

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 246

TOPICS VOLUME



Volume 246

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics  
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary  
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and  
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys  
of National Literatures**

**Lawrence J. Trudeau**

***Project Editor***



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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

### Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88, no. 2 (May 2005): 284-93. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 356-65. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*. Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32

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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Gale Literature Product Advisory Board xiii

## Early Twentieth-Century Children's Literature

<i>Introduction</i> .....	1
<i>Representative Works</i> .....	2
<i>Overviews and General Studies</i> .....	2
<i>Early Twentieth-Century Children's Fantasists</i> .....	40
<i>Early Twentieth-Century Girls' Books</i> .....	70
<i>Early Twentieth-Century Nursery Books</i> .....	99
<i>Further Reading</i> .....	109

## Early Twentieth-Century Drama

<i>Introduction</i> .....	111
<i>Representative Works</i> .....	112
<i>American Realism</i> .....	114
<i>Realism and the Moscow Art Theatre</i> .....	147
<i>The Irish Literary Renaissance and the Abbey Theatre</i> .....	182
<i>Further Reading</i> .....	196

## Jamaican Literature

<i>Introduction</i> .....	198
<i>Representative Works</i> .....	199
<i>Overviews and General Studies</i> .....	201
<i>Major Jamaican Writers</i> .....	234
<i>Jamaican Fiction</i> .....	262
<i>Jamaican Poetry</i> .....	274
<i>Further Reading</i> .....	308

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 313

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 431

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 451

# Early Twentieth-Century Children's Literature

The following entry provides a critical overview of children's literature written during the early part of the twentieth century.

## INTRODUCTION

The early twentieth century is regarded as the waning period of the Golden Age in children's literature that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Many of the most enduring works of children's fiction were written during the Golden Age, and the advent of the twentieth century saw a continued fascination with the themes explored in children's literature of the nineteenth century, including a sense of nostalgia about childhood. Critics argue that many children's authors of the time idealized childhood and depicted the world as adults wanted it to be. In children's literature of the time, it was commonplace for adults, especially parents and nannies, to be scarce or nonexistent, creating a world populated by mostly children. In this world children live by a moral code—not something enforced by adults, but one that arises organically from the pure camaraderie of childhood. Critics contend that this theme and the books that portrayed this fantasy world were, in part, a reaction to the anxiety caused by the rapid industrialization, modernization, and colonialism that affected the Western world during these years. The onset of World War I signaled a change in children's literature. During World War I, the production of books slowed considerably as paper and other raw materials were diverted for other uses. The popularity of children's literature endured, but began to reflect the era's interest in freedom and autonomy. The popularity of fairy tales and fantasy diminished, giving way to a blossoming interest in adventure stories. World War I provided plots for a number of adventure stories for children. The most popular writer of children's literature during this era was Edith Nesbit, also known as E. Nesbit, who wrote a series of adventure stories including *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Railway Children*. Laura Ingalls Wilder published a series of books romanticizing her family's pioneer experiences in the American West, popularizing a genre known as family adventure stories. In family adventures, families work together to battle the elements, evildoers, or other obstacles to the family's safety or happiness. Mystery stories also proved successful, and it was during the early years of the twentieth century

that such well-known series as the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and the Bobbsey Twins mystery series first made their appearance. These stories featured quick-witted young characters, who solved crimes and addressed injustice, punctuated by passages of exciting adventure. Boys' and girls' magazines remained popular; in fact, the 1920s and 1930s are often considered the heyday of girls' adventure fiction, populated by resourceful and determined female heroines.

School stories were another popular genre in the early twentieth century. Unique to juvenile literature, these stories were typically set in boarding schools, and explored experiences of fitting in; relationships with teachers and learning; and maturation. Key authors of school stories during the early twentieth century included Rudyard Kipling, Desmond Coke, and Elsie Oxenham. Animal stories were also a successful genre for children during the period. Typical of traditional animal fables, these stories presented settings in which animals mimicked human relationships, and the device was often used to reflect on or act as a counterpoint to larger themes of colonialism, imperialism, and industrialization found in the adult world. The most renowned illustrator of children's books featuring animals was Beatrix Potter, who created a series of much-loved children's books featuring the animals that populated the rural and bucolic English Lake District. Another key children's book author of the period was A. A. Milne, who created the world-renowned Winnie-the-Pooh stories. Today Winnie-the-Pooh remains one of most beloved characters in children's literature. One emerging genre during the early twentieth century was that of children's verse. The most successful author of the genre was Dr. Seuss (Theodore Seuss Geisel), who published his first book of nonsensical rhymes for children, *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* in 1937. His most-beloved works, *Horton Hears a Who*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The Cat in the Hat*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* remain staples of the genre. Despite its decreasing popularity in the early twentieth century, some of the most enduring books of the period were fantasy stories. In 1904 J. M. Barrie's infamous play *Peter Pan; or, The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* first appeared. The character of Peter Pan remains a favorite of children's literature. L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the story of a young girl transported to a magical kingdom with her faithful dog, Toto, was published in 1900 and spawned a series of sequels exploring the adventures of Dorothy,

the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. The movie adaptation of the book is considered a masterpiece and has cemented Baum's position as the creator as one of the best-known children's stories of the modern era.

---

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Margaret Ashmun

*The Heart of Isabel Carleton* (juvenile fiction) 1917

*Isabel Carleton at Home* (juvenile fiction) 1920

J. M. Barrie

*Peter Pan; or, The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (play) 1904

*Peter and Wendy* (juvenile fiction) 1911

L. Frank Baum

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (juvenile fiction) 1900

*The Marvelous Land of Oz* (juvenile fiction) 1904

Margery Williams Bianco

*The Velveteen Rabbit* (juvenilia) 1922

Frances Hodgson Burnett

*A Little Princess, Being the Whole Story of Sara Crewe Now Told for the First Time* (juvenile fiction) 1905

*The Secret Garden* (juvenile fiction) 1911

Kenneth Grahame

*The Wind in the Willows* (novel) 1908

W. H. Hudson

*A Little Boy Lost* (juvenile fiction) 1905

Rudyard Kipling

*Puck of Pook's Hill* (juvenile fiction) 1906

*Rewards and Fairies* (juvenile fiction) 1910

Hugh Lofting

*The Story of Doctor Dolittle: Being the History of His Peculiar Life at Home and Astonishing Adventures in Foreign Parts* (juvenile fiction) 1920

*The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* (juvenile fiction) 1922

Walter de la Mare

*The Three Mullah Mulgars* (juvenile fiction) 1910

A. A. Milne

*When We Were Very Young* (children's verse) 1924

*Winnie-the-Pooh* (juvenilia) 1926

*The House at Pooh Corner* (juvenilia) 1928

E. Nesbit

*The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (juvenile fiction) 1899

*The Railway Children* (juvenile fiction) 1906

*The Enchanted Castle* (juvenile fiction) 1907

Beatrix Potter

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (juvenilia) 1902

*The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (juvenilia) 1908

W. W. Tarn

*The Treasure of the Isle of Mist* (juvenile fiction) 1919

Laura Ingalls Wilder

*Little House on the Prairie* (juvenile fiction) 1935

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## OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

Sheila A. Egoff (essay date 1988)

SOURCE: Egoff, Sheila A. "Dream Days: The Edwardian Age and After." In *Worlds Within: Children's Fantasy from the Middle Ages to Today*, pp. 77-114. Chicago: American Library Association, 1988.

[In the following essay, Egoff elucidates the defining characteristics of English children's literature in the Edwardian age, contrasting it with literature from the more rigid and structured Victorian era.]

### CONCEPTS OF CHILDHOOD

In Edith Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), we meet a maidservant who, in order to impress her gentleman friend, appropriates and wears a ring that makes her invisible. In her frightened state, she is reassured by the children, who know how the magic works. "Now," said Gerald, "it's all over. Nothing but niceness now, and cakes and things." That comforting remark defines fantasy for about the next twenty-five years. Edwardian writers were children during the Victorian age, and they were determined to expunge from children's literature the last remnants of nursery discipline and the tyranny of nannies, nursemaids, governesses, and parents. Childhood was seen at this time as "the best of all possible worlds," and the separation of childhood from adulthood was well-nigh complete. This shift was a remarkable feat in view of the fact that most of the major writers of the period—Edith Nesbit, Beatrix Potter, Rudyard Kipling, and Kenneth Grahame—had far from idyllic childhoods. Their early unhappiness was not something that they pushed aside in their adult lives, however. In her book of childhood recollections, *Long Ago When I Was Young*, Edith Nesbit states that, "There is nothing



here that is not in my most clear and vivid recollection."<sup>1</sup> Rudyard Kipling revealed his harrowing exile from India in his short story "Baa, Baa Black Sheep," and Beatrix Potter in her adult life ultimately rejected the narrow standards of her parents. In their books for the young, whether using children or animals as protagonists, these writers drew a curtain firmly down on the adult world and therefore also on pain and distress.

In the world of childhood they created, however, there is still a moral code, but it is one to which the children themselves subscribe: kindness, helpfulness, politeness, generosity, and family solidarity. Gone is the tough moral fiber of the great Victorian fantasies as well as the iconoclastic nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. The Puritan ethos disappears—hardly ever to return—and along with it any references to religion or struggles to reach higher levels of goodness. Edwardian book-children are rarely even admonished, except by their siblings or by their fantasy parental surrogates, and they always instinctively "do the right thing."

The changes in actual childhood, however, were probably neither as great nor as rapid as the books suggest. Even Gwen Raverat, the daughter of an upper-class family, speaks in her reminiscences of a late Victorian and Edwardian childhood, *Period Piece*, of the bland nursery food and the "discomfort, restraint, and pain" of the clothes the young were forced to wear.<sup>2</sup> There is certainly much talk of uncomfortable clothes in the Nesbit books also, but these are minor inconveniences in an otherwise blissful child world.

The Edwardian Age itself was a kind of pause in English history, a pause between the excesses of the Industrial Revolution and the horrors of World War I. It was a decade of much progressive social legislation, but little of this progressiveness shows in fantasy; nor is there a concern for the lot of the poor, as exhibited in the works of Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald, and Oscar Wilde. However, the Edwardians had a fascination for English tradition and a concern about the destruction of the countryside, which was heralded by urbanization and the appearance of the automobile; these themes appear in Edwardian fantasies along with the playful spirit of childhood. Barbara Tuchman has described the last two years of the decade as a "rich fat afternoon"<sup>3</sup>—and one in which a popular tune heard then would have been "The Teddy Bears' Picnic." Gwen Raverat describes this time as a "Utopia of tea-parties, dinner-parties, boat-races, lawn-tennis, antique shops, picnics, charming young men, delicious food and perfect servants. . . ."<sup>4</sup> Translate these adult pleasures into childlike ones, and we have most of the books of the Edwardian age, especially those by Kenneth Grahame, Rudyard Kipling, and Edith Nesbit.

#### THE MAGIC OF EDITH NESBIT

Edith Nesbit's first substantial excursion into magic, *A Book of Dragons* (1900), up-ends the former soft and serious literary fairy tales as the dragons are tamed by resourceful children who take over the duties and responsibilities of adults. In one story, for example, a little boy is called upon to be king. There is little fairy-tale atmosphere; the conversations and references are contemporary with 1900, and there is not a moral to be found in the story. The book was republished in 1972 as *The Complete Book of Dragons* with the addition of a story taken from *Five of Us—and Madeline*, first published in 1925, in which a dragon becomes the first airplane. Oswald Bastable, Nesbit's most perceptive young character in her stories of child and family life, would have called it a "jolly" book.

In *Nine Unlikely Tales for Children* (1901), Nesbit's view of childhood is seen more clearly, as well as her special brand of magic. A cross nursemaid is turned into an Automatic Nagging Machine, and the children are allowed food generally forbidden to them—a combination of the gourmet and the infantile, such as lobster, toffee, and ginger-beer. Stiff and starched clothes are shed for sealskin, which "could not be spoiled with sand or water or jam, or bread and milk, or any of the things with which you mess up the nice new clothes your kind relatives buy for you." The last sentence is an example of Nesbit's constant reproof to adults who misuse their authority over children.

With the exception of *The Magic City* (1910), the Nesbit books—such as *Five Children and It* (1902), *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), and *The Enchanted Castle* (1907)—are stories of magic rather than fantasies, and Edith Nesbit is the greatest magician in the whole of children's literature. In essence, she laid down the rules for the use of magic. First of all, there has to be a talisman that sparks the adventures. The talisman can be as fabulous as the Psammead of *Five Children and It* or as common an artifact as the ring in *The Enchanted Castle*. Once the magic begins, it must work consistently; there can be no departure from its rigid rules. There are frequent caveats and prohibitions, as in the folktales. Eldred and Elfrida, for example, in the historical fantasy *The House of Arden* (1908), cannot find the door into the past unless they have not quarreled for three days—a most difficult feat for two lively children to accomplish. It also is generally accepted that adults are *not* to be drawn into the magic. Some exceptions include, on the one hand, good-natured cooks and housemaids who will swallow a swiftly concocted explanation or, on the other hand, a learned professor or the Board of Directors of the Phoenix Fire Insurance Company who will put the events all down to a dream.

Parents, however, are totally excluded from the children's adventures. In *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, Anthea, who has a sensitive conscience, feels she should explain to her mother why the cook is missing (the children have left her happily ensconced as queen of a cannibal island), but to no avail:

"Darling one," said mother, "you know I love to hear the things you make up—but I am most awfully busy."

"But it's true," said Anthea desperately.

"You shouldn't say that, my sweet," said mother, gently. And then Anthea knew it was hopeless.

Overall, it is belief that counts in Nesbit's magic. Nothing can happen unless the children respond to its imperious call. In *The Enchanted Castle*, the children debate whether or not the castle is an enchanted one:

"Wireless is rather like magic when you come to think of it," said Gerald.

"Oh, *that* sort!" Jimmy's contempt was deep.

"Perhaps there's given up being magic because people didn't believe in it any more," said Kathleen.

"Well, don't let's spoil the show with any silly old not believing," said Gerald with decision. "I'm going to believe in magic as hard as I can. This is an enchanted garden, and that's an enchanted castle, and I'm jolly well going to explore."

In other words, the more one believes, the easier belief becomes. As the children moved farther into the garden, "the feeling of magic got thicker and thicker."

Nesbit's chief claim to remembrance lies in her creation of the Psammead (in *Five Children and It* and in *The Story of the Amulet*), the mythological Phoenix (in *The Phoenix and the Carpet*), and, to a lesser extent, the Mouldiwarp (in *The House of Arden* and in *Harding's Luck*, 1909). The Psammead, with its eyes like a snail, its bat's ears, its spider-like body and a monkey's hands and feet, is a creature from Megatherium times who hates the damp and loves dry, warm sand. He is, indeed, a sand-fairy. The Phoenix is best described by Jane in *The Phoenix and the Carpet*: "You are the most beautiful person we've ever seen." The Mouldiwarp leads a more ordinary life than either the Psammead or the Phoenix. Although he is the badge of the House of Arden come alive, he is still just a mole; the magic in him appears to lie in his white coloring. Nesbit's sure touch of magic had faltered, however, by the time *The House of Arden* was conceived, and the Mouldiwarp did not achieve the memorable personality of his two predecessors. Nonetheless, all the creatures know their worth; and although they are at the children's beck and call, they manage to persuade the children and the reader of the opposite.

To a considerable extent, these creatures also substitute for absent fathers and busy mothers. They provide information and advice, and lay down the rules for conduct as well as magical procedures:

"I shouldn't advise that," said the Phoenix very earnestly.

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, it isn't true."

and

"Now you're talking," said Robert.

"Of course I am," retorted the Psammead tartly, "so there's no need for you to."

The children accept all rebukes with equanimity, and they never argue back. They show their mettle and resourcefulness during the course of their magical adventures.

Nesbit's greatest strength lies in her ability to mingle the ordinary and familiar with the fantastic. When the children get their wishes from the Psammead in *Five Children and It*, they are not whirled away to enchanted lands but must cope with the wishes in their own time and place, where the golden guineas they have received are not current exchange and where the servants refuse to let the children into the house since, being "as beautiful as the day," they are not recognizable. In *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, journeys into the past are linked to an acquisition of artifacts for mother's bazaar. The children are the epitome of Edwardian middle-class values. They are intelligent, well educated (Anthea learns "Algebra and Latin, German, English and Euclid"), well read (they also know how to use reference books), considerate, and polite. They are also ordinary children in their carelessness:

It was breakfast-time, and mother's letter, telling them how they were all going for Christmas to their aunt's at Lyndhurst and how father and mother would meet them there, having been read by every one, lay on the table, drinking hot bacon-fat with one corner and eating marmalade with the other.

Nesbit is most successful with the short story format and the episodic novel. Both *Five Children and It* and *The Phoenix and the Carpet* are based on a series of separate adventures linked only by the magic of the Psammead and the Phoenix, without whose powers the adventures cannot even begin. *The Story of the Amulet* is her most continuous purposeful narrative as the children quest for their heart's desires—the return of their parents and their baby brother, and the joining together of the halves of the amulet to help their friend the absent-minded professor. It is also the book that comes closest to successful fantasy. The amulet has a presence that borders on the awesome:

Then out of that vast darkness and silence came a light and a voice. The light was too faint to see anything by, and the voice was too small for you to hear what it said. But the light and the voice grew. And the light

was the light that no man may look on and live, and the voice was the sweetest and most terrible voice in the world. The children cast down their eyes and so did everyone.

There are many humorous moments in the story, but they are merely decorations to its overall serious thrust. The Egyptian mythology that ultimately subsumes the ordinary events of child and family life, which are so much a part of the first two books, gives the aura of an Other World that is both powerful and believable.

In spite of its episodic chapters, *The Story of the Amulet* is, as its title suggests, a whole story. *The Enchanted Castle*, on the other hand, moves from a humorous, magical adventure story into a burst of pantheistic fantasy as the statues in the garden are reincarnated as the Greek gods themselves, but the sudden change is far from convincing. *The Magic City* (1910) is a totally created building-block world, but as in *The Enchanted Castle*, Nesbit's inventive spirit flags, and the complex magic demands overly concentrated attention. Both books, however, have memorable episodes. In *The Enchanted Castle*, the most memorable episode involves the "Ugly-Wuglies"—creatures made by the children out of broomsticks, umbrellas, coathangers, and paper masks. These creatures come alive through the magic of the ring and provide the only true shiver of horror in any Nesbit book. One of the most original touches of her fertile imagination was to provide the Ugly-Wuglies with consonantless speech. *The Magic City* also has its marvelous moments, especially its beginning. Philip, a lonesome young boy who is harassed by his nurse, builds—as an anodyne for his misery—a beautiful city, first of all from his own toys and then from everything useful, beautiful, and exotic that he can find in a luxurious drawing room. Suddenly, he can enter the magic city, where he finds his step-sister, Lucy, a little girl whom he had previously disdained. Together they have a series of "do-good" adventures while being pursued by a female villain, who turns out to be Philip's nurse. The story is all a bit of a hodgepodge.

Edith Nesbit and her husband, Hubert Bland, were active socialists and founding members of the Fabian Society, and so they moved in the same circles as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. Little of her reforming zeal appears in her writing, however, but it does break through on occasion. For example, when the nurse in *The Magic City* is unmasked and defeated, she speaks her mind about her condition in the real world:

"... You don't understand. You've never been a servant, to see other people get all the fat and you all the bones. What you think it's like to know if you'd just been born in a gentleman's mansion instead of in a model workman's dwelling you'd have been brought up as a young lady and had the openwork silk stockings and the lace on your under-petticoats."

Nonetheless, her words fall on deaf ears and do not mitigate her punishment.

Genteel poverty is well described in *The House of Arden* in the lives of Eldred, Elfrida, and their aunt before they inherit Arden Castle. Similarly, in 1909, Dickie Harding of *Harding's Luck* is poor, orphaned, and lame. When he travels into the past, however, he is metamorphosed into healthy and wealthy Lord Arden. Obviously, Edith Nesbit did not regard a children's book as a vehicle for social reform as did Charles Kingsley in *The Water-Babies*. Only in *The Story of the Amulet*, when the children go into the future, does she allow herself a vision of Utopia. In this story, the children find London unrecognizable. The Thames runs as clear as crystal, there are motor carriages that make no noise, and there is no smoke. And the people? "I know," said Anthea suddenly. "They're not worried; that's what it is." From a little boy named Wells (after the great reformer), they discover that future children like school (they can choose their own subjects for study) and that they have comfortable padded playrooms with no open fireplaces. Robert knows that three thousand children a year in his time are burned to death because of open fires. In a beautiful park, groups of people are gathered, and "Men, as well as women, seem to be in charge of the babies and were playing with them." This chapter, "The Sorry-Present and The Expelled Little Boy," is the first venture into science fiction in children's literature and the strongest statement of Nesbit's socialist ideals. She is typically Edwardian in her dislike of cities; all her children prefer the country and frequently say so.

Nesbit also had an affinity for the past, as is evident in her major characters—the primeval Psammead; the Phoenix, who might have stepped out of a medieval bestiary; and the ancient Mouldiwarp, who speaks with an earthy, old-fashioned Sussex accent. *The Enchanted Castle* ends in a burst of Greek mythology. Her two time fantasies, *The House of Arden* and *Harding's Luck*, take us back into various reigns of English history, notably those of Queen Elizabeth and James I. Although both these latter books have intriguing beginnings and the history is well used as a springboard for adventure, the events become tedious and repetitive, the magic complicated, and everything verges on the sentimental.

Edith Nesbit's books were written solely to give children pleasure (as well as to fill the often empty Nesbit family purse), not to inculcate moral principles or to express her adult views of society. Nor was she concerned about creating Other Worlds or dimensions of them. Her children step eagerly but lightly through the rifts in the curtain of fantasy into other real worlds and are not affected by them. However, her special and consistent use of magic, combined with her observation of the small delights of childhood (mostly derived from her own children) and her strong feeling for family life,

gave rise to a Nesbit tradition that has lasted until our own time. Like so many other Edwardian writers who saw their adult works as of greater importance than those they wrote for children, by the time of her death in 1924, Nesbit was saluted in *Punch* magazine only for her children's novels. For an epitaph, C. L. Graves wrote:

You pass, but only from the ken  
Of scientists and statisticians,  
To join HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN,  
The Prince of all the good Magicians.<sup>5</sup>

PERSPECTIVES OF CHILDHOOD IN THE WORKS OF  
RUDYARD KIPLING, W. H. HUDSON, AND JAMES  
BARRIE

History itself provides almost enough magic for Rudyard Kipling in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910). The fantasy lies only in the appearance of Puck, "the oldest Old Thing in England"; and why shouldn't he appear when the children have "acted out *Midsummer Night's Dream* three times over, on Midsummer Eve, in the middle of a Ring, and under—right under one of my oldest hills in Old England"? The magic continues as Puck parades before Dan and Una, figures from England's past, ranging from the god Weland (turned blacksmith) through the Vikings, the Romans, Harold (the loser at Hastings), King John (of the Magna Carta), and a host of others. Although the great names of history are legion, the narrators are most frequently minor figures who give their personal view of events. This is not the history of the history books, but a kind of *tableaux vivant* with the addition of dialogue.

Dan and Una are not participants in the action as are Eldred and Elfrida in Nesbit's *The House of Arden*; they are eager listeners, questioners, and, only occasionally, commentators. At the end of each episode, they are "de-magicked" by means of Oak, Ash, and Thorn; for, as Puck says, if they told at home of what they had seen and heard, human beings would "send for the doctor." In a way, Dan and Una do not need magic. They are children of the Sussex countryside and already "seized" of their own private domain, where not even their great friend old Hobden the hedger (and poacher) would venture without permission. Sussex, which Kipling loved and where all the stories are set, is seen as a land of enchantment in "Puck's Song," which begins *Puck of Pook's Hill* and which ends:

She is not any common Earth,  
Water or wood or air,  
But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye,  
Where you and I will fare.

Although there is talk of getting home to tea and Latin lessons and governesses, Dan and Una are true children of the Edwardian age in their freedom from adults:

When they had seen their dear parents and their dear  
preceptress politely off the premises they got a cabbage-  
leaf full of raspberries from the gardner, and a Wild  
Tea from Ellen.

Kipling's style in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and in *Rewards and Fairies* has neither the brilliance of his *Just So Stories* (1902) nor the rhythmic cadence of his Mowgli stories in *The Jungle Book* (1894) and in *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), but it is effective nonetheless. It changes from the natural conversation of the children to the colloquial speech of some of the narrators to heightened language when deep-felt emotions and strained loyalties are revealed. No one, until Rosemary Sutcliff in her novels of early Britain, has written so passionately about history as Rudyard Kipling.

W. H. Hudson's *A Little Boy Lost* (1905) owes almost everything to his childhood in Argentina. It is the book of a naturalist combined with the mysticism of Blake, from whom he tells us that he took his title and "something too of the semi-wild spirit of the child hero. . . ." All of Hudson's writing can be summed up in Blake's lines from *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

In its imagery and feeling of something beautiful but intangible that escapes the conscious mind, *A Little Boy Lost* resembles George MacDonald's *The Golden Key* more than any other book in children's literature. But it is, in essence, unique.

Martin, the little boy of the story, has an immediate affinity with the unnamed pampas land to which his parents have moved after his father abandons an ordinary carpenter's life in England. At age seven, and even more in tune with the natural world than ever before, Martin does not understand things mechanical and accidentally kills a spoonbill with his father's gun. A drought comes, mirages occur—again, which Martin does not understand—he follows their enticements as once mortals pursued the will-o-the-wisps, and he is lost. Figures emerge from the mirage—a dying prince who has the features of a spoonbill and a queen and her entourage, who give Martin gifts: "he shall be a wanderer all his days on the face of the earth," "let the sea do him no harm," and "let all men love him." Martin's adventures from then on are a combination of fantasy and reality, dream and awakening. Into them are woven legends of the country. One day, however, he glimpses the sea, and not all the love and enticements of the lovely "Lady of the Hills" who has adopted him can keep Martin from it. However, when he achieves his goal, he finds the sea uncontrollable—not subject to him as were the birds and beasts of the pampas—and he lies naked, hungry, cold, and wretched on a sea-worn raft until he is rescued by a passing ship.



In his innocence and naiveté, Martin is like Diamond in George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*. Like Diamond, too, he hears a song of "Wonderful Death and Wonderful Life," but it is beyond his understanding. Diamond's experience is religious and mystical, leading him to a joyful acceptance of death. Martin's is of the natural world—a journey into the mysteries of nature and pantheism that ends with the knowledge that the ultimate ideal cannot be reached.

Whereas W. H. Hudson created a half-fantasy world out of the flora and fauna of Argentina, Sir James Barrie created a complete fantasy island out of his own boyhood, his love of boys' books, his companionship with boys, and the Edwardian perspective of childhood. All of these influences combined to make *Peter Pan* one of the most successful children's books of all times. It influenced both the spirit and content of fantasy for several generations. The genesis of *Peter Pan*—from a first appearance in Barrie's adult book *The Little White Bird* (1902) to its performance as a stage play in 1904 through the publication of the novelette *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906) and then to a full-fledged novel, *Peter and Wendy* (1911), that is frequently republished as *Peter Pan and Wendy* or *Peter Pan*—has been well documented in Harry M. Geduld's book *Sir James Barrie*.<sup>7</sup>

The first sentences of *Peter and Wendy* give the kernel of the story: "All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up. . . . Wendy knew it after she was two years old. Two is the beginning of the end." Peter escapes the fate of adulthood because he runs away the day he is born:

"It was because I heard father and mother," he explained in a low voice, "talking about what I was to be when I became a man. . . . I don't want ever to be a man," he said with passion. "I want always to be a little boy and to have fun. So I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long time among the fairies."

Peter has to "pay the Piper" for his defection, however; he is neither mortal nor fairy. As the raven points out to him in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, he is "a Betwixt-and-Between."

The half-fairy Peter holds sway over Never-land. It is a tropical island (Barrie loved islands) with white sand, a blue lagoon, and a forest. It is peopled with Indians, pirates, mermaids, bears, wolves, tigers—and a crocodile. Food is ready-to-hand—"roasted breadfruit, yams, coconuts, baked pig, mamee-apples, tappa rolls and bananas, washed down with calabashes of poe-poe." But best of all, there are adventures every day. Never-land is the eternal land of make-believe, made of the stuff of dreams, old tales, and adventure stories. Here children can have all the fun and none of the responsibilities of the grown-ups; they can fight without being hurt, kill

and see their foes rise again. They can wage war with pirates and Indians and fierce animals—and then do it all over again. They can even face death with impunity. When Peter is left alone on a rock in the sea with the tide rising, a drum beats within him that says, "To die will be an awfully big adventure." Never-lands are in all children's minds, Barrie tells us. "We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more."

Peter lures the Darling children—Wendy, John and Michael—to Never-land chiefly by appealing to the oldest wish of all, that of being able to fly. What Peter really wants, though, is a mother for his "Lost Boys" on the island, and like the winged Greek god Hermes, he uses every wile at his command. Off the children fly to Peter's address, "second to the right and straight on till morning." When they reach the island, they hail it "not as something long dreamt of and seen at last but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays," for below them lie all their imaginings, just as Peter has said. They have flown by means of Peter's fairy powers—he has sprinkled fairy dust on them—but now there is no more magic. The island is a place of wish fulfillment, but it also comes astonishingly close to their home routine. "Do you want an adventure now," [Peter] said casually to John, "or would you like to have your tea first?" Wendy, in the house underground, prepares the meals, darns the socks, sets the bedtime hours, and generally keeps the boys in order as they wrangle in a familial way. She is, of course, the mother; Peter is the father; and Michael, much to his chagrin, has to sleep in a cradle like a baby. The island is so real a make-believe world that the children still make-believe. Meals are frequently make-believe; and when Wendy is stunned by an arrow, Slightly (one of the lost boys) makes believe he is a doctor. Peter is the greatest make-believer of them all; he can even pretend not to have adventures!

Because of his attachment to his mother, Barrie himself has been called "the boy who wouldn't grow up." However, *Peter Pan* shows him as much a realist as any other fine fantasist. It is filled with references to the selfishness and egotism of Peter and the other children, although, like real children, they are not aware of any flaws in their nature. Wendy, John, and Michael give not a thought to their parents as they fly out the window, and they are superbly confident of hugs and kisses when they return. At the thought of losing Wendy, the Lost Boys threaten to keep her a prisoner; but Peter, who has been described by some critics as the personification of selfishness, lets Wendy go. He does so out of pride, of course, but he does let her go—and the Lost Boys as well—and arranges for her journey home (she cannot fly without his magic power). Peter is far more than a one-dimensional character; he was, after all, created to entertain Barrie's favorite boy in real life—Peter