear of 'being there''.¹⁷ This fear may be seen in the continual separation of 'old people' from, and by, those who do not consider themselves to be old. The elderly are not only expected to reside in particular places, such as retirement homes, there is an assumption that they *belong* there, and prefer to associate with those of their own age in special designated places. They may be subject to discrimination if they are found 'out of place' in the spaces of middle-aged adult society. Similarly, although adults desire access to the spaces and places of childhood, children are not permitted access to certain 'adult' locations and environments. Thus, adult society allows neither children nor old people free access to spaces and places reserved for middle-aged adults.

The tendency to understand age categories through metaphors of place and space suggests an anxiety about how old age or childhood should be defined. On the one hand, thinking of old age or childhood spatially as a 'landscape' or 'terrain' with

14 Susan Honeyman, *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 51.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Hazan, *Old Age*, p. 3.

borders allows it to be more easily comprehended. Jenny Hockey and Allison James note ‘the centrality of metaphor to understanding the life course,’ arguing that ‘the ageing process may only be grasped through metaphor, for it is through this that meaning can be given to bodily experiences which are both intangible and ambiguous’.¹⁸ On the other hand, the idea of old age or childhood as a ‘place’ counteracts ambiguity, making it easier to view old people and children as different from, and ‘other’ to, adult identity. Using metaphors of place and space to refer to old age in particular suggests a desire to separate the inhabitants of this marginal ‘country’ from the domain inhabited by middle-aged adults. *The Haunt* problematises this kind of oppositional thinking. The current examination of the spatial conceptualisation of age thus builds on earlier discussions of innocence and experience. For Barker, there is no possibility of choosing between these states because neither means anything in isolation, only in relation to one another. Innocence and experience ‘merge’, ‘invert’, ‘infiltrate’, and ‘transmute’; they are necessary to one another. Just as Barker rejects innocence so she undermines the tendency to view categories of age as ‘countries’ that are separate from and different to one another. *The Haunt* emphasises the imbrication of individuals of different ages on a personal level and, by extension, the inter-connectedness of different ‘categories’ of age on a social level.

In *The Haunt* ideas of place, space, and age are explored through the pairing of Owen Grierson and James Hartop. Owen and his wife Elissa are newly-retired Londoners who have relocated to a Cornish village in order to begin ‘a new life’.¹⁹ As Owen and Elissa move in to their new home they are observed by James, the son of their neighbour, Angela Hartop. Later, exploring the overgrown garden of his new house and having serious doubts about the wisdom of the move, Owen comes face-to-face with James:

He stamped through a bank of thistles, found himself facing a fence
and a child, looking over.
‘Hoo,’ said the child.

¹⁸ Jenny Hockey and Allison James, *Social Identities across the Life Course* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 24.

¹⁹ Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 1.

'We're your new neighbours,' said Owen.
 'Hoo, hoo, hoo.'
 It was definitely a hoot.²⁰

The fence represents the boundary between the spaces of adult and child, a boundary that is problematised throughout *The Haunt*. The fence separates James from the 'wild' garden with 'breast high' grass that has formerly been his territory.²¹ And so it seems that the garden, the space of the child, has been invaded by an adult. When Owen closes the gap in the fence, he makes excuses to Angela: 'I did it because my garden's no place for a child, there are too many thistles and stinging nettles'.²² Owen's assertion that the garden is 'no place for a child' appears to disrupt the usual order of things.

The statement is also disingenuous. Owen's emphasis on the uncultivated state of the garden suggests the 'wild' character of the child who recently inhabited it, and by now the reader, like Owen, knows that James is certainly at home in the garden and the wood. Indeed, he regularly goes to the wood alone and his hooting suggests that he is familiar with the moorhens at the pool.²³ Owen, on the other hand, finds 'the superabundance of nature hard to take' and tends to misread it.²⁴ For example, when he first explores the wood he encounters 'a gamey smell' that he cannot identify. He sees white roses and thinks '[t]hat's nice', '[b]ut when he drew level the flowers were the feathers torn from the half-eaten corpse of a bird'.²⁵ Owen's naïve imaginings about nature as a garden filled with 'nice' flowers are halted by a scene of death and decay. His naivety is emphasised when he worries that the sight of the bird corpse is unsuitable for James, who does not need to be protected from the natural world. On the contrary, it is clear that this child knows more than the adult, with James correcting Owen about the moorhens, which Owen mistakes for black ducks.²⁶ This role reversal draws attention to the arbitrary nature of the construction of age categories. James, who has grown up in the country and has

20 Ibid., p. 4.

21 Ibid., pp. 3, 4.

22 Ibid., p. 41.

23 Ibid., p. 27.

24 Ibid., p. 26.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 29.

superior knowledge of the natural world, is shut out of the garden, which has suddenly become 'no place for a child'. Conversely, Owen, a city-dweller, who has gained his first garden aged sixty and has no knowledge of how to manage it, feels the need to exclude James because he is a child. This suggests the fragility of the adult/child boundary represented by the fence. Persons assigned to the categories of 'child' or 'adult' do not in fact form a homogenous group of people but will differ wildly from one another, meaning that the distinctions between adult and child seem arbitrary when one encounters a precocious child or an infantile adult. Owen's and James's placing in the roles of 'adult' and 'child' suggests the instability of these positions.

If we read the fence as a symbol of the boundaries of childhood space then James may be read as a child who does not know his place. When Owen first encounters James the boy is 'looking over' the fence, already troubling the newly-imposed adult-child boundary. He frequently disobeys his mother's instructions, not only venturing into the wood and visiting the pool alone but also refusing to be shut out of Owen's garden: 'He had found – Owen rather thought he had made – a gap in the fence and crept through whenever Owen was in the garden'.²⁷ The gap in the fence signals James's refusal to be restricted by his status as a child, his breaching of the adult-child divide. Indeed, as his and Owen's relationship becomes closer, James is revealed to be ever more precocious and demanding, and Owen starts to see him as a threat, calling him an 'adversary'.²⁸ He is figured as a transgressive person and Owen is keen to put a stop to, perhaps even punish, James's behaviour:

The boy must have been warned not to intrude: he put his head and shoulders through the gap in the fence and hung there, watching. It put Owen in mind of someone in the stocks.

When James had gone to bed he went out and closed the gap with a plank driven into the ground and lashed to the end posts. He felt mean doing it, and something else – a generalised discontent; throwback, he supposed, to his misgivings about the wisdom of coming here to live.²⁹

27 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

When James lurks in the gap he reminds Owen of ‘someone in the stocks’, reinforcing the idea of James’s transgression. Owen repels James’s invasion with a gesture described in aggressive language: the ‘driving’ of the plank into the ground and the ‘lashing’ evoke the language of corporal punishment (people in the stocks may be lashed) and even carry connotations of crucifixion. Chris Jenks argues, ‘we might suggest that children either occupy designated spaces, that is they are placed, as in nurseries or schools, or they are conspicuous by their inappropriate or precocious invasion of adult territory. Childhood, then, is that status of personhood which is by definition often in the wrong place, like the parental bedroom, Daddy’s chair, the public house or even crossing the busy road.’³⁰ And indeed, after James is shut out of the garden, he begins to appear in places ever more unsuitable ‘for a child’. Owen finds him sitting in the middle of the road. On another occasion, when Owen and James’s mother, Angela, who have started an affair, are embracing in her bedroom, James is found spying on them from inside her bed.³¹

The Haunt’s foregrounding of the image of the fence reveals a preoccupation with the ways in which adult space and childhood space are constructed and suggests the instability of their borders. A child ‘out of place’ is threatening to adult identity. When James ‘h[angs] there, watching’, his suspension on the fence not only indicates the fragility of the child subject but the precariousness of the adult self. Indeed, the instability of James’s position is mirrored by Owen’s position as a man who does not know his place in the world. Owen, too, transgresses through his affair with Angela. He becomes a father-figure to James and a husband-figure to Angela, moving him from one stage of life, the so-called ‘beginning’ of old age, to a stage usually associated with middle-age. His doubt about the wisdom of coming to Cornwall to live suggests not only a doubt about place but an anxiety about his position in life. His friendship with James at first appears to resolve his doubts but when he closes the gap in the fence and bars James’s entry his discontent returns.

The relationship between James and Owen raises important questions about how the boundaries of age are delineated and maintained. The metaphor of the fence as a barrier, both breached and reconstructed, between the spaces of

³⁰ Jenks, *Childhood*, pp. 73-74.

³¹ Barker, *The Haunt*, pp. 75, 111.

adulthood and childhood reveals the instability of notions of age-specific space and an anxiety about constructions of age. But, as I will show, not only are notions of age always bound up with discussions of place, they also raise related questions about the ageing *of* place and the relationships between past and present. The way Barker structures *The Haunt* around a short story set in the Second World War is key to understanding the ‘haunt’ of the book’s title and its staging of the presence of the past by way of its intertwined, multi-perspectival narratives.

II. Haunted Places

Oddly perhaps, Barker’s epigraph for *The Haunt* is a quotation from David Russell, the National Trust Forestry Advisor: ‘At the heart of our woods still lies the germ of the great forest.’ The distinction made here between ‘woods’ and ‘forest’ is significant. The use of ‘woods’ implies their modernity and, especially because of the possessive ‘our’, that they are man-made. In contrast, the forest is associated with the past, a place once ‘great’ but now buried within the man-made landscape. The significance of the phrase for Barker is that ‘the germ of the great forest’ is not buried – it will escape and return. This return is what we see in Barker’s book, one aspect of the ‘haunt’ of the novel’s title.³² In *The Haunt* there is a primitivism at the heart of the domesticated Cornish landscape. The wild, sublime aspects of the landscape, having come first, never went away but remained, lingering, haunting.

Barker’s epigraph to *The Haunt* is very like the metaphor of ‘the Eternal City’ of Rome, used by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) to describe conservation in the mind. Freud observes that ‘much that is ancient [is] still buried in the soil or under the modern buildings of the town’ and imagines what Rome would look like if the ancient buildings rose up beside the modern ones.³³ The city would then resemble, he argues, ‘a mental entity [...], in which nothing once constructed had perished and all the earlier stages of development had survived alongside the

32 Another epigraph for *The Haunt* could be Owen’s statement on the second page: ‘Though you drive out Nature with a pitchfork, yet will she always return. Horace, 65 BC.’ (Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 2.)

33 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 7.

latest'.³⁴ Even though Freud later abandons his metaphor the implications are clear. If, for Freud, everything formed in the mind 'survives in some way or other, and is capable under certain conditions of being brought to light again', then the natural aggression of humankind which lies beneath the thin veneer of civilisation will always return given the right conditions: 'I take the view that the tendency to aggression is an original, autonomous disposition in man, [which] represents the greatest obstacle to civilization'.³⁵

Similarly, in *The Haunt*, the forest beneath the wood represents the underlying presence of primitive barbarism in human civilisation. In the typescript of her 1984 Arvon Foundation talk, mentioned previously, Barker wrote: '[t]he first story was written over 35 years ago. It appeared in a book entitled Innocents – with a 't', mind, because that's important. I don't believe there is any general condition of unblemished purity. *The germ of the contrary, the other black thing, exists in all of us, it is of our essence*'.³⁶ Just as the 'germ' of the great forest exists at the heart of the wood, so a 'germ' of aggression and violence lies at the heart of humanity, 'the other black thing' dwells in us all. Here Barker proposes a view of human nature that is not only similar to Freud's but also recalls Klein's argument, quoted in chapter two, that peace was impossible because the innate aggressive instincts of individuals had been underestimated. Like Freud and Klein, Barker emphasises that barbarism is an essential characteristic of humanity, which is perhaps why she adds that she 'can't define the ethics of [her theme of innocence and experience] because it hasn't any'.³⁷

The Haunt is structured around a short story, a flashback section in which Ernie Clapham is told the tale of a German pilot who dies in the oak tree in the garden of the Bellechasse during the Second World War. This dark story appears to have been conceived prior to the rest of the narratives that make up *The Haunt*.³⁸ This story is both the 'germ' of the book and the source of 'the haunt'. It begins when Ernie, on a childhood holiday to Cornwall, encounters the elderly reclusive Miss

34 Ibid., p. 8.

35 Ibid., pp. 7, 56.

36 Barker, Arvon Foundation tutorial, p. 3, my italics.

37 Ibid.

38 See Barker's 1988 diary used as a notebook, in which she notes a reminder to check historical details of the story for accuracy. Barker, Black 1988 Diary, box 6, folder 8, HRHRC.

Pendennis. She makes Ernie promise not to climb in the large oak tree in her garden and he wonders why. ('She probably thought he would fall.'³⁹) In fact, Miss Pendennis insists that Ernie avoid the tree because it is the scene of the death of a German pilot in which she participated years before:

'That's where he died.' Ernie turned to find her close behind him. 'Koenig,' she said, 'in that tree.' [...]

'He was shot down, his parachute caught in the branches. He hung there three days and nights, he couldn't free himself, both his arms were broken. I think he must have had internal injuries as well, he bled so much. He cried, every time I went to him he cried, pleading, like a child to its mother.' [...]

'I didn't tell anybody he was there. The beach was mined and the creek fenced off with barbed wire, so no one came this way. I left him to die. After the atrocities he and his kind committed should I have had pity? I hardened my heart, my heart was like a stone.'⁴⁰

The fact that Koenig died in the huge ancient oak tree is significant because the oak is the English national tree and has been used historically as a symbol of England. So Miss Pendennis's individual act of barbarity, the novel suggests, is representative of wartime violence and destruction in general, on all sides of the conflict. Indeed, after telling Ernie the story of the pilot's death and justifying her actions, Miss Pendennis adds: '[a]nd then we bombed Dresden, thousands of women and children were slaughtered and that beautiful city was razed to the ground. I thought enough is enough, one more is too much, and I went out to him. It was too late, he had strangled in the cords of his parachute'.⁴¹

The image of Koenig's slow and agonising death is echoed by that of a sapling being 'squeezed dry' in artist Charlie Olssen's sketch of a cliff-top tree, 'a skinny sapling lodged in a crevice and clinging in virtual extremis to the rock face':

He said, 'See this tree? Its guts are being squeezed dry and it's got nowhere else to grow.' He sketched a penumbra round the tree, intensifying it. 'There's an altar-piece by a German Renaissance painter showing an arm and a leg sticking out from under a stone slab. The

39 Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 65.

40 Ibid., pp. 71-72.

41 Ibid., p. 72.

unquiet grave. It was done for the chapel of a hospital order and the sick saw it every time they went to pray for a cure. [...] This little tree has been buried alive and is trying to escape.⁴²

The image of the unquiet grave is significant when considered in relation to Koenig. His grave is also 'unquiet' in the sense that what he did and what was done to him cannot be forgotten or erased. History is preserved. It is transmitted via texts and artefacts such as Koenig's diary which Miss Pendennis shares with Ernie. It is passed on by way of myths of place, in which certain natural objects such as trees acquire special significance as sites of historical events. *The Haunt* suggests that past events cannot be laid to rest because they live on in people's minds, passing from one generation to the next. Miss Pendennis tells Ernie: 'The evil those men did lives on in all of us. Even you, blameless child'.⁴³ The phrase 'blameless child' is significant given my earlier discussion of the essential aggression of humankind and the 'haunting' of human civilisation by the underlying presence of primitive barbarism. In her Arvon talk Barker states: 'I don't believe there is any general condition of unblemished purity.' In *The Haunt* the evil done by previous generations 'lives on' in the child. The suggestion is that the child is not 'blameless', 'unblemished' or 'pure' but is tarnished by 'the other black thing'. Barker's figuring of the child speaks to the ideas of an inherited shared unconscious I discuss later in relation to the 'haunting' of Pam Wallington.

The structuring of *The Haunt* around the wartime story of Koenig's death allows the book to stage the ways in which the present reaches back into the past and the past intrudes into the present. On the margin of an early draft typescript of *The Haunt*, Barker noted the sentence: 'Retropulsion (pushing backwards). Tendency of the paralysed to walk backwards. (dict.)'⁴⁴ The OED definition of retropulsion does carry this sense of '[a] tendency to walk backwards involuntarily or in an uncontrolled manner', although it has this 'occurring in parkinsonism'.⁴⁵ The word also means '[t]he action of pushing something backwards' and also carries a now rare

42 Ibid., pp. 57-58.

43 Ibid.

44 Barker, 'Haunt I (Old) 26.5.94', p. 16 a), box 2, folder 7, HRHC.

45 "retropulsion, n.". OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/164543?redirectedFrom=retropulsion> [accessed March 10, 2015].

connotation of the 'inward movement of a disease' that is described as being similar to blood poisoning.⁴⁶ Retropulsion is important to *The Haunt* because of the text's preoccupation with, first, the processes by which underlying, primitive elements of the past may be transmitted into the modern, 'civilized' world and, second, the ways in which the 'civilized' adult mind 'pushes back' (represses) what is primitive and infantile, only for these half-buried elements to return unannounced in memories and dreams.

The Haunt's preoccupation with involuntary memory and unexpected return suggests the influence not only of Freud but of modernist fiction. Stevenson notes the challenge to conventional temporality posed by Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), arguing that, for Freud, 'past and present are crucially connected, though not necessarily in chronological sequence'.⁴⁷ Freud's influence, argues Stevenson, may be detected in the fiction of the period, including Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927), which I discuss in a moment. The influence of modernist fiction on *The Haunt* may be seen in the book's sense of the presence of the past, and time in the mind. The book contains moments of time in which the narrative flow is interrupted (frozen, paralysed) and a character is involuntarily plunged backwards (retropulsed) into their own past or the past time of the place. In addition, the intersecting narratives and shifting perspectives stage ideas of time looping and repeating. Nearly all of the characters in *The Haunt* experience nightmares and hallucinations and witness supernatural occurrences. As one character, Antony Wallington puts it: '[t]his place brings out the morbid streak [...] There's Olssen painting monsters, Mrs Clapham attacked by her own saucepan, the Soulsbys are trying to work miracles and a deaf woman heard wolves'.⁴⁸ This gives the impression of a shared consciousness of the history of Cornwall and a sense that the past time of the place is somehow being incorporated into these individual selves.

This is especially the case for Pam Wallington. She has repeated visions that are centred on the area around the Bellechasse hotel and cannot master her

46 Ibid.

47 Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, p. 113.

48 Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 183.

ambivalence towards the place: 'She sighed. 'This lovely place worries me. The loveliness doesn't go deep. [...] Yesterday I was lying on the beach watching the gulls [...] Then I saw a huge great face, up on the cliff, leering at me. [...] hundreds of feet of face in the rock'.⁴⁹ In addition to these visions, Pam has a recurring dream which recalls *The Haunt's* central story through its focus on the creek next to the oak tree where Koenig died:

When Pam Wallington first dreamed the dream it stayed with her all day: nothing else could get through. She kept coming over sick and faint, her body behaving as if it was trying to expel something. She had believed it was only one night's nightmare, but all that day was aware of imperfection, as if she had the power of seeing to a faulty source.

The dream kept recurring, undimmed. She tried recapturing the worst moments in her mind, hoping to see them in a different light. Because there must be hope, the source which had produced dinosaurs and phased them out in favour of humans must get it right in the end.⁵⁰

What the 'source' is, is not entirely clear. It appears to be a primordial force responsible for the creation and evolution of life on earth. But it is also 'faulty' and Pam's dream has enabled her to see this 'imperfection'. It inhabits her mind, repeating, blocking all else, and at the same time incorporating the fault or imperfection into her body. The sickness Pam experiences brings to mind morning sickness and thus pregnancy, and the sense that her body is 'trying to expel something' foregrounds the foetus figure Pam later sees.

The image of an ancient force existing within the human mind recalls modernist conceptions of time in which it is represented not as linear but rather as fragmentary, and in which a moment from the past may be triggered by experience and recalled through memory into the mind at any time. Modernist texts aim to represent these fragments in the mind of past, present and future moments, thoughts and memories. The passage in *The Haunt* that describes Pam's dream as inhabiting her mind and body evokes the famous moment of involuntary memory in

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* when Marcel bites into the tea-soaked Madeleine. Stevenson argues that this moment, which transports Marcel back to an 'identical' childhood moment, shows past time 'continuing to exist not only in the recesses of the mind, but virtually in the body – digested, deeply engrained, within the physical structure of the self'.⁵¹ For Pam, as for Marcel, past time exists 'within the physical structure of the self'. The difference, of course, is that Pam's dream recalls a moment in the past of the place rather than a moment from her own individual life. This is a moment of 'retropulsion'; Pam is compelled to move backwards as the past returns and inhabits her body.

The sense that Pam incorporates into the structure of her self a trace of these events, or rather that the trace is already there, again evokes Freud's figuration of the mind in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*. I want to read this moment in the light of ideas of an inherited shared unconscious. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) Freud states that 'what may be operative in an individual's psychical life may include not only what he has experienced himself but also things that were innately present in him at his birth, elements with a phylogenetic origin – an *archaic heritage*'.⁵² He goes further than this, though, proposing 'that the archaic heritage of human beings comprises not only dispositions but also subject-matter – memory-traces of the experience of earlier generations'.⁵³ Freud suggests that the universal symbolism in language and in dreams gives evidence to support this, as do the extreme reactions of neurotic children 'which seem unjustified in the individual case and only become intelligible phylogenetically'.⁵⁴ In 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis' Freud argues that: 'dreams bring material to light which can come neither from the dreamer's mature life nor from his forgotten childhood. We are forced to regard this as part of an *archaic* inheritance that the child, influenced by the experience of his forebears, brings into the world with him prior to having and experiences of his own.'⁵⁵ Freud argues that the material in dreams may be explained with reference to 'the earliest

51 Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, pp. 93, 94.

52 Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays' (1939), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII (1937-1939)*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 3-137, p. 98.

53 *Ibid.* p. 99.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

55 Freud, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis', p. 21.

legends of mankind and in surviving customs' and concludes that dreams are therefore 'a source of human prehistory that we should not dismiss out of hand'.⁵⁶

In *The Haunt*, Pam's dreams reflect the 'memory-traces of the experience of earlier generations', bringing to the present a trace of the events of the past – the events that occurred at the Bellechasse, as well as those which occurred across the world during the war. Pam's dream of the 'faulty source' is joined by one about a foetus. After having the dream, she leaves her bed, goes to the creek and looks into a boat with a broken deck:

[...] visible through the gaps in the bottom boards was a wash of cloudy yellow liquid.

The dream began. Beneath the surface of the liquid, only just beneath – it was so light, weighed next to nothing – was the thing she had been obliged to cradle in her arms night after night. It was coloured by the waters in its wooden womb: it looked up, eyeless, stretched its buds of arms in entreaty, turned its faceless head and cried, soundlessly, from a non-existent mouth.⁵⁷

After her first dream Pam exhibits symptoms that resemble morning sickness and her body 'tr[ies] to expel something'. *The Haunt* thus suggests that this 'eyeless', 'faceless', voiceless 'thing' that Pam sees under the boat is born of the 'imperfection' of the 'faulty source' in Pam's previous dream. This source, which 'produced dinosaurs and phased them out in favour of humans', appears to be evolutionary. What it produces is a baby born too soon. This image of a premature infant, conceived by an ancient source, lying 'only just beneath' the surface of the liquid is significant because of what the child represents in psychoanalysis: the primitive and aggressive unconscious. If, as Freud suggests, the (ancient, primitive, infantile) unconscious lurks in the depths of the (modern, 'civilised', adult) conscious mind then this equates the child with the old and the adult with the new. *The Haunt* suggests that if we follow this logic then the child is not innocent or ignorant or 'blameless' because it is born bearing the trace of the 'evil' of previous generations which 'lives on' inside the child. This trace or imperfection, *The Haunt* suggests, produces a

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁷ Barker, *The Haunt*, pp. 105-106.

distorted infant. This recalls Shuttleworth's argument, quoted in chapter one, that '[p]sychiatric models' create 'a new evolutionary rendering of the biblical notion that the sins of the fathers will be visited on the sons'.⁵⁸ Perhaps, though, the infant is distorted not because the sins of its forebears live on in its mind but by the *idea* that this is the case – the idea of the child as 'the father of the man'.

The structuring of *The Haunt* around a story which recalls the barbarism of the Second World War is related to the book's preoccupations with the relationships between past and present and the identities not only of people but of places. The distinction made in the epigraph to *The Haunt* between domestic man-made woodland and 'the great forest' is crucial to Barker's understanding of the duality of the landscape of Cornwall and, in turn, the divided nature of human identity. For Barker, Cornwall is an ambiguous place, at once beautiful and grotesque, familiar and strange. This duality of place illuminates the complex, conflicted nature of childhood and of ageing identity. *The Haunt* stages the ways in which the present and the past (of people and of places) are interlinked and cannot be separated. This in turn signals the book's interest in the deconstruction of oppositions of young and old and the assumed attributes of different ageing identities. In the following section I explore this further by returning to Owen and James. I argue that their relationship not only undermines the ideal of the innocent Romantic child but also explores the tensions between the idealisation of retirement and Owen's individual experience of this stage of life.

III. The Lingering Child

The Haunt begins as Owen and Elissa move into their new bungalow to begin retirement in rural Cornwall. Barker's decision to begin the novel at the start of the Griersons' retirement is significant, signalling a preoccupation with the tensions of this stage of life. Owen and Elissa are every bit the image of the 'ideal' retired couple. Positive and forward-looking, they reject the idea of retirement as the beginning of old age and see it instead as what Mike Hepworth calls 'a period of refurbishment'.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 353.

⁵⁹ Hepworth, 'Images of Ageing' in John Bond, Peter Coleman, and Sheila Peace, eds., *Ageing in Society: An Introduction to Social Gerontology* (London: Sage, 1993), pp. 304-332, p. 328.

Both feel that their move to Cornwall represents a new life: ‘It will be like turning a page,’ said Elissa’.⁶⁰ The idea of retirement as a new beginning replaces clichéd conceptions of this stage of life as the start of the ‘second childhood’ of old age, suggesting that it may be a time when individuals develop new ways of perceiving and contemplating things and forge new identities. However, the image of retirement as a ‘new beginning’ is itself a cliché, something that *The Haunt* registers and explores through its representation of an experience Owen has in nature that appears to be an epiphany.

The framing of Owen’s ‘epiphany’ by the presence of James, a hooting ‘Boy of Winander’ figure, encourages a reading of his experience in the light of William Wordsworth’s *Prelude*.⁶¹ Like the ‘Winander boy’, James hoots instead of speaking and roves alone in the woods that surround the village. The allusion is reinforced when James and Owen visit a pool in the village wood and James stands at the water’s edge hooting to the birds. In Wordsworth’s poem the boy: ‘Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls/That they might answer him’.⁶² By comparison, ‘James stooped, uttering the same watery cries as the moorhens’.⁶³ There is also an echo of the Winander boy in the description of James hanging in the gap in the fence: James ‘hung there, watching’; the Boy of Winander ‘hung/Listening’.⁶⁴ Furthermore, one of the important events in *The Prelude* is a drowning in Esthwaite’s Lake and around this point in *The Haunt* James ‘drowns’ in the pool.⁶⁵

Like Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, Owen undergoes a psychological crisis to which an epiphany appears to be the solution. Paul Maltby describes epiphany as ‘the convention of the sudden and momentary illumination’.⁶⁶ Martin Bidney agrees

60 Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 1.

61 The poem featuring the ‘Winander boy’, entitled ‘There was a Boy’, was composed in 1798, first published in 1800, and later published as part of the fifth book of *The Prelude* in 1850. Barker alludes to Wordsworth’s writing throughout *The Haunt*, most obviously in the title of the novel which refers to his prospectus to *The Recluse* (1814). Wordsworth describes ‘the Mind of Man’ as ‘My haunt, and the main region of my song’. (Wordsworth, ‘Prospectus to *The Recluse*’, in Abrams and Greenblatt, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, pp. 301-303, p. 302, Lines 40-41, my emphasis.)

62 Wordsworth, ‘The Boy of Winander’, in *The Prelude*, Book Fifth, Abrams and Greenblatt, eds., *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 343-344, p. 343, lines 375-390.

63 Barker, *The Haunt*, pp. 31-32.

64 Ibid., p. 39.

65 Ibid., p. 32.

66 Paul Maltby, *The Visionary Moment: A Postmodern Critique* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2002), p. 11.

that an epiphany is sudden and suggests that it is also 'a moment that is felt to be expansive, mysterious and intense'.⁶⁷ The convention originated with Wordsworth and is informed by the Romantic notion of 'Natural Supernaturalism', the sense that there is wonder, even divinity, in the everyday.⁶⁸ In *The Prelude*, as in much of Wordsworth's writing, childhood epiphanic moments or 'spots of time' are represented as an important source of adult identity. *The Prelude* depicts Wordsworth's psychological crisis, a reaction to the failure of the French Revolution. His recovery is made possible by the influence of a positive sublime and a return, by way of memory and imagination, to the lost past of childhood. The 'spots of time' described in the first books of *The Prelude* are drawn on as a source of recovery. They nourish and repair an adult imagination which has been depressed by 'false opinion', 'contentious thought' and the routine and trivia of everyday life. Spots of time are experiences by which, Wordsworth argues, 'our minds/Are nourished and invisibly repaired'; these moments, he emphasises, '[a]re scattered everywhere, taking their date/From our first childhood'.⁶⁹ For Wordsworth, childhood is a state to be idealised and drawn upon as a way of reconstructing the adult self.

Owen's crisis occurs as a result of his doubts about his retirement plans. His so-called 'recovery' is prompted by a moment that occurs during an expedition to a waterfall in the wood and bears all the hallmarks of an epiphany. It is worth quoting this episode in full because reading the entire passage enables us to see the way in which *The Haunt* frames Owen's 'epiphany' with the presence of James, which, I will argue, calls into question the nature of Owen's experience.

It was stock-still under these trees. Although a wind drove the clouds overhead, here below the dry twigs did not stir. But he saw something out of the corner of his eye, an extraneous flutter which ceased when he looked over his shoulder: it could have been a flash of light in his own eyeball.

The trees thinned, gave on to a field planted with low-growing green, a crop of some sort. Circling it, Owen was pleasantly surprised to come

67 Martin Bidney, *Patterns of Epiphany: From Wordsworth to Tolstoy, Pater, and Barrett Browning* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1997), p. 3.

68 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 65.

69 Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XI, in Wordsworth, ed., *The Prelude*, p. 478, lines 260-264, 273-275.

to a pool fringed with yellow irises and being musically replenished by the fall from a swift-running culvert.

He went to the brink, disturbing waterfowl which scrambled up the bank with fussy cries. Muddied, the water flowed into a still centre peppered with gnats.

In a relaxed mood, Owen tossed twigs into the gnats. Some twigs fell short, interrupting the music of the little waterfall. He took a stick and worked to clear them, dislodging a big stone. The fall fell stronger. When he lifted his stick from the depths it was draped with a shawl of brilliant green weed. The voice of the fall changed to a deeper, sweeter note; suddenly the water was shooting up at the sun. Splinters of light fell round him, the trees roared in the wind.

Like an ovation. Why not? Suddenly he felt wholly glad that they had come here to live. [...] He looked about to identify the factor which had resolved his doubts. There was nothing he could pass on to Elissa [...] As he turned to go he lifted his hand in salute, acknowledging benefit received.

On the way back he sighted someone under the trees, someone small, in a bright blue jump suit, running away.⁷⁰

Being sudden, Owen's experience fulfils one of the criteria of epiphany. It is marked by the sudden feeling of gladness Owen has about moving to Cornwall, preceded by a moment in which the water 'suddenly' shoots up at the sun. Owen's experience is also 'intense', 'expansive' and 'mysterious'.⁷¹ A psychological intensity is suggested by the physical force with which the water shoots up at the sun, by the mention of the sun itself (with its connotations of heat and fire) and by the falling 'splinters of light' that suggest an impact has taken place. Expansiveness is suggested by both the all-encompassing nature of the experience and its impact on Owen. He is surrounded by the light that falls around him and the noise of the trees roaring in the wind, which he likens to 'an ovation', suggesting that the trees are paying tribute. Owen's participation in this moment, which simply involves the lifting of a weed-draped stick 'from the depths', results in the resolution of his doubts, and therefore has a significance for him that resonates far beyond the actual experience. Owen's experience is thus characterised by a sense of mystery: the factor responsible for the resolution of his doubts cannot be identified and his experience cannot be explained rationally: 'There was nothing he could pass on to Elissa'.

⁷⁰ Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 27.

⁷¹ Bidney, *Patterns of Epiphany*, p. 3.

Owen's experience certainly seems to be an epiphany but there are some significant differences between it and Wordsworthian 'spots of time'. The most important of these is the way that Owen's experience is framed by James's presence in the wood. Before Owen's 'epiphany', just as he enters the wood, James appears as 'something out of the corner of [Owen's] eye, an extraneous flutter'.⁷² As Owen turns to leave the waterfall and salutes, James appears again: '[Owen] sighted someone under the trees, someone small, in a bright blue jump suit, running away'.⁷³ As I suggested earlier, *The Haunt* emphasises James's precocity and transgression, his invasion of adult space. So his peripheral presence during Owen's experience makes it difficult to read: is this a genuine moment of restoration for Owen? Or is the idea of Romantic epiphany being undermined and revealed to be superficial and inert? I suggest the latter reading. It is my contention that Barker's unchildish-child draws attention to and problematises the function of childhood in Wordsworth's 'spots of time'.

In *The Haunt*, childhood is not represented as a place to which adults may return and draw on for comfort and a sense of identity, as it is in *The Prelude*. In order for the child to provide a source of restoration for the adult experiencing psychological crisis, the meaning of 'child' must be fixed, it must mean particular things: innocence, tranquillity, and purity. As I noted earlier, Wordsworth conceives of the child as being divine, writing in his 'Ode': 'trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God'.⁷⁴ In contrast to the divine, 'visionary' child, he presents the blinkered adult: 'Inmate Man', who 'can see no more'.⁷⁵ The problem with this kind of construction is that it renders the meaning of 'child' static and inert, refusing to recognise the complexity and instability of the term. If instead the category of 'child' is unstable, if the child is a fragile subject who cannot be fixed as an innocent, tranquil being, then this in turn has implications for the stability of the adult subject, which is dependent for its meaning on the child. I propose that it is these ideas about the fragility of the child, and the subsequent instability of the adult self, that are being

72 Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 27.

73 Ibid.

74 Wordsworth, 'Ode', in Gill, ed., *Selected Poems*, p. 159, lines 64-65.

75 Ibid., pp. 157-160, lines 56, 82, 9.

considered in *The Haunt* when it evokes the Wordsworthian child and stages Owen's 'epiphany'. The reconstruction of Owen's adult identity is not aided by James. Instead it is repeatedly interrupted by an ever-present child who turns out not to be childish at all. For Barker, James is an anti-'Winander boy' figure: a child who invades the physical and mental spaces of adulthood, breaching the limits of 'the child' as constructed by adult imagination.

The representation of retirement in *The Haunt* is a second factor that suggests that Owen's experience undermines the Romantic epiphany. For the Griersons, ageing is a narrative of actively 'growing' older rather than passively 'getting' older. As I suggested earlier, they are positive and forward-looking, an 'ideal' retired couple. Owen appears to try to preserve this ideal even after he has started an affair with Angela. But there is an inauthenticity to his actions, and this extends to his experience of 'epiphany'. Abrams notes that Romantic conceptions of 'renovative' modes of perception, including the epiphany, place emphasis on seeing everyday things with 'the child's sense of wonder and novelty'.⁷⁶ The main obstacles to this, as noted above, are custom, habit and regularity. One might argue that, as a retired person, undergoing 'the... radical change of not having a job to go to', Owen has acquired a 'freshness' of perception, having been released from his regular customs and habits.⁷⁷ *The Haunt* undermines this view by representing Owen's experience as a 'perfect' epiphany. Owen goes into the woods plagued by doubts about the move to Cornwall and, by extension, his metaphorical and literal 'place' in life. At the end of his 'epiphany', which meets every criterion of the convention, he feels 'wholly glad that they had come here to live' and his doubts are 'resolved'. This idealised encounter with nature is so perfect that it appears staged, as though it is an experience Owen feels he should have rather than one he actually undergoes. My suggestion is that in addition to problematising the ideal Romantic child *The Haunt* calls into question the idealisation of retirement. Barker's novel puts emphasis on the tension between the Grierson's idealised image of retirement and their actual

⁷⁶ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 377; Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 378-9.

⁷⁷ Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 1.

experience of this stage of life, foregrounding the importance of individual experiences of age and ageing.

The Haunt's questioning of Romantic constructions of childhood and selfhood through its representation of the relationship between James and Owen enables us to view Owen's experience for what it is: an anti-epiphany in the tradition of modernist writers such as James Joyce. Barker's novel avoids the idealisation of childhood. It also complicates the idea of retirement as a period of renovation but, at the same time, does not figure this stage of life in wholly negative terms. Barker's emphasis is on the complexity and ambiguity of these different life stages, and this carries through to her representation of Eashing's experience of old age and immobility, which I address in the following section. While *The Haunt* puts emphasis on old age as a time of new experience, a stage of life that is not static and fixed, it does not conceal the negative consequences of Eashing's old age. I argue that *The Haunt* is able to represent the complexity of age and ageing through both its characterisation and its formal structure, which is partly a result of Barker's own old age and immobility.

IV. 'The Inconsistent Texts of Ageing'

The Haunt took six years to complete. Beginning the book in 1992 as a collection of short stories, Barker finished the manuscript in 1998 and finally saw it published by Virago Press in 1999, by which time she was living at the Lodore Nursing Home in Sutton, Surrey. In June 1995, having redrafted the manuscript three times, Barker had converted *The Haunt* into three novellas with an articulated structure similar to that of *The Joy-Ride and After*. Despite these revisions both her agent, Jennifer Kavanagh and Lennie Goodings of Virago were unsatisfied and pushed for a novel. Barker continued to write, revise and edit the manuscript throughout several episodes of severe ill-health. She had experienced her first stroke in early 1994. Her diary for the year 1997 shows that after falling and fracturing her pelvis on the 6th January, and suffering a further fall a week later, she decided she could no longer remain at home. On the 18th January she wrote: 'Pain very bad. Took several pain-

killers. Increasingly difficult to get about, decided to go into residential care'.⁷⁸ In fact, she was not admitted into Lodore until 16th June 1998, after another 'incapacitating' stroke.⁷⁹ As the following extract shows, Barker's diaries for this period are preoccupied with two things, her failing mobility and the progress of *The Haunt*:

- 8th February: '35 days since fall. Still very stiff + painful left leg'. [...]
 4th February: '7 weeks today since fall'. [...]
 6th March: 'Started typing final copy of 3rd novella'.
 9th March: 'Work all day on typescript of 3rd Haunt'.
 11th March: 'Finished typing 3rd Haunt (the place) about 11,500 words (took 6 days) final copy on 13th March'.
 17th March: 'Posted typescript (Reg.) of 3rd Haunt'.
 25th March: 'J.K. [Jennifer Kavanagh] rang – "likes" 3rd Haunt '
 29th March: 'Finished 3RD HAUNT revision (last page) ready to send to J.K.'.
 31st March: 'Posted to J.K. 1) 3rd Haunt Revised last page of'.
 15th April: 'Rang JK. She sent Haunt 1,2,3 to [...] Virago on 4th April. Advises a novel next!'
 17th April: 'Started revisions 1st HAUNT'. [...]
 12th May: 'Finished typing Haunt I (approx. 35,000 words); '1st Haunt (original) finished typing revised version 12th May 1997'; 'J. K. not enthusiastic [...] you were going to do a novel'.
 29th May: 'I walked to Post Box – 1st time this year'.
 24th June: 'JK rang – Tony Whillems has HAUNT'.
 14th July: 'Rang J.K. "will take time"!! 50 years?'
 21st July: 'J.K. rang, still no decision'.
 31st July: 'Long letter from JK in answer to my plea for news of HAUNT. Must be a novel'. [...]
 4th September: 'finished 1st draft of novel (Haunt)'. [...]
 14th September: bad fall in kitchen.
 15th September: to hospital for check.
 25th September: 'working all day to finish final draft (for processing) estimate about 40,000 words – processed version 50,000'.
 2nd October: 'Sent draft of HAUNT as novel for processing'. [...]
 14th November: 'Laura Longrigg rang [...] sending [*The Haunt*] to Lennie Goodings of Virago'.
 2nd December: 'Rang MBA – spoke Laura... (no reaction yet from Virago)'.
 16th December: 'NEWS!! Laura rang: a v. nice conversation with Lennie G., she likes HAUNT as novel, has read it 3 times, showing to a colleague before giving a definite answer'.

78 Barker, Daybook entry, Daybook 1997, 18th January 1997, box 16, folder 1, HRHRC.

79 Gardam, 'Introduction', in Barker, *Submerged*, p. viii.

29th December: fall in night, hit head – to hospital to have wound stitched.⁸⁰

Using the ideas of immobility, stasis and revision in Barker's diary as a starting point, I make two proposals in this section. The first concerns the way in which Barker's notion of retropulsion or pushing backwards relates to the assumed connections between old age, physical immobility and mental stasis. Hazan argues that '[o]ne of the most deeply rooted stereotypes of the aged is that they are conservative, inflexible, and resistant to change. The aged are perceived as incapable of creativity, of making progress, of starting afresh'.⁸¹ *The Haunt* explores this stereotype through the character of Gilbert Eashing, who embodies what Hazan calls the 'structural immobility' of old age. The assumed association between old age, physical paralysis and mental stasis is challenged by a moment in *The Haunt* in which the present cuts through Eashing's solipsistic focus on the past, the opposite of retropulsion. My second proposal is that, through the constant revision and pulling together of her stories into a book, Barker succeeds in creating a text that conveys the experience of ageing: fragmented, emplaced, intertextual, complex and ambiguous, with past and present intertwined. The labour of revision, the writing and rewriting, represents the process of living a life and brings Barker's experience of old age and immobility into the structure of *The Haunt*. I conclude this final chapter by arguing that, although it is preoccupied by issues of immobility, pain, lack of progress, and stasis, *The Haunt* paints a complex picture of ageing experience, challenging ideas of old age as a time of physical, mental and social immobility and foregrounding the huge changes it entails.

In addition to Barker's definition of 'pushing backwards', retropulsion carries the senses of involuntary or uncontrolled backward movement, and inward movement.⁸² *The Haunt's* concern with retropulsion is expressed through Eashing, an aged, disabled antiquarian who is in Cornwall researching funerary sculpture. For Eashing, old age is 'a nasty business'.⁸³ He warns his new companion Betty, ex-

80 Barker, Daybook 1997, box 16, folder 1, HRHRC.

81 Hazan, *Old Age*, pp. 28-29.

82 "retropulsion, n." OED Online. March 2015.

83 Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 166.

maid at the Bellechasse: '[d]on't be deceived by talk of tranquil old age[...] one is not cured of strong emotions. The most ignoble remain'.⁸⁴ Eashing rejects the idea of old age as a period of wisdom and peace: 'He said sharply, 'Getting old is a nasty business. There's nothing to commend it, certainly not the illusion of learning.'⁸⁵ Although some of his comments challenge stereotypes of old age – that older people are wise and have a calm and settled existence, for example – Eashing has taken on many of the negative assumptions about old age common to Western culture.

These assumptions are examined by Hazan, who notes the disparity between the perception of old age as a static period of life and the pace of change experienced by many older people. 'On the one hand', he argues, 'the aged are seen as being at a social standstill; on the other, the changes occurring in their lives are extraordinarily rapid and extreme.'⁸⁶ Thus:

[A]geing is commonly perceived as a static condition with the aged as its unchanging inhabitants. [...] Among the non-aged, moving from one stage of life to another, the opportunity for socially approved transformations is a culturally cherished privilege. The old, however, are not supposed to change as others do and, accordingly, are denied such opportunity. This structural immobility stands in absolute contradiction to their personal experience and sensibility, for they are in fact undergoing rapid and important changes in roles, identities, abilities and bodily functions that influences their self-perception and their capacity to handle everyday affairs.⁸⁷

Eashing embodies Hazan's notion of 'structural immobility'. Not only is he physically immobile, he has also rendered himself socially and mentally immobile through his acceptance and proliferation of negative stereotypes of ageing. Other characters perceive him in negative terms; for example, when George Soulsby watches Eashing asleep in his wheelchair he notes that he is 'sleeping like a baby', reiterating the clichéd image of old people as helpless and infantile.⁸⁸ But Eashing is complicit in constructing an image of old age as 'a nasty business'. He is unable to see the

84 Ibid, p. 167.

85 Ibid, p. 166.

86 Hazan, *Old Age*, p. 76.

87 Ibid., pp. 74-5.

88 Barker, *The Haunt*, p. 141.

disparity between his personal experience of old age, which involves huge emotional change and novelty, and social constructions of old age as static.

Eashing's sense of self is reliant on free movement. He equates physical immobility with immobility in general and thus feels himself to be at a standstill: 'That ambition should dwindle to the performance of a simple reflex was humiliating. He yearned for the privileged years when he could move about unaided. He watched everyone else exercising the right of passage [...] and on the quiet wept tears of impotence and despair.'⁸⁹ Eashing has taken on conventional ideas about old age, equating physical restriction with humiliation, helplessness and, crucially, with mental stasis. Central to this passage is the double meaning of the phrase 'rite of passage' as both a 'right' to movement and a ritual of transition through which a subject's status or identity may be changed. Eashing's sense that his ambition has dwindled suggests that he believes his identity and role in life to be static and his only desire is to walk again, as he did in 'the privileged years'. Clearly the idea of retropulsion applies to Eashing here. His paralysis provokes a tension between stillness and movement, stasis and change, and past and present. We might say that he 'walks backwards' in the sense that he is unable or unwilling to live in the present, being caught in a loop of remembering and dreaming about his past.

Despite Eashing's sense of himself as static and the anger this provokes he does experience a moment of physical pleasure and joy when he touches an ancient Cornish cross. Although he dismisses the idea of reverence for the old, which is significant given his profession, he is in awe of this particular object:

He wanted to touch the cross, feel the granite, the grit, under his fingers – it was one of the obscure compulsions which he observed in himself from time to time. So much was denied to him now in the way of physical experience, minor episodes had to be savoured to the full. [...]

He stretched out his hand, laid his palm on the stone, rolled the detritus of centuries under his fingertips. 'Feel how warm it is, from the heat of the sun, the heat of thousands of suns.' [...] He sighed. 'It is so very old.'⁹⁰

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

For Eashing, this is an intensely physical experience. He connects with the past through physical contact with a historical artefact, a reminder that one of the ways in which the experiences of earlier generations are communicated to the present is through objects. This moment is not primarily about the past, though; it is significant to how Eashing views himself in the present. For Eashing, a researcher of funerary sculpture, old objects have value in a way that old people do not. While he is compelled to interact physically with the cross, interpreting its age positively, he avoids identifying himself with his own physical body, which he regards as an encumbrance to be hauled around. His view is altered when, after leaving the cross and entering the church, Eashing experiences a seizure while gazing at the sixteenth-century burial effigy of a noblewoman: 'When the pain ceased and he was still alive, fear took over, the pure and simple fear of not being. During all his researches into funerary concepts he had never felt it so keenly.'⁹¹ This encounter appears to be opposite to a moment of retropulsion: the immediate, present fear of 'not being' cuts through Eashing's absorption with the past.

Eashing assigns the cause of the fear he feels to Betty's conviction that the burial effigy resembles her Aunty Viv. As he passes the effigy '[its] eyes, which had appeared closed, now appeared wide open; the marble lids had become the whites, blank and blind. [...] Betty's influence could not be discounted'.⁹² At this moment, Eashing is suddenly afraid of 'not being', perhaps because he recognises the importance of his relationship with Betty, something to which he has previously been blind. Betty represents the future and reignites Eashing's ambition. Their relationship not only benefits him but makes her life better: he defends her from Mrs Clapham and reads with her. Eashing recognises the differences between himself and Betty: 'Her world is alien, she is cut off from so much of mine, or perhaps I should say I am cut off from hers. I have had no contact with young people and this poor child has been misused. [...] She is as unsure of me as I of her. It leads to some unexpected exchanges.'⁹³ For Eashing, the meeting of the worlds or countries of old age and childhood (which are, we remember, both figured as foreign to adult

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

identity), leads to an ‘unexpected exchange’, a moment that resembles an epiphany and is a source of meaning and power. Active old age, *The Haunt* suggests, is not necessarily about being physically active but is about other kinds of action, such as forging new emotional relationships. Eashing’s experience suggests the importance Barker assigns to genuine moments of insight in old age, which are achieved by new experience. In *The Haunt*, old age is characterised neither as decline nor necessarily as progress but by novelty of experience and emotional connection.

The tension Hazan notes between the assumption of old age as static and the rapid pace of change actually experienced by many older people is one reason why literary portrayals of old age may not effectively represent the realities of older people’s experience. The conventional novel of ageing, in which the end of life equals the dénouement of narrative, tends to oversimplify old age, suggesting that it is a period in which all of the ‘loose ends’ of life are tied up: ambiguity is resolved, meaning is understood, lessons learned are passed on. However, if we, like Barker, see old age as a period of transition and disruption then we might question its association with dénouement. At the beginning of the chapter I noted that narratives of old age tend to focus on the negative aspects (‘getting’ older) or try to see ageing as a time of development (‘growing’ older, ‘progress narrative’). *The Haunt* suggests that old age is not a phase of resolution at the end of a chronological narrative. It undermines a teleological conception of history, which assumes that people learn more as they age and human history is progressive. Indeed, the latter half of the book consists of the endings of a series of unresolved narratives and repeated images of stasis, paralysis and repetition, all of which suggest a preoccupation with alternatives to chronology, linear time.

The Haunt departs from many other conventions of books about old age. These have been charted by Hepworth, who groups them into five ‘variations on a theme’.⁹⁴ *The Haunt* has no central ageing character and the book’s focus is neither

94 See: Mike Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*, p. 20. Hepworth groups novels concerned with ageing into five key ‘variations on a theme’ which are listed, he notes, according to ‘the space taken up by ageing as a theme in each novel, ranging from central in variation 1 to peripheral in Variation 5, and the intensity of interest in subjective experience and social interaction between characters in various age groups.’ (Ibid.) In the first variation, the narrative concerns one central ageing character; the second variation is focused on a collection of older characters living in a residential group; the third focuses on ‘family interaction’; and the fourth on relationships between older characters and friends

on older people's family relationships nor on the interactions between elderly people living in a community. Although *The Haunt* is interested in relationships between older people and neighbours and strangers, its main focus is on the interactions older people have with landscape and place and, as I proposed above, on the ageing of the Cornish landscape itself. *The Haunt* is unusual, too, because so much of the action takes place outside, whereas novels about older people are often set in interior, domestic locations. Often, as Hepworth puts it, 'The home is seen as the most appropriate place for older people'.⁹⁵ However, in *The Haunt* older people are most frequently encountered outside the home in natural environments such as gardens, woods, beaches, and church yards. Barker's portrayal of old age, then, is neither wholly negative nor wholly optimistic. It resists ideas of old age as resolution and the conventions of the traditional novel of old age and instead highlights the complexities of this period of life.

The Haunt represents this complexity not in spite of but because of the fact that Barker was pushed to rewrite her book from short stories to novella to novel in order to secure publication – a request perhaps motivated by the sort of assumptions considered above about what a book written by an older person should be. The pulling together of Barker's original short stories creates a text which represents the fragmentary, layered, emplaced, ambiguous nature of old age. The final structure of *The Haunt* suits its content perfectly. The form of the book, with its intertwined, overlapping stories of people and of place, represents the experience of ageing by staging the ways in which people's lives intersect, clash, come together, grow apart, and the ways in which personal individual lives are always interwoven with public events, histories, places, and the physical world. The idea of human lives as texts with many strands of narrative, suggested by William L. Randall and A. Elizabeth McKim, is useful here:

or strangers. In the fifth variation, older characters are often incidental and the focus is more on descriptions of older people and the processes of ageing. *The Haunt* does not fit comfortably into any one of the variations. Although it has similarities with novels in the second variation, for example Elizabeth Taylor's *Mrs Palfrey At The Claremont*, *The Haunt* is not so much interested in social relationships between older people as in their relationships with a variety of people of other ages. In this respect it is most like Hepworth's description of the fourth variation, though not at all similar to the novels he lists in that category.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[O]ver time, [our lives] are not merely lengthening but continually thickening as well, their countless strands becoming ever more intertwined, not just with one another but with the texts of others' lives as well. What is more, they are woven through with countless larger texts in turn: the contexts of the families, relationships, and communities by which our personal worlds are shaped. Most important, they are texts whose potential for meaning intensifies with time. In effect, they are living works of literature – blends of fact and fiction that grown more imbued with depth, emotional and metaphorical, as the end draws nigh.⁹⁶

The idea in this passage of the effect of ageing being the lengthening, thickening and deepening of these strands speaks to Barker's project. In *The Haunt* many different strands of personal human narratives are interwoven with the history and mythology of Cornwall and Europe and strands of narrative about public events affecting whole communities and nations. Drawing further strands into the text, Barker builds up layers of intertextuality: Daphne De Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) echoes through the pages of *The Haunt*; the work of Romantic writers such as Blake and (as we have seen) Wordsworth is also evoked; the central story of Koenig's death alludes to 'The Darkness Out There' (1980), a short story by Penelope Lively. The stories that make up *The Haunt* mean that the book speaks to ideas of old age as a fragmentary experience punctuated by the narratives of other people and other places, literary or otherwise, and by moments of insight rather than a resolution achieved by the culmination of the narrative of life.

Barker's struggles with ageing and form are played out on the page, not only in her characters' experiences but in *The Haunt's* construction. The diary entries quoted at the start of this section reveal the work Barker had to do to turn the stories into a book, and her recording of details, such as days taken to write sections and word counts, makes salient the labour involved. The energy that Barker put into redrafting *The Haunt*, and with which she pursued the progress of her book's publication, stands in contrast to her physical immobility, the extent of which we are reminded when she writes on the 29th May, 'I walked to Post Box – 1st time this

96 Randall and McKim, *Reading Our Lives*, pp. 5-6.

year'.⁹⁷ Physical immobility, experienced by Barker when revising the book, and by Eashing in *The Haunt*, almost guarantees a degree of marginalisation. In spite of her stated decision to move to a nursing home, though, Barker's response to her immobility was not to leave her home and go into residential care. And her avoidance for as long as possible of this conventional space of old age parallels Barker's initial rebellion against the demands her publisher made of her book – it 'must be a novel'. Thus *The Haunt* not only represents, but is produced by, liminal experience and Barker's resistance to both the conventions of old age and those of books about this stage of life.

The restrictions put in place by Barker's publishers regarding the form of her book speak to the restrictions of the experience of old age. I noted above that Eashing calls physical movement a 'right of passage' and that this phrase carries two meanings: a 'right' to movement and, more importantly, a ritual of transition. Change in old age is restricted (especially with regard to place) and the fiction of old age is expected to adhere to certain conventions. The restrictions of old age – mental, social, and physical – speak to the restrictions placed on the fiction of old age. In trying to make her stories into a novel, then, Barker has created a narrative which stages the difficulties of the restrictions placed on the elderly. But *The Haunt*, itself a liminal text, between the short story and the novel, does not see the liminality of old age as a wholly negative condition; rather, Barker suggests, the transitions undergone by the elderly have the potential for insight. This insight, however, may not be gained in opposition to or from the child, but through relationships between generations. The child as a fixed symbol of 'innocence' is empty and devoid of meaning. Similarly, an understanding of 'the old' as a homogenous group of people will miss the complexities and subtleties of this stages of life. Just as Hazan's notion of the 'structural immobility' of the aged relates to the stereotyping of older people, so it relates back to the ideas of the figure of the child I have explored in this thesis. The idea of 'the child' as static, fixed and categorised, a pure object for study, speaks to the view of old age as a fixed, intransigent stage of life. It is only with difficulty that

97 Barker, Daybook 1997, box 16, folder 1, HRHRC.

the child and the old person can break free from the constructions of age assigned to them by society.

This recalls the ideas of the places and spaces of childhood and old age discussed at the beginning of the chapter and the sense that middle-aged adults continually push children and the elderly to the margins of 'mainstream' adult space. As Kathleen Woodward points out, stereotyping requires 'a certain kind of spectatorship – of distance'.⁹⁸ This distancing allows us to generalise rather than focusing on individual characteristics. *The Haunt* employs images of place and space to portray Owen's navigation of his new role, James's conflict with his parents, Pam's uncanny dreams, and Eashing's struggle to come to terms with his immobility. However, the book also shows the dangers of observing old age or childhood as a place from which we ourselves are distanced, suggesting that this kind of spectatorship leads us to understand these stages of life in terms of false dichotomies and stereotypes. Judging by the passage from her commonplace book with which we began, Barker was herself persuaded by some of these stereotypes in middle age. Presenting these two texts, written by the same person at least twenty-five years apart, this chapter considered how they might help us to make sense of the intersections between different narratives of age – what Hazan calls 'the inconsistent texts of ageing'.⁹⁹ *The Haunt* takes the ambiguity of categories of age as its subject, presenting a number of narratives of ageing, representing the confluences and disparities between them. The novel thus draws attention to the ways in which age is constructed, as well as enabling us to draw a more complex and rounded picture of old age.

98 Kathleen Woodward, *Aging And Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 57.

99 Hazan, *Old Age*, p. 91.

Conclusion

Barker finished writing her first collection in late Spring 1946, a year after V.E. Day.¹ *Innocents* was partly written during the war when Barker was working first in the women's land army and afterwards as a firewoman.² Why, during the war, did Barker write a collection in which all of the stories bar one are about a child? What are the implications of her claim that the relation between innocence and experience is the 'fundamental principle' of her work? Why are children so uncanny not only in her early short fiction but throughout her *oeuvre*? What is it about being adolescent or elderly that renders a person out of place or time? And why is age so often inverted and queered in Barker's fiction?

I began this thesis by introducing the metaphor of the 'eye of childhood' and argued that Barker's fiction compels us to view the world through this eye. I do not mean that when we read Barker we look at things from the point of view of the child, although some of Barker's writing does attempt this. Rather, I argue that it is through the child that we can access her fiction. When we read Barker's work, and interpret her historical moment through her writing, we look through a lens that focuses our eye on questions about the child.

The most important of these concerns innocence and experience. Barker's *oeuvre* troubles both these concepts and their relationship. She insists not only on the undecideability of the child but on the ambiguity and instability of all categories of age which, her writing suggests, are constructed against and in relation to one another. As queer theory has shown, the idea of homosexuality is always present in discourses of heterosexuality. Similarly, for psychoanalysis as for the Romantics, the idea of the child is always present when 'the adult' is considered, notions of childhood and adulthood are necessary to define adolescence, just as the idea of

1 Barker received a rejection letter from Jonathan Cape on 14th June 1946 (see chapter two).

2 In a draft of a talk to would-be writers Barker discusses her 'spare-time' writing done, she writes, on trains, in buses and queues, even walking down the street. She adds: 'During the war when I worked as a land girl I managed it.' See: Barker, 'Advice to young would-be writers' (undated), box 8, folder 6, HRHRC. For information on Barker's employment see: box 16, folder 5, HRHRC.

youth is implicit in constructions of age. In this respect, Barker's *oeuvre* may be read as a genealogy of innocence and experience. In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971) Michel Foucault argues that genealogy 'must seek [...] in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts'.³ Age has been seen as an 'unpromising' place, a place 'without history'. Because age seems 'natural' rather than constructed we tend not to question it. Categories of age are often fixed with certain attributes: children are innocent, adolescents disrupted and disruptive, old people static. The 'queering' of age that we find in Barker's fiction seeks to destabilise assumptions about what different identities of age entail.

Barker's genealogy of age speaks to the preoccupation with adult and child relationships in British society and culture at mid-century. During the war the child was a figure of anxiety and, for psychoanalysis, a figure through which people's reactions to wartime anxiety could be understood. Wartime experience is frequently represented in mid-century literature as a 'second childhood', a moment of temporal discontinuity in which people are overwhelmed by the incomprehensible nature of international events and suspended in the present. In my introduction I noted that Rosamond Lehmann, among others, explains the post-war preoccupation with childhood by arguing that youth represents stability and security for uneasy and anxious mid-century writers and readers. For Lehmann youth is 'the time when [and] the place where they knew where they were'.⁴ Barker rejects the idea of childhood as a period of stability. Her fiction stages and reworks literary, psychoanalytic and anthropological ideas about children, questioning the tendency to observe the child as an object and try to 'fix' it as one thing or another in order to shore up adult identity.

So while some mid-century writers retreated to childhood innocence, others, like Barker, put emphasis on its instability and danger. In Barker's fiction 'innocents' (those who have innocence but no experience) are shown to threaten not just

3 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', 1971, in Donald F. Bouchard ed., *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-164, pp. 139-140.

4 Lehmann, 'The Future of the Novel?', in Stevenson, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 80.

themselves but the people around them. Youth, writes Barker, is ‘the greatest of all weapons’ because when it is mishandled the holder ‘gets the sympathy and her opponent [...] bleeds’.⁵ Barker’s emphasis on the potential destructiveness of youth registers and responds to the mid-century anxiety about what war-damaged children might become, which was expressed in the panic about juvenile delinquency in the 1940s and 1950s. The period was marked by a deep uncertainty about changes in intergenerational relationships and the impact this might have on society, politics and culture. Concern over the precocity of the post-war generation was coupled with worries about the ‘parental’ role of the newly-established Welfare State. As the age inversion in Barker’s articulated novels registers, just as children were growing more mature, so adults were becoming child-like. Barker’s genealogy of innocence and experience necessarily raises epistemological questions, the most salient being ‘what is a child?’ This uncanny figure, suggests Barker, cannot be ‘known’ and can never be definitively understood because it is both familiar and strange, ‘close’ and ‘closed’.

Barker’s genealogy of age is written in a number of forms that are other to the chronological novel: the short story, the ‘articulated novel’, and the retropulsive text. For Barker, the ambiguity of the child and other age categories considered to be ‘other’ to adult identity is best expressed in alternative forms. The short story, for example, is a genre that is able to tolerate opposition and ‘hold’ and unify difference. It does not unify in the sense that difference is overcome but in the sense that opposing interpretations can coexist within it. As well as identifying Barker’s innovative use of the ‘articulated novel’ and the retropulsive text, I have shown how these texts stage through their formal construction the connections and disconnections between adult and child, and the ways in which intergenerational relationships invert and intertwine. Both the form and the style of Barker’s fiction play important parts in an understanding of her writing life. Throughout the thesis I have tried to show that Barker’s preference for alternative forms of fiction affected her publication history and contributed to her marginality. I also suggested that Barker’s fiction is understudied because the restrained precision of her prose means that she tends to be read as a ‘writer’s writer’. Her ‘perfect finish’ (in Quigly’s words)

⁵ Barker, ‘Introduction’ to *Hester Lilly*, p. vii.

conceals her anger about the inequalities of twentieth-century Britain or, as Thwaite puts it, the ‘claws beneath the surface’.

Like her work, Barker’s writing life is inflected by a tension between surface and depths, between revealing herself and remaining secret. She is compelled to write but wants ‘nothing of [her]self on paper’. In my introduction I suggested that Barker’s self-effacement may be a further reason for her marginality. Neither Barker nor her fiction announce themselves. There is a quietness to her work that is often mistaken for conservatism, a lack of energy, or disengagement from social and political concerns. Barker always considered herself to be a ‘spare-time writer’ and her fiction to be somehow different to or apart from that of more canonical writers. It is difficult to gauge Barker’s views on the work of others, apart from Rebecca West with whom she had an acquaintance based on mutual admiration. The archive shows that Barker read and appreciated the work of Henry James, James Joyce, Stella Benson, Katherine Mansfield, and Elizabeth Bowen. In what seems to be a response to a list of questions about her writing from an academic researcher, Barker wrote: ‘V.S Pritchett, Walter de la Mare, Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, Daphne du Maurier – and a host of others classic and moderns – I admire and envy *because they demonstrate how it should be done*.’⁶ The words in italics have been added in pen to replace the previous phrase, ‘but cannot think they have influenced my work’, which was crossed out.⁷ Barker’s reluctance to admit the influence of other writers on her own work might be interpreted as arrogance. Does Barker feel her work is entirely original? I suggest not. Rather, this statement is another example of Barker’s underestimation of her work. Barker feels that these writers ‘demonstrate how it should be done’, the word ‘should’ suggesting that her writing falls below this ideal standard. Such a lack of confidence is typical from a writer who was known for her self-condemnation. ‘[N]ever have I met a more self-critical writer’ wrote Smallwood to Barker in 1951. ‘But that’s why you’re so good.’⁸

6 Barker, draft response to questions about her writing, c. September 1993, box 8, folder 6, HRHRC. I presume these questions were sent by a member of staff at the School of Cultural Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, because a compliments slip with this address, dated 19.09.93, is stapled to Barker’s response.

7 Ibid.

8 Smallwood, letter to Barker, 20th June 1951, box 8, folder 8, HRHRC.

Barker was wrong not to recognise the importance of her *oeuvre*. As my title *Figuring the Child* suggests, I think that her fiction at once represents and tries to 'figure out' the child and, by implication, related categories of age. Barker's project is to (re)write the child, and she does this for over sixty years, from the mid-1930s at the Amalgamated Press to the late-1990s. Another answer to the question of why Barker is an understudied writer is that many of the suggestions her fiction makes are in response to questions that were not being seriously asked until the end of her writing life. The central questions asked about childhood in the last 25 years are anticipated in Barker's writing. For example, since the 1980s Childhood Studies has put emphasis on childhood as a cultural construct. The discipline rejects notions of the innocence and passivity of children and recognises their agency and rights.⁹ The attention that Barker's fiction pays to age and to the ways it has been conceptualised also anticipates many of the arguments of Age Studies, a discipline that has gained traction in recent years, and which puts emphasis on the importance of literary representations to an understanding of age. Age is starting to become a category of attention in the same way as race, gender, sexuality, or class, meaning that Barker's *oeuvre*, which reveals the cracks in historical constructions of age, would be useful to researchers considering the queering of age and intersecting attributes of identity in twentieth century fiction. Finally, the place of childhood in literary modernism has gained more critical attention recently. My thesis makes a contribution to this emerging field of scholarship by drawing attention to the ways in which Barker's fiction reads and rewrites modernism's child, and by putting emphasis on age as a key critical concept for modernist and after-modernist research, as well as for scholarship on post-war and postmodernist fiction.

I began writing this thesis with a distinct aim. In addition to examining how the figure of the child and innocence and experience are represented in Barker's work alongside theoretical and historical frameworks about childhood, I wanted to introduce Barker and her work to the literary community. My visit to Barker's archive at the HRHRC was essential to this aim. But writing Barker's life has been challenging; I have not studied life writing and I am wary of the trap of equating work and life.

⁹ See: Allison James and Adrian James, eds., *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2012), pp. xi, 68-72, 3-5, 105, 5.

What I have tried to do is to read the archival documents in the same way as the literary texts: to carefully consider the language being used and not to privilege so-called ‘fact’ over ‘fiction’. It is worth noting that Barker saw no distinction between these terms, writing in a draft ‘blurb’ for *Life Stories*: ‘I think that fiction is autobiography’.¹⁰ With this in mind, I have used her fiction, her ‘autobiography’, her correspondence and many other sources to suggest explanations for puzzles such as Barker’s marginality, the twelve-year gap in her publication history in the 1950s, and the rejection of ‘View in a Long Mirror’. A biography written by an accomplished life writing scholar would be an invaluable resource for present and future readers of Barker’s work.

One implication of reading Barker’s fiction through the lens of childhood is that the child structures the thesis. The ‘eye of childhood’ serves as a metaphor for the way in which the child provides a frame for and sets the parameters of my study. On the one hand, this lens provides clarity, like the water in *A Heavy Feather* which grants Almyer ‘a vision clear and scrupulous’. It aims to correct the distortion caused by the absence of the child in literary criticism about modernist and after-modernist books about children for adults (I discuss this in my introduction). Without the child we cannot perceive Barker’s fiction with clarity. And without Barker’s fiction the child in mid-twentieth-century literature would be less clear, perhaps even distorted. Through her dialectic of innocence and experience and her genealogy of age, Barker’s *oeuvre* shows us that the concept of age is essential for reading mid-century fiction. On the other hand, my decision to view Barker’s fiction through the lens of childhood creates its own distortions. The ‘eye of childhood’ looks at Barker’s writing at a particular angle and having the child frame the thesis puts parameters in place that no doubt exclude other ways of looking at Barker’s fiction. It must be noted that I never really ‘decided’ to view Barker’s fiction through the lens of childhood. My intention was not to have innocence and experience and the child as a frame to the thesis but to produce a more exhaustive and conventional chronological study. But Barker’s fiction resisted these intentions. Her concern with experience and innocence was salient in both the fiction and the archive. Perhaps, then, innocence and

10 Barker, ‘Blurb for *Life Stories*’, in letter to ‘Dennis’, 27th January 1981, box 11, folder 1, HRHRC.

experience are the terms with which Barker invites us to read her *oeuvre*, the way that she wants to be read.

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