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## 1

# Worlds Enough and Time: The Cult of Childhood in Edwardian Fiction

*Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries*

[I]n our own society the talk of benevolence and the cult of childhood are the very fashion of the hour. We, of this self-conscious, incredulous generation, sentimentalise our children, analyse our children, think we are endowed with a special capacity to sympathise and identify ourselves with children; we play at being children.... Know you what it is to be a child? It is to be something very different from the man of to-day.

(Francis Thompson, *Shelley: An Essay* [1908] 28)

Childhood in the Edwardian period was a subject of deep concern, fascination, and even obsession. Despite Romanticism's idealization of the child and Victorian advances in education, it was the Edwardians who truly made the child central to 'childhood' and childhood central to the Zeitgeist. Nowhere was this more evident than in fiction. Edwardian novels and short stories focused on children to an extent not before seen, nor continued in the same way after the outbreak of World War I. Literary children were no longer merely 'incipient adults' (Keating 221), but were beings in their own right: imaginative, free, and distinct from adults. In the Edwardian period for 'the first time it was widely recognized that children...have different needs, sensibilities, and habits of thinking; that they cannot be educated, worked, or punished like adults; that they have rights of their own independent of their parents' (Rose 178). Paternalistic 'seen and not heard,' 'spare the rod and spoil the child' notions of childhood were being swept away and children became protected, longed for, and recognized as having their own needs and desires.

The concept of childhood, too, became a symbolic counterweight to the urbanized, pressurized, anarchic stresses of modern life and a civilization felt to be in decline.

Gathering international expertise on childhood in fiction, this collection contains twelve original essays written by scholars in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia which assess the concept, role, and portrayal of childhood within British fiction of the Edwardian period. For the purposes of this volume the Edwardian period is defined as 1901–1914 and the major texts discussed are those published within this timeframe. Because the volume is interested in the literary marketplace of this time, works written earlier but first published in these years are included, while texts written during the period but not published until later are excluded. While the precise start and end dates of a movement in literature are in some measure necessarily arbitrary, this collection is presaged on the view that this time witnessed a new, intense, and distinctive fictional depiction of childhood. The volume seeks, too, to challenge assumptions often implicit in literary criticism that the Edwardian years were merely a continuation of the Victorian period or the start of the Modern. Certainly where fictional childhood is concerned, the Edwardian period had its own distinctive qualities and tastes.

Because the Edwardian obsession was for the pre-adolescent child, the volume's central focus is on childhood itself rather than puberty and the teenage years. Interweaving studies of single authors with analyses of trends in fictional childhood across several texts, the volume also aims to open up literary discussion between scholars of children's literature and scholars of adult literature, between those who work on canonical texts and those who research popular fiction, and between those interested in realism and those interested in fantasy. Analysis of fiction from all these areas is included as essential to understanding Edwardian fictional childhood. In particular the volume seeks to break down artificial boundaries between considerations of works written or marketed for children and examinations of adult texts. Such classifications obscure valuable symmetries, especially in a period when cross-writing for both readerships flourished.

Interested in historical and cultural positioning of British fiction in the period, the volume reads texts as distinctively of their time and place. This is not to suggest that Edwardian fiction mirrors exactly Edwardian childhood as it was lived. If it did one would expect a more eclectic picture of childhood and the wider presence of urban and working-class child characters. The predominant textual portrayal of

childhood is of middle-class children living generally pleasant lives. Indeed, what Anna Davin suggests of the child in Edwardian art is equally true of the child in Edwardian fiction:

[The] social diversity of children's experience [is] not well represented.... The homogeneous image of the Edwardian child reflects the contemporary preoccupation with universalizing a middle-class ideal, and obscures the existence of multiple Edwardian childhoods. (62)

Reflecting Edwardian ideals, the period's fictional children tend to exist in idyllic surroundings. Yet as Graham Hough observes:

The concept of pre-1914 England as a long summer afternoon is quite false; it was filled with conflict, political, social, and ideological. But it is true that the fabric of high bourgeois culture was as yet unbroken, and it managed to hold all together in a precarious fusion until the war blew it away for ever. (476)

In addition to some very warm summers in a meteorological sense, an element in the sense of the 'long summer afternoon,' which was part of the period's own consciousness, was surely the prevalence of writing about or for children and childhood experience itself. Yet remembering growing up in a boarding school just before the outbreak of World War I, George Orwell reflects upon the unresolved tensions and inequalities of English life simmering beneath its apparently sumptuous surface:

From the whole decade before 1914 there seems to breathe forth a smell of the more vulgar, un-grown up kinds of luxury, a smell of brilliantine and *crème-de-menthe* and soft-centred chocolates – an atmosphere, as it were, of eating everlasting strawberry ices on green lawns to the tune of the Eton Boating Song. (409)

J. B. Priestley notes that 'The Edwardian was never a golden age, but seen across the dark years afterwards it could easily be mistaken for one' (57). The tendency to idealize childhood, however, was widely evident during the period itself, with Edwardians feeling that there was something particularly special about the young of their time. Edward H. Cooper, for example, in his nonfictional *The Twentieth Century Child* (1905), states:

Critics of the new cult of the child are heard occasionally to express a wish that their own sayings and doings had been treasured carefully by admiring friends, which sayings would be found, they allege, to be quite as clever as those quoted from the nurseries of the twentieth century. Regretfully and apologetically I doubt it. (7)

Childhood in fiction is of course an adult construct, often of 'whatever adults have lost and maybe never had' (Honeyman 4). The construct that predominates in Edwardian fiction is of childhood as a world (or worlds) apart from that of adults, both in time and imaginative possibility. As Dieter Petzold notes, 'Even where there is no physical separation, a profound mental separation is often assumed. Again and again it is suggested that adults and children are really worlds apart, separated by a gulf which few adults are able to bridge' (34). The child's separateness could become challenging: 'as childhood came to be seen as a state distinct from and potentially opposed to being "grown-up" ... it came to be figured as "other," with all the idealization, horror, and projection that such a status implies' (Briggs 168).

This collection's subtitle, *Worlds Enough and Time*, pluralizes the opening line from Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress': 'Had we but world enough, and time' (1). Marvell's poem is one of seduction, but for Edwardian writers it was childhood that seduced, not (primarily at least) in a sexual sense, but in that childhood seemed to offer the 'worlds enough and time' lacking in adult lives. *Worlds* in the sense of places and states created by child-like imaginations where there is freedom to be light-hearted, playful, free from adult pressures, and uncorrupted in vision. *Time* in the sense that children experience it: expansively, slowly, in unlimited capacities. Unlike adulthood, childhood in the Edwardian ideal was not confined or defined by the industrialized, work-driven, time-constrained structures of grown-up 'civilization,' but instead was free to explore a multiplicity of worlds without pressure. For the Edwardians childhood became an escape, a solution, an ideal. Ellen Key's *The Century of the Child* (1900; English translation 1909), for instance, which became 'a world bestseller' (Cunningham, *Children* 171), presents the child as model for adults to follow and as the answer to the problems of the age.

Freedom from the strictures of time, in particular, was a signifier of childhood's separation from an adult world increasingly driven by timetables. By 1899 Standard Time had been established across the railways of Europe and life could be synchronized to the second. That fewer 'unreachable worlds' any longer existed in real life may also account for the period's fictional fascination with Arcadian childhood domains which are set apart from the industrialized urban. By '1901 three quarters of the [British population] were urban dwellers' (Walvin 18), and 'Edwardian Britain was the most urbanised country in the world' (Thea Thompson 37). Yet even the urban or industrial could become charged with the magic of children's imagination in Edwardian fiction through

such vehicles as E. M. Forster's *Celestial Omnibus* ("The Celestial Omnibus" [1908]), or Algernon Blackwood's *Starlight Express* (*A Prisoner in Fairyland* [1913]) whose schedules run by the power of imagination alone.

The essays in this collection discuss texts which illustrate in different ways the heightened literary taste for childhood in the 1901–1914 period. Four recurring aspects of fictional Edwardian childhood emerge: a sense of adult loss or longing in connection with childhood, the centrality of the child at play in the home or garden, society's views of what children need or should be, and the child's connection with savagery and the pagan. These four aspects serve to group the essays into sections.

The essays in Part I reveal varying aspects of the 'The Child Lost': lost from adult life, lost from Victorian moralistic or religious conventions, or lost in the sense of being unknowable and unreachable. The child lost also includes children who are searching for a home or place of happiness like Mary Lennox in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), the children who return to an English country house in preference to a Christian heaven in Rudyard Kipling's "They" (1904), or Peter Pan who is shut out from home, adulthood, and life.

The Edwardian fictional child, as the essays in Part I show, is less sentimentalized than might be expected. Children are idealized but are not used for sentimental pathos, rhetorical flourish, or social moralism as they had been in Victorian novels by writers such as Charles Dickens. Edwardian fiction may set up an ideal vision of childhood but at the same time deconstructs and demythologizes it, moving towards a heightened realism in the portrayal of children. The Edwardians also commodified childhood, creating the child as an object of adult desire, 'a fetish,' an integral part of consumer society.

This consumerism is seen, for example, in the publishing for and about children which flourished in the period, creating a diamond age of gorgeously illustrated gift books and a merging of child and adult readerships for the same texts: 'With so many adult readers attempting to recapture their childhoods, the distinction between adult and juvenile fiction gradually dissolved' (Rose 183). As Jonathan Rose suggests, 'One extraordinary product of this childhood nostalgia was an unprecedented flowering of children's literature ... no other generation in English history produced so many children's classics as the Edwardians' (181). Adult longing for childhood, and child characters who have no need of adults, became key literary themes, and there was a 'neo-Romantic attempt to convey the child's own point of view and way of life' (Keating 219).

As the discussions in Part I demonstrate, children's own feelings and experiences are expressed in Edwardian fiction and, in contrast to

Victorian depictions, the child is no longer used primarily for moralistic or religious ends. The Edwardian child is neither original sinner nor original innocent. Yet the period's child characters do elicit emotion; longed for or lost, they have an enormous emotional impact on adults. Lying beneath the surface joyousness of Edwardian depictions of childhood lies an acute sense of loss, even grief. That sense of loss in some cases is over *actual* children lost or longed for, but more widely is over what childhood variously symbolizes.

The lost child is often associated with mysticism, fantasy, and the supernatural. Writers also use fantasy to enhance a sense of children's otherness, to create a child-like perspective, or to invoke a magical, mythical sense of 'real' England. Edwardian fiction generally presents a particularly *English* rather than more widely British vision, even in the work of Scottish writers or British authors living outside England. As Anthea Trodd observes 'The England of Edwardian writing is a peculiar geographical entity... usually defined as the Home Counties. The myth is of England, not Britain' (24). The preciousness of childhood in the period's fiction is often linked to the preciousness of England; the longing for childhood is equally the yearning for an idealized unaltering, unflinching England. 'Englishness' in itself becomes a moral concept: 'In *Terry, the Girl Guide* by Dorothea Moore, published...in 1912, "English" is insistently used by the girls as the ultimate word of moral approval' (Bratton 91). Cooper's 1905 view, too, is that English children were the world's best:

at present the large majority of English children of all classes and all ages are the most charming companions in the world; from no point of view can the little folk of any other country with which I am acquainted bear comparison with them; and this state of affairs must not change for the worse. (136)

The essays in Part II, 'The Child at Play in Home and Garden,' examine a defining image of Edwardian writing: the child of garden and home. The symbolism of the garden or, in the case of J. M. Barrie and D. H. Lawrence, the island-as-garden, operates as a separate domain of childhood play, otherness, or escape from the adult home. By offering children adventure and freedom from the strictures of the adult world, the garden in Edwardian literature contains potential for regeneration. Part II's essays explore the ways in which domestic environments impact upon child characters either by implicating them in adult games and battles or by blurring Victorian-espoused family boundaries between

adult and child. In texts such as Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897 revised 1907) and Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904) there develops a very Edwardian ambiguity between flirtation and play.

By focusing on territorial tensions, the discussions in Part II also highlight the precarious relationship between home and garden as, respectively, adult and child domains. Gardens offer freedom and adventure to children, who, for Edwardian writers, seem to represent the hope, natural resilience, and creative imagination society needed. Houses, by contrast, at times symbolize adult power and degeneration. These essays also reveal the importance of the child-in-the-garden in connecting the human and the natural worlds. Childhood is shown, too, to be part of a spiritual domain in a world becoming less spiritual. Writers like Lawrence, for example, connect childhood with primitivist celebration of unrestrained bodily instinct and naturalness, seeing a child-like uninhibitedness as an antidote to Victorian Puritanism.

The Edwardian period was a time when games, the spirit of play, and 'reversion to a childlike turn of mind' were lauded (Rose 178). Children's role within the domestic environment was acknowledged and the production of toys and merchandise for children increased exponentially as children's right to play was emphasized. Peter Pan's "'I just want always to be a little boy and to have fun'" (*Peter and Wendy* 170), reflects the Edwardian cultural desire for play that these essays examine and which Rose terms the 'Edwardian cult of childhood and fun' (xii) or 'Gospel of Fun' (as opposed to the Victorian 'Gospel of Work') (163–98). This spirit of play was evidenced by 'a reversion to a childlike turn of mind, often an outright refusal to grow up' which produced a 'list of eminent Edwardians who seem to have been stuck in childhood' (Rose 178). Some commentators have interpreted this quest for fun and 'desire to lavish more attention on children' as arising from the 'uncertainties of the adult public world – as an attempt to gain for and from children the sense of security that the outside world could not provide' (Kemp, Mitchell, and Trotter xiv).

The importance of play and games in the domestic environment accentuates tensions between adult domesticity and childhood freedom. Adults in Edwardian fiction are often reluctant to leave childhood behind and their attempts to retain childhood, or regain it in order to atone for adulthood behaviours, disrupts children's lives. While child characters in some texts such as Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) need rehabilitation as a result of neglect and damage suffered at the hands of adults, damaged adults themselves seek forms of childhood freedom as an escape from the

dilemmas of maturity. The Edwardian home itself, as these essays show, can sometimes become a prison which forces children to assume adult domestic roles under the guise of play. This often means that 'real' play must take place outside the home and accounts in some measure for the fictional interest in alternative childhood worlds, such as gardens and islands, which are beyond adult jurisdiction.

During the Edwardian period parental and domestic powers over children diminished as the state increasingly assumed control over children's lives, according them rights independent of their parents. Part III, 'Society's Child,' provides an overview of the interaction between fiction and Edwardian society's attempts to provide for children's education, welfare, and health. The period saw a diminishing birthrate,<sup>1</sup> a declining infant mortality rate (at least among the upper and middle classes), and there was dramatic development in child welfare laws and practice. The Pyrrhic victory of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the national shock that 'two out of five of those who volunteered to go to fight in South Africa were rejected because of poor physique' (Cunningham, *Invention* 184) led to panicked attention to children's health. Improving children's fitness was seen as integral to national security and Imperial survival. C. F. G. Masterman's *The Condition of England* (1909) expressed fears about modern city life producing physically degenerate children, and works such as those arising from the Royal Commission on Physical Deterioration (1904) and J. E. Gorst's *The Children of the Nation: How Their Health and Vigour Should Be Promoted by the State* (1906) urged that children should be seen as national assets which the state should protect and nurture into 'the coming race' (Gorst 204).

Established at Deptford in 1900, the first nursery school was hailed as signalling 'the dawn of "the children's century,"' and improvements in health and education were ushered in (Cecil 134). An unprecedented range of child and welfare legislation was passed in the period. Midwives were compulsorily registered from 1902, the Education Act of 1902 created a national education system with Local Education Authorities, the Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906 mandated free meals for poor children, and in 1907 the Medical Inspection Act provided for medical inspections for school children. The Children's Act of 1908 introduced probation or 'borstal' rather than prison for child offenders, established separate juvenile courts, made child neglect a crime for the first time, and 'confirmed the growing practice of regarding a person as a child until the age of fourteen' (Walvin 167). 'By 1914 there were few areas of children's lives which were not regulated by statute and

governed by judicial and administrative bodies' and 'it was clear beyond doubt that children had rights of their own, which were independent even of their own parents and which the state would try to safeguard for them' (Walvin 198).

Changes were not only state initiated. The period saw the Scout and Guide movements established in 1907 and 1910 respectively and Sigmund Freud's 'Essay on Infantile Sexuality' (1905) challenging the innocence of childhood.<sup>2</sup> To an extent never before seen children became the focus of legal, medical, literary, psychological, sexological, anthropological, political, sociological, anti-Victorian, and nationalistic interest. The Edwardian construction of childhood drew on Rousseauian and Romantic ideas about the benefits of the natural world but also integrally responded to matters at hand: Empire at its height but under evident threat, standardized education, legislative will towards the child, and child-like imagination as a palliative to the rushing mechanized city and a scientific age.

The essays in Part III demonstrate that literature participated in the debates about child welfare issues ranging from educational theory to eugenics, particularly in school stories, the juvenile periodical press, and fictions by Edith Nesbit. The school curriculum for girls, for example, became closely linked to broader concerns about motherhood and national degeneration. Periodicals aimed at boys, on the other hand, sought to inspire models of masculinity in young readers who were expected to become moral and physical leaders of nation and Empire. Fiction became increasingly involved in defining childhood in relation to welfare issues. Although less stringently expressed than in Victorian texts, Edwardian fiction, in a world less certain of its boundaries, saw itself as having a role in redressing declines in moral and physical health. Like those in Part II, the discussions in Part III emphasize the importance for children of play, games, and pastimes as an escape from the dangers and pressures of the modern world. Writers like Nesbit argued for more imaginative opportunity in children's play and education, while school stories and periodical fiction offered new combinations of adventure and excitement mixed with social and moral messages. Edwardian fiction expresses, too, contemporary expansion of children's education outside the domestic sphere and reflects the roles played by social and political movements in this process. Some authors, including Nesbit, were becoming active players in wider social discussions on child development even beyond their fiction.

Part IV, 'Savagery and the Child,' draws attention to the ways in which Edwardian writers often depict child characters in connection with

savagery, the primitive, or the pagan. This is evident both in texts that, implicitly or explicitly, teach their intended readership of white British children how savagery might be assumed and regarded in other peoples, and in texts that impute a positive savagery, paganism, or beastliness to child characters themselves.

As Jenny Bourne Taylor notes, this was a time 'when a wide set of contemporary concerns about the nature of civilizations and empires and the subjects that they produce were embodied particularly acutely in the imaginary figure of the child' (91). At the height of Imperialism, discussion about the education of the child and of 'savage' nations at times coalesced and the literature of childhood often drew upon or reflected contemporary anthropological thinking about hierarchies of race, human development, and civilization. Some Edwardian writers grouped children together with primitive 'savages' as lesser beings who were perceived to be incapable of understanding certain things or who needed to be kept innocent of particular knowledge. According to this vision both child and savage required training into a 'civilized' state. Other writers include the white British child reader or character within 'civilization' as opposed to colonized or other 'savage' races. Such texts regard the white British child as a junior imperialist with responsibilities towards 'savages,' child or adult, according to a racial hierarchy.

Other Edwardian depictions of childhood reify the 'primitive,' delight in the instinctive or the beastly, and see childhood as the epitome of existence free from civilization. Savagery is here connected with the 'beastliness' of children who operate according to their animal instincts. Adult characters, by contrast, have socialized, constrained, and constricted habits of being. The child in such texts is a free natural being set against the civilized adult. These child characters are often shown breaking adult boundaries, behaving in an unsocialized way against adult dictates, and receiving (overt or covert) textual applause for their actions. Such characters are seen in the rural, pre-industrial settings of works by Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and Saki. These fictions closely associate children with animals and often ally them with paganism, mysticism, magic, the gods, the supernatural, nature, instinct, ruthlessness and, to some extent, violence.

The four parts of this volume focus on prominent aspects of childhood in Edwardian fiction that have been highlighted by the contributors. The essays as a whole also identify qualities pervasive in fictional childhood of the period which serve to distinguish it from earlier constructions and make it distinctively Edwardian.

Romanticism's Wordsworthian idea of the child represents children raised in close connection to nature as the ideal. A symbolic figure representing innocence and untarnished human goodness, the Romantic child, unlike the Edwardian one, is usually a solitary figure. In Victorian fiction, childhood is often a time of powerlessness, trial, and emotional (and often physical) pain. By contrast to these earlier models Edwardian fiction sees the obsolescence of the lonely or solitary child, emphasizes the joys of childhood, and often neo-Romantically links children with nature – gardens, animals, woodlands, and islands. It also rejects the too-adult indulgences and experimentations of the 1890s. 'The Edwardian withdrawal into childhood was, in part,' as Rose observes, 'a reaction against the Decadent movement in literature. More generally, it was an attempt to rejuvenate – or escape from – a civilization that seemed old, dissolute, and sterile' (184).

Edwardian texts no longer focus so singularly on the solitary child figure of Romantic and Victorian literature and instead frequently centre on groups and siblings, reflecting, as Peter Keating has noted, the period's anthropological and sociological interests (221). The significance of religion in children's lives, too, plummets as more secular portrayals prevail. As childhood becomes its own world in Edwardian texts, the fictional child is also sometimes used 'as a means for establishing human values in an increasingly secular age' (Coveney 340).

Autonomy, integrity, and agency become the hallmarks of childhood in Edwardian fiction. Edwardian child characters are not controlled by adults nor do they long to grow up as an escape from childhood's vulnerability and victimization as they often do in Victorian fiction. Indeed, while in Victorian texts childhood is usually a comparatively brief, difficult step on the path to adulthood, in Edwardian literature children are rarely shown growing up. The Edwardian text seeks to 'fix' the child in a permanent childhood. In Romantic and Victorian writing, too, parents, teachers, employers, and religious figures have enormous control over children. Edwardian fiction sees this adult control dissipate. While Victorian literature depicted the power balance being weighted heavily in adults' favour, Edwardian fiction reveals the scales swinging triumphantly towards a child power base. There is a clear sense that it is not Father, but children, who know best. Fictional children are presented as independent, imaginative, troubling, mischievous, at one with nature and the supernatural, and, above all, as 'better' and more self-assured than adults.

Edwardian fictional children have no need of adults however much adults long desperately for children. Childhood in the period's fiction is

ephemeral not only because it does not last, but also because it need not choose to engage with the adult world. The adult world appears to have little importance to or involvement in childhood. As Keating suggests:

There is no single or simple explanation why so much independence was being granted at this time to fictional children. In addition to its links with anthropology and sociology, the change can be related to the greater independence being given to children by legislation, the pervasive mood of anti-Victorianism, the new demands for youthful heroes being made by Empire, and to a resurgence of interest in the education of young children. (226)

An emphasis on male connections to childhood also demarcates the Edwardian years as, in generalized terms – and in contrast to the more ‘female’ Victorian period – a ‘masculine’ period of literature. Certainly in its interest in the child as literary subject Edwardian writing echoed that earlier ‘masculine’ period: the Romantic era. It is often suggested that the first decade of the twentieth century marked a change from the Victorian cult of the little girl to Edwardian obsession with the boy. As Christine Roth argues, however, the change of spotlight from girls to boys was not absolute or overnight: there was overlap (51). As the essays in this volume verify, the cult of childhood in Edwardian fiction certainly encompassed children of both genders.

Childhood fully came into its own in Edwardian fiction, but from 1895 childhood had started to enter novels and short stories in new more intense ways, frequently from a child’s-eye perspective. Kenneth Grahame’s highly successful semi-autobiographical books *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898) captured a sense of real childhood, its views, delights, and adventures in stories about a group of orphaned siblings who live in a country house governed by ‘Olympians’: stultifying Aunts and Uncles who have all the authority but have no understanding of children’s imaginations. Grahame’s books clearly influenced Edith Nesbit’s Bastable stories – *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *The Wouldbegoods* (1901), and *New Treasure Seekers* (1904) – which, like Grahame’s texts, are narrated by a child who tells of his life and adventures with his siblings and contains both scenes that are poignant without being Victorianly sentimental and elements that are comic. Indeed another marker that distinguishes Edwardian depictions of childhood from earlier ones is a general readiness to engage with the humorous qualities of children. Henry James, too, significantly advanced the child’s perspective and

questioned childhood innocence in *The Other House* (1896), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

J. M. Barrie, whose *Peter Pan* would epitomize the Edwardian cult of childhood, also turned to the literary child in these final years of the nineteenth century in *Sentimental Tommy: The Story of His Boyhood* (1896), as did Rudyard Kipling with his *Jungle Books* (1894, 1895) and *Stalky & Co.* (1899). Elizabeth Von Arnim's *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (1898) was timely in its recognition that sentimentalized and unrealistic methods of writing about children in fiction – “you can't write effectively about children without” mentioning “a mother's knee,” “And pink toes,” and being “mildly pathetic” (162–63) – needed freshening.

Some late Victorian views of childhood follow less delightful models. Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896) focuses on a child of the London slums who turns to crime. Thomas Hardy's Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), who kills his siblings and then himself thinking it will help his parents, is the bleakest type of the child in late nineteenth-century fiction. Jude reports a doctor's view that:

there are such boys springing up amongst us – boys of a sort unknown in the last generation – the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live. (355)

The Edwardians reclaim childhood from this pessimistic vision. Indeed, novels like Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906) and Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) move actively towards optimism by emphasizing the regenerative capacities of children.

From 1895 the ‘world apart’ of childhood intensifies acutely in fiction, but adults still hold power and control the lives children lead. It is only in the Edwardian period itself – a new century with a new more playful king<sup>3</sup> – that fictional children achieve agency and autonomy and adults become less powerful. In Edwardian texts children become unreachable, self-contained, longed for: characters whose worlds run on their own grooves and who engage with adults only in ways and on terms that suit them. In the Edwardian period it is childhood – symbolized in the forever child Peter Pan – that has God-like wisdom and powers. Grown-up power is expunged from the world of children in Edwardian fiction. The Victorian governess's crushing of the young boy Miles at the end of *The Turn of the Screw* becomes, in Edwardian hands, the child

Conradin's contentedly buttering himself another piece of toast after contriving the death of his aunt in Saki's 'Sredni Vashtar' (1910).

If World War I marked the end of the Golden Age of children's literature, it also ended (assisted by wider dissemination of Freud's theories of childhood) the Edwardian golden age of childhood in fiction. Certain individual writers with a passion for childhood, like Algernon Blackwood, would continue to produce fictions in which childhood was central, but these were specific rivulets of storytelling. Fiction as a whole began flowing in more adult directions: breaking through barriers to sexual content, plunging into realist depictions of war, and rushing towards the cataracts of Modernism.

This volume encompasses discussions of texts by the Edwardian writers who most significantly contributed to childhood in the period's fiction: J. M. Barrie, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Angela Brazil, Kenneth Grahame, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, Andrew Lang, D. H. Lawrence, Edith Nesbit, Beatrix Potter, Saki, and the juvenile periodical presses. Other writers who are not covered in depth because their contribution to the Edwardian fiction of childhood is not as central are nevertheless worth mentioning here.

Several leading Edwardian authors who might not be associated with literature of or about childhood nevertheless display clear traces in their work of the period's fictional fascination with children. Samuel Butler, for instance, demolishes the Victorian patriarchal family in *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), H. G. Wells depicts giant children challenging the adult social fabric in *The Food of the Gods* (1904) and in his short story 'The Door in the Wall' (1906) portrays the fragility of the childhood domain in a frenetic adult world. E. M. Forster in 'The Story of a Panic' (1904) and 'The Celestial Omnibus' (1908) creates children who are assisted by mythical or literary characters in their search for alternative authorities to the adult voice. Arnold Bennett, too, in *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902) and his *Clayhanger* trilogy (1910–1916) portrays childhood perspectives as being different from, and yet equal to, those of adults.

Childhood was also central to the bestseller of 1908, Henry de Vere Stacpoole's *The Blue Lagoon*, which ran through 16 editions before the outbreak of World War I (Cockburn 67). The story of two shipwrecked children who grow up in natural isolation on a deserted Pacific island, fall in love, and while still effectively children themselves, have a baby, the book sought to capture the 'wonderment' of children who must learn about the mysteries of life – death, love, sex, and birth – completely naturally. Unadulterated by society, religion, culture, and adults, childhood on the island reflects the Edwardian ideal: non-urban existence

separate from adults, glowing physical health, a sense of timelessness in an eternal summer, and instinctive closeness to nature.

The period was notable for the wide variety of subgenres or styles of fiction in which the cult of childhood was expressed. Algernon Blackwood, best known for his tales of the weird and supernatural, contributed significantly to the Edwardian fiction of childhood in *Jimbo: A Fantasy* (1909), *The Education of Uncle Paul* (1909), and *A Prisoner in Fairyland: (The Book That Uncle Paul Wrote)* (1913), which are intense, complex evocations of childhood and its importance to adult life and literary creation. George Douglas Brown's realist *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901) pits a sensitive son against a brutal father. Helen Bannerman's eight Edwardian books that followed her hugely popular *Little Black Sambo* (1899), although more recently controversial, were among the few then widely read in Britain that depicted black children at all. Urban working-class childhood was revealed in Arthur Morrison's *The Hole in the Wall* (1902). W. H. Hudson's unusual fantasy *A Little Boy Lost* (1905) tells of a boy whose wanderlust and passion for nature in a remote land takes him on a long overland adventure. Child characters and concerns in works such as Ford Madox Ford's *Christina's Fairy Book* (1906), John Masefield's historical novel *Jim Davis* (1911), and W. Heath Robinson's illustrated *Bill the Minder* (1912) also contribute to the period's fictional passion for childhood.

Forrest Reid and Katherine Mansfield both dipped their pens into the Edwardian ink of childhood but only fully established their reputations as writers of children outside the period. Although Reid's work as a whole shows an 'obsessive interest in children' (Coveney 269), his best-known Edwardian novel *The Garden God: A Tale of Two Boys* (1905) focuses on love and loss between two male adolescents rather than childhood itself. Similarly, apart from stories such as 'The Child-Who-Was-Tired' (1910) and 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' (1912), Mansfield's most notable stories of childhood were published in post-Edwardian or posthumous collections.

Although expressed most acutely in fiction, the Edwardian cult of childhood also manifested itself in other literary genres. Significant texts which fall outside the parameters of this volume, but which should nevertheless also be borne in mind as part of the apotheosis of literary childhood include works such as Walter de la Mare's poetry, Hilaire Belloc's *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907), and Edmund Gosse's (auto) biography *Father and Son* (1907). Arthur Mee's enormously popular *The Children's Encyclopedia* was published in fortnightly parts from March 1908 to February 1910 (and in volume form). Robert Baden-Powell's

*Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (1908) – the ‘world-renowned “self-instructor” for boys, and all-time bestseller...possibly in fact the most influential youth manual ever published’ (Boehmer xl) – was followed by Agnes Baden-Powell’s *The Handbook for Girl Guides, or, How Girls Can Help Build the Empire* (1912). Plays for and about children were very successful on the Edwardian stage including Seymour Hicks’s *Bluebell in Fairyland* (1901), Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Blue Bird* [*L’Oiseau Bleu*, 1908] first performed in England in 1909 and, above all others, Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1904) which best expressed, and entrenched, the Edwardian cult of childhood through Peter Pan himself who embodies the ultimate in child autonomy and agency by refusing to become an adult.

The volume opens with Paul March-Russell’s ‘Pagan Papers’ which investigates fictions of childhood as microcosms of the mythologies surrounding Edwardian England as eternally sunny and leisurely before the onslaught of World War I. Discussing Saki’s ‘The Toys of Peace’ (1914), May Sinclair’s ‘The Intercessor’ (1911), Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911), and Rudyard Kipling’s ‘“They”’ (1904), *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906), and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), his essay explores portrayals of the home as a place of disturbance. It also considers childhood in relation to the concept of ‘Deep England’ as a place mystically sustained in fiction to fashion an English identity and establish an alternative to the period’s preoccupation with efficiency and progress.

Examining J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1904) and *Peter and Wendy* (1911), Karen McGavock’s ‘Cult or Cull?’ discusses the ways in which Barrie deconstructs notions of childhood. The Peter Pan texts, she argues, fetishize, demythologize, and desentimentalize childhood. Yet, as the essay argues, economic benefits accrued from the appearance of sentimentality in these texts, reflecting the Edwardian commodification of childhood which lucratively marketed texts at both adult and child markets.

Adrienne E. Gavin’s essay, ‘Intangible Children,’ explores ways in which longing for children or grief over the loss of a child are manifested in the dream children of two early Edwardian texts: J. M. Barrie’s novel *The Little White Bird* (1902) and Rudyard Kipling’s short story ‘“They”’ (1904). Her essay suggests that having such noted writers focus so intensely on yearning for children early in the period reflected and encouraged the obsession for childhood that Edwardian fiction so pervasively expresses. She also draws attention to the prevalence in Edwardian fiction of relationships between children and bachelor or bachelor-like characters.

In 'The Edwardian Child in the Garden' Jane Darcy discusses childhood in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Edwardian fiction. Examining Burnett's children's novels, particularly *The Secret Garden* (1911), and her adult texts *In the Closed Room* (1904) and *The Shuttle* (1907), Darcy demonstrates that the child in these works becomes a symbol of the possibilities of rebirth. Discussing the ways in which child characters and gardens intertwine or parallel each other, the essay illustrates that Burnett's fictional children have a much greater rapport than adults with nature, animals, and birds.

Michelle Beissel Heath's 'Playing at House and Playing at Home' explores the prominence of games and sports in Edwardian life. Discussing J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911), Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897, revised 1907), and Edith Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), she argues that Edwardian literature of childhood is filled with images of playful children whose role is to reveal tensions between play and domesticity.

In 'Separated Lives and Discordant Homes' Andrew F. Humphries examines D. H. Lawrence's ambivalence towards childhood as a stage which is both idyllic and disrupted. Discussing *The White Peacock* (1911), *The Trespasser* (1912), and *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Humphries explores children as separate from, or separated by, adult behaviours. He also discusses how interaction between adults and children in these novels indicates both a strong instinctive bond and an equal tendency to disrupt or destroy. The essay analyses, too, Lawrence's interest in the continuity between childhood and adulthood within individuals.

Examining Edith Nesbit, Jenny Bavidge's 'Exhibiting Childhood' reveals the role of the Children's Welfare Exhibitions held in London in 1912–1913 and 1914 in depicting Edwardian attitudes to childhood and child welfare. Contextualizing Nesbit through her involvement with the first exhibition, and discussing the ways in which Nesbit's fiction is central to our sense of Edwardian children's literature, Bavidge demonstrates the cultural and commercial influences surrounding childhood and its fictions in this period.

Michelle Smith's essay 'Girls! Girls, Everywhere!' discusses the ways in which Angela Brazil's Edwardian school stories provide interesting insights into the tensions surrounding the education of girls in secondary schools leading up to World War I. Smith examines the relationship between intellectual pursuit and moral responsibility and demonstrates that Edwardians increasingly linked the academic development of girls to the regeneration of the nation and Empire.

In 'Towards the Modern Man' Stephanie Olsen explores the ways in which periodicals helped construct concepts of Edwardian boyhood. She shows that periodicals instruct as they entertain by mixing reality, fantasy, and pastimes to inculcate the right sort of moral character expected of the Edwardian man. Through discussing periodical stories, she makes a connection between boys' conduct and the expectations and responsibilities of Empire and indicates how the moral conditioning of boys impacted upon the whole Edwardian family.

Discussing stories from Andrew Lang's *The Brown Fairy Book* (1904) and *The Orange Fairy Book* (1906) and from Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* (1902), *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), Karen Sands-O'Connor in 'Primitive Minds' examines 'anthropological' children's literature, which presents children as 'primitives' who need civilizing. She demonstrates how Lang's work, influenced by social anthropology, links the concepts of 'child' and 'savage.' Kipling's texts, by contrast, influenced by physical anthropology, privilege white European children and teach the implied white British child reader about concepts of racial hierarchy and the fixity of the races.

In 'Truth and Claw' Elizabeth Hale discusses Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Saki's 'The Penance' (1910) and 'Sredni Vashtar' (1910), and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), *The Tale of Tom Kitten* (1903), and *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* (1907). These texts, she shows, depict beastly children and childlike beasts who behave according to their own natural instincts and desires without regard to corrupt adult norms and concerns. Although portraying these child characters in natural settings draws on Romantic and Victorian models, Hale suggests that the association between children's unrepentant bad behaviour and animals is particularly Edwardian.

Exploring the amorality of youth in its resistance to an impotent adult Victorian conformity, Brian Gibson's 'Murdering Adulthood' examines a range of Saki's short stories including 'Sredni Vashtar' (1910), 'The Lumber Room' (1913), and 'The Story Teller' (1913). Children battle against adult pretension and convention in these stories, and Gibson also illustrates that Saki's attention turned by 1913 towards war and the usefulness of child rebellion to adult warfare.

Edwardian writers seem desperately to be capturing childhood within the pages of their fiction as if they sensed that their passion for expressing childhood had not long to live and so must be obsessively indulged. Framed between two disastrous wars, the Edwardian period made of childhood an idyllic haven or escape, yet also saw it as the focal point of future national security in a disintegrating moral world. This fact

colours the fiction of these years, adding an undercurrent of menace and unease to childhood's apparent Arcadia. As Samuel Hynes reminds us, 'anxiety and the expectation of war were a part of the Edwardian consciousness' (53). Time was running out, quite literally, for the children of this generation, a factor that made the preservation of their fictional 'worlds enough and time' all the more compelling and childhood's values all the more precious.

## Notes

1. '[T]he British birth rate fell sharply between 1900 and 1914 – a 10 per cent drop overall and considerably more among the affluent and educated classes. That decline was widely perceived as yet another sign of national decadence, and it aroused great public concern' (Rose 91).
2. Freud's ideas began to circulate in the Edwardian period, and seemed to have been instinctively understood by some writers, but 'were not influential in Britain until after the First World War' (Bland 88).
3. 'It was said in 1904, "there is scarcely a game or diversion dear to Englishmen which the King has not himself either enjoyed or else found pleasure in watching. He is, of all Englishmen, the complete sportsman"' (quoted in Dobbs 21).

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