

**RECOVERING THE STORY: MODERNISM AND THE INTERWAR BRITISH  
CHILDREN'S NOVEL (1918-1939)**

by

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B.A. in English Literature, University of Pittsburgh, 2012

Submitted to the Undergraduate Faculty of  
University Honors College in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2012

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

University Honors College

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Christopher J. Comer, BPhil

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Although Modernism stands as an undeniably important moment in literary history, few critics have explored its connections to the children's literature of the interwar period (1918 – 1939). As well, scholarship of children's literature has been surprisingly silent about the children's books of the early to mid-twentieth century. This study seeks to address the absence of research on children's literature during the interwar period by showing how three neglected texts from this era reflect and engage with the aesthetic and political concerns of Modernism. While E.F. Benson's *David Blaize and the Blue Door* (1918), John Masefield's *The Midnight Folk* (1927), and Eve Garnett's *The Family From One End Street* (1937) all appear to be Victorian on the surface, my analysis shows that these texts actually demonstrate a wide range of Modernist techniques and concerns, such as the characterization of mental anxiety, the preservation of individualism in the modernized world, the need to confront a problematic past through story telling, and the authorial focus on creating characters with psychological and emotional depth. In short, this study calls for the further study of the interwar period as a unique moment in the history of children's literature. By considering these three texts to be Modernist, this thesis broadens the understanding of both children's literature and the cultural backgrounds of Modernism.

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## **PREFACE**

This research project would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my thesis advisor, Professor Marah Gubar. From its earliest conception, this project has challenged the conventional structure of the BPhil thesis program, leaving me at times to question whether or not its completion was even possible. However, Professor Gubar was always willing to assist me in my endeavors and constantly reassured me along the way. Her dedicated feedback has helped me to become a stronger writer, which undoubtedly will benefit me in my future aspirations.

I would also like to thank Professor Karin Westman, whose own work partially inspired this thesis. Professor Westman was also kind enough to travel all the way from Kansas State University to participate in my defense.

Furthermore, I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Gayle Rogers and Professor Courtney Weikle-Mills who also were kind enough to be apart of my defense committee.

Additionally, I would like to thank The University Honors College, and particularly, Professor Dave Hornyak for giving me the opportunity to participate in the BPhil program.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor Susan Smith and Professor Llana Carroll, who both have had a tremendous impact on the direction of my academic career.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

“Children’s books published in the decade between 1920 and 1930 reveal more new forms, both outward and inward, than any other period in their history”

- Anne Carroll Moore, *The Three Owls*

“It is important, however, to acknowledge that the extent to which the aesthetic of modernism embraces notions of the changing relationship between the individual and society, the lack of certainty and the need to challenge ‘old ways of saying’ might contribute to children’s books written since the beginning of the twentieth century.”

- Critic Deborah Cogan Thacker, “Criticism and the Critical Mainstream”

Scholars routinely speak of two “golden age[s]” of children’s literature: the era before World War One and the period after World War Two. The first of these periods produced such famous works such as *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), *Treasure Island* (1883) *The Jungle Book* (1894), and *Peter Pan* (1911). The second featured titles like *Goodnight Moon* (1947), *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), *Where the Wild Things Are* (1964), and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1963). In contrast, the children’s literature of the interwar period (1918 to 1939) has been neglected, overlooked, and largely forgotten about by both readers and critics alike. Why have these texts been ignored? Partly because they seem at first glance to be more Victorian than Modernist, and so scholars of Modernism have seen little need to engage with them. At the same time, Victorianists have tended either to leave them out of accounts of the first Golden Age of children’s literature or merely to tack on one or two twentieth-century examples to arguments

that concern themselves mostly with nineteenth-century culture. Recently, a few children's literature critics have begun to "acknowledge the significance of modernism and modernity to the texts produced for children" (Thacker 48); and in this project I follow their lead by showing how three neglected children's novels from this era which seem like Victorian throwbacks in fact reflect and engage with the aesthetic and political concerns of the Modernist movement.

Reflecting upon the absence of significant cultural analysis focused on early twentieth-century children's literature, Deborah Cogan Thacker observes that

while there are many useful discussions of the cultural and historical *contexts* of twentieth-century children's books, these largely rely on a separation of the concerns of the specialist reader and the literary historian, whereas the interconnectedness of the texts discussed and reading of mainstream literature of the period would enrich both an understanding of children's texts and the cultural dynamics of modernism. (emphasis mine 48)

In other words, Thacker encourages critics to consider the children's literature of the 1920s and 1930s as an important companion to the mainstream texts of Modernism. Rather than focusing on the culture *around* children's literature during this time, she stresses a need to read these texts as cultural artifacts in dialogue with Modernism.

Similarly, Karin Westman explains in "Children's Literature and Modernism: The Space Between," that the separation of children's literature from studies of Modernism may be attributable in part to the way that scholarship on children's literature is organized. Because children's literature tends to focus on genre, rather than chronology, it is difficult to place children's texts within a form of criticism that discusses Modernism as a literary movement or period. Westman states that when the "organizing principle is form rather than the passage of time... it is challenging to build a picture, let alone a canon, of children's literature between the conventional bookends of 1890 – 1950 or during a smaller span of years in the modernist period" (284).



As these critics suggest, there is a clear need to distinguish and analyze the tradition of interwar children's literature in order to clarify its relationship to Modernism as well as its characteristic modes of representing and addressing children. It is the aim of this study to recover some of the popular children's texts from the period of 1918 to 1939 and show how infused they are by Modernist cultural influences and concerns, such as the characterization of mental anxiety, the preservation of individualism in the modernized world, the need to confront a problematic past through story telling, and the authorial focus on creating characters with psychological and emotional depth. Historically, the interwar period witnessed a vast number of cultural changes, ranging from the Roaring Twenties and Prohibition to hyperinflation and the Great Depression. As well, rapid advancements in technology, transportation, and communication allowed people around the world to interact in ways never before possible. Art and literature also experienced a significant change during this time, a change driven by the Modernist movement. As a reaction against Realism, Modernism sought to distinguish itself as a radical departure from the previous forms of representation. This meant moving away from the transparent, objective mirroring of the world that Realism created in favor of a "truer" depiction of reality through human subjectivity. Modernism then, focuses on how the individual mind perceives reality, rather than how the author conceptualizes an event from the third person. As a result, Modernism seeks to "represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual's relation to society through interior monologue, stream of consciousness, tunneling, defamiliarisation, rhythm, [and] irresolution" (Childs 3).

Since some work has already been done on the American picture book in this regard<sup>1</sup>, I have chosen to focus my study specifically on the British children's novel during this time, as doing so adds tremendously to the very small amount of research that exists on the subject. Furthermore, I have chosen selections that represent the beginning, middle, and end of the period, in an effort to solidify the study of this material as a distinct literary moment for children's literature. The authors of these texts come from backgrounds as varied as their subject matter, adding even more complexity to my readings of their work. From magical fantasy to domestic poverty, these texts represent the variety of subject matter that childhood texts expressed during the early twentieth century.

I begin my study with an analysis of E. F. Benson's *David Blaize and the Blue Door* (1918). Because it seems like an imitative recapitulation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Benson's novel is a challenging work to ascribe to Modernism. Yet within this Victorian inspired narrative is a strange yet clear depiction of an individual's internal struggle against modernity. Moreover, the novel's challenges to representation, its deployment of cyclical time, and its characterization of dream space as an unstable state of existence, align this text with Modernism. In short, I argue that the text finds itself in dialogue with Modernist concerns, despite Benson's Victorian sympathies.

My second text, John Masefield's *The Midnight Folk* (1927), has been virtually ignored by critics despite the fact that it constitutes a magical and influential contribution to the history of children's fantasy. The few scholars that have written about *The Midnight Folk* perceive it as a grossly nostalgic text full of Victorian optimism. However, while Masefield's novel appears at first glance to contrast with Modernism, I argue that this unjustly neglected text has several

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<sup>1</sup> Natalie op de Beck's book *Suspended Animation: Children's Picture Book and the Fairy Tale of Modernity*, examines the relationship of the American picture book to modernity, beginning with the interwar period.

connections to the Modernist movement, focusing especially on its links to Freudian Psychology. As such, I contend that *The Midnight Folk* addresses an individual's problematic past through a very Modernist negotiation of subconscious dream space. Like many Modernist authors, Masfield employs a version of Freud's "talking cure," as well as the structure of a mythic narrative, in an effort to confront the traumas of the past.

Moreover, Masfield's children's books have remained popular with British readers, allowing the book to remain in publication despite a clear lack of critical attention. In fact, the BBC has done two radio broadcasts of the book, as well as numerous productions of its 1935 sequel *The Box of Delights* (Stephenson). According to the New York Review Book's website, *The Box of Delights* "is now an established Christmas favorite [in England] and as much a part of the season as Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*." Masfield, I suggest, is an important figure in children's literature, especially in terms of studying the interwar period. I hope that my analysis of *The Midnight* inspires others to study the text, especially given its striking parallels with J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

The final text I discuss, Eve Garnett's *The Family From One End Street* (1937) has also been neglected by scholars. Although it beat out J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as the best new work for children the year it was published, critics have rarely discussed the book, perhaps because it seems like a mundane Victorian throwback. In fact, in the book's opening pages, the narrator even uses the term "Victorian" to describe the novel's large family (3). Although it was intended to capture the reality of working class life, Garnett's text has been viewed as patronizing, in that it paints too optimistic of a picture of poverty. In all honesty, the text does not explicitly express any radical political views, and the family is always rewarded for their unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. As well, Garnett avoids using any distinct types of

aesthetical experimentation characteristic to Modernism in her prose. Yet even though this text does not adequately address the reality of poverty, it too grapples with Modernist concerns by, attempting to internally depict the financial anxieties of the individual, reflecting Benjamin and Marx's sense of history as a crisis of class struggle, and subscribing to Woolf's conception of character as central to good fiction. Even though she doesn't fully succeed, Garnett *tries* to present a realistic view of how poverty can emotionally burden individuals, and in so doing, advances the Modernist agenda of countering materialism with greater concern for the individual.

These three texts, while all different in their own ways, have one clear thing in common: they reflect a cultural awareness of Modernism. By examining the connections between the mainstream literature and children's literature during this period, this study broadens our overall understanding of literature and culture during the years of 1918 to 1939. I hope that in the pages to follow, you will be intrigued enough by the connections that I have made to investigate other works of children's literature from this period, or in the very least, share one of these texts with someone else.

## 2.0 PROTECTING CHILDHOOD: *DAVID BLAIZE AND THE BLUE DOOR*

Although his prolific writing career extended well into the twentieth century, there are many reasons why people consider Edward Frederic Benson to be a late-Victorian author. As critic Catherine Juncâu notes in her biography of Benson, his “prose style aligns him with his Victorian predecessors more than his more modernist contemporaries” (30). In other words, the formal structure of Benson’s writing and his “rigid adherence to the rules of good grammar” stand in stark contrast to the elliptic style and abstract experimentalism of Modernism. Thus, it should not be surprising that he openly “criticized the prose of the Modernists which ‘had acquired lucidity by blank disregard of euphony: they were full of jerks’” (30). In this quote, Benson expresses his conviction that the Modernists had encapsulated their emerging philosophies into a form of representation that was far too fragmented and unpleasant for its audience. Perhaps he did not completely disagree with the principals behind the movement, but he felt that the incoherent discord of their prose took away from the elegance of telling a quality story. This is not to mention the fact that, as an author who wrote primarily in pursuit of commercial interests, Benson had good reason to avoid the experimental challenges posed by Modernism. That is not to say that Benson did not wish to create more radically artistic works. In fact, Juncâu notes that he lamented having “sold out”; as a professional writer; he simply “wrote what the market demanded of him” (31).

With striking similarities in plot to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Benson's 1918 Children's novel *David Blaize and the Blue Door* appears to be nostalgic for the Victorian age. In fact, the strength of these similarities seems to have prompted the book's inclusion in Carolyn Sigler's anthology *Alternative Alices: Visions and Revisions of Lewis Carroll's Alice Books* (1997). Yet, the influence of Carroll's narrative on Benson's writing demonstrates one way that *David Blaize* can be seen as a Modernist text. In *Alice to the Lighthouse* (1987) Juliet Dusinberre explains that while books like *Alice in Wonderland* belong to the Victorian age, they are actually the foundational texts of Modernism:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries children's books and writing about children provided the soil from which *Sons and Lovers*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, William Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, *The Voyage out*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* all sprang. To name these novels is perhaps misleading, for the argument is not that children's books created books about children, but that cultural change was both reflected and pioneered in the books which children read. Radical experiments in the arts in the early modern period began in books which Lewis Carroll and his successors wrote for children. (5)

Additionally, I argue that *David Blaize and the Blue Door* also reflects certain Modernist concerns, primarily in the struggle for individualism and self-definition against the constraints of modern society. Because entrance into adulthood entails conforming to societal laws and cultural norms, the text treats the loss of childhood as a principle threat to individuality. In this way, Benson portrays a crisis of personal identity through the subjective exploration of dreams and the imagination. While the structure of Benson's story does not quite conform to the narrative techniques of the High Modernists, it still displays an acute awareness of the shifting cultural sensibilities in a Post-World War I world.

In 1903, critic Georg Simmel remarked in his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" that "the deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the

independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life” (1). In accordance with Simmel’s observation, the story of David’s trip through the blue door is riddled with the anxiety of preserving the individuality of childhood. As such, the novel begins by presenting the reader with a juxtaposition of two separate realities, wherein David’s childhood world is distinctly separate from that of the adult world. Immediately then, the novel alerts the reader to its principle conflict, which is the child’s exploration of the true meaning of reality:

Ever since he was four years old, and had begun to think seriously, as a boy should, David Blaize had been aware that there was a real world lying somewhere just below the ordinary old thing in which his father and mother and nurse and the rest of the fast-asleep grown-up people lived. Boys began to get drowsy, he knew, about the time that they were ten, though they might still have occasional waking moments, and soon after that they went sound asleep, and lost all chance of ever seeing the real world. (Benson 11)

Benson sets up childhood as an independent state of existence. Perception of the “real world” is only possible for David while he is a child, since the consciousness needed to find this reality diminishes with age. Such a presentation reflects a concern for the loss of childhood in a manner characteristic of Romantic child nostalgia. While such nostalgia is not surprising, given that the story is indeed a recapitulation of *Alice*, this anxiety parallels the concerns of the Modernists in that it places the independence and individuality of childhood against the threats of society faced in adulthood. However, it is the mental characterization of these threats, particularly with regards to the loss of the imagination, that makes this dynamic so expressively Modernist in the text.

Furthermore, Benson’s employment of time as a catalyst corresponds with Modernism’s exploration of the differences between chronological and psychological time. If Benson were to completely subscribe to the Romantic conventions of childhood, we might expect his treatment of David’s story to contain a more linear depiction of finality and division. That is, Benson’s

conception of childhood is much more fluid than Wordsworth or even Milne. Rather than preserving the pinnacle of childhood through a construct of death or isolation, Benson acknowledges a gradual transition to adulthood through a negotiation of dream space. There is still an elemental nostalgia, but it is mitigated by the employment of the realm of hazy uncertainty that exists between a state of consciousness and deep sleep. In other words, the use of Impressionist qualities to transition from the state of childhood to adulthood allows Benson to emphasize the importance of the individual experience as the true measure of time.

To that end, the book's beginning also embraces semantic challenges similar to many Modernist works, thus creating tension within the relationship between sign and object:

If you asked grown-ups some tremendously important questions, such as "Why do the leaves fall off the trees when there is glass on the lake?" as likely as not they would begin talking in their sleep about frost and sap, just as if that had got anything to do with the real reason. Or they might point out that it wasn't real glass on the lake, but ice, and, if they were more than usually sound asleep, take a piece of the lake-glass and let you hold it in your fingers till it became water. That was to show you that what you had called glass was really frozen water, another word for which was ice. (12)

Rather than simply contrasting David's observations with accepted reality, the novel complicates representations and invites the reader to think about the relationship between language and meaning. Like Joyce's Stephen or Faulkner's Benjy, David perceives a different understanding of the world and is trying to explore the symbolism of language. As such, the process of language development, a distinct experience of childhood, is utilized as a way to challenge semantics within the novel. Ice of course is very similar to glass, and they are used interchangeably as metaphors for each other. Likewise, the French word for ice is *glace*, which is in fact pronounced glass. By subverting the direct relationship between the object (in this case the frozen water of the lake) and the word, David's questioning produces interference amongst the path of representation. Thus, what was a clear, distinct path from word to object becomes



fuzzy and disjointed. As such, meaning is no longer derived from the “actual,” but from the haze that surrounds it; the absolute truth is rejected.

Accordingly, the real reason for the formation of ice does not interest David, he is much more concerned with an imaginative explanation:

"Now you're talking non-sense. Master David." Now that was the ridiculous thing! Of course he was talking nonsense just to humour Nannie. He was helping her with her nonsense about the difference between ice and glass. He had been wanting to talk sense all the time, and learn something about the real world, in which the fish put a glass roof on their house for the winter as soon as they had collected enough red fire-leaves to keep them warm until the hot weather came round again. (13)

Nonsense is of course a major component of Carroll's *Alice*; nonsense also feeds into the more abstract forms of Modernism, specifically Dadaism, which rejected the formal logic believed to have led to the Great War. Furthermore, nonsense was of course a precursor to Absurdism, a derivative form of Modernism. The disparity here between imagination and rational explanation furthers my argument that the anxiety associated with the loss of childhood, is the same sort anxiety that haunted the Modernist. For David, losing touch with one's imagination is a loss of independence, since accepting the rational explanation means conforming to societal beliefs. In his explanation of Modernism's assertion of the individual, Peter Childs explains that “Realism had proposed a shared world perceived in largely the same way by all members of society; by contrast the Modernists argued that reality was as varied as the individuals who perceived it” (46). In other words, true reality is not found in the conformity of society, but in the individuality of the “fathomless human mind” (Childs 45). To think about this differently, consider the changes that the rational human mind brought about with the technological age. By 1914 the intelligence of the human mind utilized its understanding of the reason based sciences to create engines, planes, bombs, machine guns, and poison gas. For the first time, technology had

allowed more humans to perish at the hands of other humans than from natural disasters. With so much inhumanity around them, survivors of World War One questioned the traditional ways of representing human character. Thus, semantic and aesthetic challenges became a central focus of Modernism, as the understanding of reality moved from the external to the internal.

As mentioned above, Benson's use of time is far more Modernist than Victorian. Although the structure of the book itself may be somewhat linear, the diegetic space challenges the type of objective temporality that had governed the realist novel. "Modernism," Childs explains, "expressed time moving in leaps and swerves. Space was compressed, oppressive, threatening and subjectively perceived" (67). Although time in the diegesis appears to be functioning in a linear fashion on the surface, the example of the "Train To Anywhere" shows that Benson's depiction of time and space is far more radical than he probably would have liked to admit:

The train seemed to be running very slowly round and round a field. Occasionally it stopped dead, and began to whistle, but usually it splashed quietly along, into puddles and out of puddles, without any lines in front of it. Sometimes they curved a little to avoid a tree, but they crushed their way through an ordinary hedge, and birds flew out scolding them and saying, "I wish you would look where you are going." Then a voice from the engine said, "Sorry you have been troubled" just like a young lady in the telephone exchange.

But the country seemed familiar to David, and presently he saw that the train was in a field just beyond the High Street of the village he had left at 11.29. It was slowly going back to it again, to a spot some fifty yards away from the place they had started from. Then it began to make a very sharp curve, in order to avoid a horse that was lying down in the field, and the engine came just opposite his window. (125-126)

The train itself is defined by time, as it is named "The 11.29" in accordance with its departure time. Given this, the train can be understood at some level to be a metaphor for the construct of time within the novel. Since the train returns in a cyclical manner to its destination of origin,

time then is expressed in a repetitive fashion. Likewise, rather than having a linear set of tracks to follow, the train's negotiation through the landscape is highly subjective since it makes sudden swerves to avoid some objects, while it smashes completely through others. Although Benson was adamant about rigid rules and formal structure, his definition of time in David's world is quite ambiguous while his notion space is subjectively oppressive. Thus, despite trying to depart, the repetitive nature of time traps David within the urban space. In addition, the diegetic space of the novel as a whole becomes compressed since David never actually travels beyond the town. Although he is not alarmed at the moment, this instance shows that David's freedom as an individual is threatened by both societal conventions and the repetition of the temporal, since he is unable to transcend either one.

Another way that the novel depicts identity anxiety is through a fear of the physical fragmentation of the body. Several characters are introduced who are facing the threat of being chopped up, divided, and used for commercial purposes. Benson's abrasive tone certainly rings with similarity to the abstractness of Modernism, especially within the tenets of Cubism and Surrealism. The first of these disturbing moments occurs when David's mother tells him the story of Grandma Apple-tree:

Or there was a red-faced old woman who lived in the apple-tree, and kept a sharp look-out for dumplings coming round the corner, for these were her deadliest enemies, and pulled pieces off her, and made them into apple-dumplings. Sometimes they pulled her nose off when they caught her, or a finger or two, which never grew again till next spring, and often, if spring was late, from going to sleep again after Nannie Equinox had called him, there was practically nothing left of her. (14-15)

Not only does Grandmamma Apple-tree face a threat of physical harm to her body, Benson portrays that threat militarily. In fact, the dumplings come around the corner as a "regiment" and are lead by Colonel Dumpling (15). Clearly, Benson's work contains a Modernist concern for the

individual amidst a militarized world. In a sense, Benson combines the process of story telling with the abstract, fantastical qualities of the imagination, in order to portray a postwar disillusionment. Yet this is not the only instance in which *David Blaize and the Blue Door* reflects a marked pessimism towards Government institutions. Later on, Benson revisits the threat of physical harm to the body when the Banker invites David's Uncle to tea.

Both the complexity and strangeness of this moment in the text testify to Benson's awareness of the threat to individualism. Though it is premised with David's naivety, the moment when he discovers the true purpose of the Banker's invitation is highly alarming. David quickly discovers upon arrival that Uncle Popacatapetl is made of solid gold. In some way that "gold" is damaged and so Uncle Popacatapetl is at the boot maker's shop to be repaired. However, the repairs are strikingly alarming to both David and the reader, because they try to fix him by "driving nails" into his body, "so as to tack down the rags and tatters" (66). When David tells him of the invitation to tea, Uncle Popacatapetl falls into a frantic despair:

"Its all too sad," sobbed Uncle Popacatapetl, "and too true and too tiresome. I knew they had tracked me down here... I thought I could have myself recovered and repaired out of all knowledge... instead of which, they send in my beastly nephew to ask me to tea, and then they'll chop me up, and make sovereigns of me. I've seen their signs and notices. They tried to put me off the scent by saying that sovereigns were cheap, and make me think they didn't want me. And then that was changed, and they said sovereigns were dearer. And then that was changed, and they suspended payment to make me think that they weren't collecting gold any more, never more at all..." (72)

While at first Uncle Popacatapetl may seem odd, his story actually eludes the financial instability in Great Britain caused by World War One. The British Government actually suspended the gold standard at the start of the war, an act that made paper bank notes into legal tender. Despite having been one of the strongest economies in the world before the war, the conflict left the country with millions in debt ("Pound Sterling"). By personifying gold as an individual, Benson

portrays the harsh realities of modern commercialism as a threat to not only psychological but also physical independence. In essence, the body of an individual is as much threatened by the institutions of society, as they are by the physical space of their surroundings. Clearly, the economic effects of the war influenced Benson's writing, but as was the case for so many of the Modernists, the devastation of human life was probably more haunting.

We get a sense early on the Benson saw standing armies as one of the largest contributors to the powder keg that started the war. After the giraffe tells David about the dance, she suggests that there may be a battle looming on the horizon: "One never can tell for certain, but, with so many soldiers about, something of the sort is bound to happen" (87). It is fitting that the world within the blue door collapses on David when religion converges with militarization and the social institution of marriage, since all three topics require conformity of the individual. Although Noah threatens David's childhood with the sentence of marriage, it is the technological achievement of the machine gun which poses the final threat to David's person. As such, the final battle in *David Blaize and the Blue Door*, like World War One itself, becomes a culminating event of modernity. However, while the Great War "seemed a climactic, severing event that showed conclusively the failures of nineteenth-century rationalism," Benson's conclusion is more optimistic in the sense that David manages to escape the impending violence using his imagination (Childs 20).

In short, *David Blaize and the Blue Door* cannot be truly separated from its Romantic ties. However, as I have shown, Benson created David with the same sort of anxieties of the self and uncertainty that fueled the works of Modernist authors and artists alike. As such, *David Blaize* demonstrates a clear need to analyze not only the effects of The Great War on children's literature, but the effects of Modernism as well.

### 3.0 A TROUBLED PAST: *THE MIDNIGHT FOLK*

To those who know John Masefield's reputation as a children's fantasy writer and realist poet, it may seem to odd to consider his work as Modernist. In fact, Stephen Whited's biography of John Masefield makes it sound as though Masefield's optimistic theory of art was incompatible with the more cynical works of Modernism:

Nostalgic for a heroic past, Masefield champions the traditional virtues and exposes the hypocrisy of twentieth-century pessimism, for he proposes to reclaim "a perception of the Life of the Universe," and he asserts that "Great art cannot and will not appear in generations or nations careless of the finer kinds of intellect, and therefore not attuned to the spirit of the Universe, which is all splendour and beauty." (186)

Referring to Masefield's post-World War One writing, Whited states that "his experience seems to have done more to confirm his moral sentiments than to fragment them, for he continued to set his fiction in the past, where heroes held strong against a more manageable adversary than mechanized war" (181).

Although Whited is correct in highlighting the prevalence of the past as a device in Masefield's work, he is quite wrong about its purpose. Within Masefield's 1927 children's novel, *The Midnight Folk*, the representation of the past is actually far from being nostalgic and positive. In fact, not only is the past portrayed as a time filled with betrayal and crime, the events of that past literally haunt the individuals of the present. Given this, the challenge of dealing with the past can be more properly seen as the central problem of the novel.

It is widely recognized that the events of World War One were a major influence on the works of Modernism. For Masfield, no less than other writers from this era, the experience of the Great War produced a marked change in his writing. Patric Dickonson acknowledges as much when he comments on the creation of *The Midnight Folk*: “it was so utterly outside his imagination as a realist, but he didn't like what was happening and perhaps wasn't quite sure how to write it” (238). The violence of the war prompted Masfield to switch to writing children's literature, not because he wanted to escape the problems of the present, but rather because he sought a way to both understand and negotiate the effects of emotional trauma. Influenced by psychoanalysis, Masfield viewed storytelling as the way to confront a problematic past in order to find a better future. Since an individual's history begins with their childhood, it is not surprising that Masfield chose to write a children's story. In other words, childhood is important to both Masfield and Modernism because the issues of the present find their origins in the past.

In seeing childhood and the imagination as the site for resolving the disorder and fragmentation of the present, Masfield adopts a philosophy in tune with the popular Freudian psychology of the day. For, as Christopher Butler states in his book, *Early Modernism*, “what Freud shares with the Modernism of the first decades [is a] belief that the culture around us needs to confront mythical and patriarchal orders from the past” (94). Thus, I argue that *The Midnight Folk* not only addresses a problematic past in terms of a very Modernist negotiation of the subconscious, but it does so by incorporating many of the same techniques as Modernist authors. In what follows, I draw parallels between Masfield's structuring of the story of Kay Harker (the protagonist of *The Midnight Folk*) and Freud's treatment of dream space, stressing the importance that childhood played in Freudian theory. Given that Freud's influence can be seen in the subjective introspection of Modernist protagonists, I also highlight how *The Midnight*

*Folk* uses myth and narrative arrangement to depict Kay's inner conflicts. In summary, I conclude that the book's focus on storytelling as method for resolving the issues of one's past aligns Masfield's children's book with the Modernist movement, especially since these issues play themselves out within the subconscious space of the fantasy world.

While literary exploration of the unconscious had begun much earlier, Freud helped to formalize notions of internal chaos and dream space as legitimate points of both scientific and artistic inquiry. During Freud's time, other work within the scientific community was actually opening the door for new types of psychological therapy and literary representation. As the emerging theories of Darwin, Einstein, and Bergson produced uncertainty about the place of the individual in the universe, western culture witnessed a decline in religious faith. Since the church had previously served as the place for individuals to seek help with life's crises, this loss of faith actually encouraged the creation of new therapeutic methods (Childs 48). It is not surprising then that the study of psychology begins to emerge as a legitimate form of scientific inquiry at the same time that the Modernist movement starts to form its literary investigation of the inner workings of the individual mind.

Both Modernism and Freudian psychology seek to explore the identity of an individual by addressing modern crises through storytelling and representation. Although Freud focused on the sexual development of an individual, his idea that the cause of identity anxiety is a hidden personal narrative demonstrates why the storytelling aspect of psychoanalysis gained popularity with Modernists. Freud's theory suggests that if an individual experienced a conflict during any stage of their psychosexual development, they would encounter an anxiety that would follow them into adulthood. More important, however, is Freud's method of therapy for addressing anxieties: the navigation of the subconscious dream space as a way to uncover an individual's



repressed conflicts. As Butler points out, many of the early Modernist works investigate the nature of the subjective by “exploiting broadly ‘Freudian’ cultural assumptions about the ways in which self-revelations, through dream, metaphor and symbol, might take place in the text as in dreams” (95).

Furthermore, Freud’s own investigation of the subconscious exposed the two-fold nature of the crisis of the individual. ““The prehistory into which the dream work leads us back,”” he declared, ““is of two kinds – on the one hand, into the individual’s prehistory, his childhood, and on the other, in so far as each individual recapitulates in an abbreviated form the entire development of the human race, into phylogenetic history too”” (qtd in Butler 94). In other words, modern life is as much disrupted by the haunting nature of the past as the individual is haunted by the primal sexual tensions of their childhood. In this way, Freud uses his theories about the personal crises of identity to form a much broader cultural diagnosis. Thus, going back to the past and resolving such conflicts, becomes important not only for the individual to move forward, but also for society as a whole.

Since the critical community considers Masfield to be a realist poet, rather than a Modernist, few have noticed how familiar he was with Freudian concepts. Indeed, Masfield’s letters to his American friend Florence Lamont show that he had read and been provoked by Freud’s work. In a 1920 letter Masfield writes, “I am glad you are bored by Freud. Like most men of energy he insists on jumping every fence with his own stolid legs, whether the gates are open or not. Most of his hops are absurd” (94). Despite his unease with what he saw as Freud’s overreaching, however, Masfield supported the study and practice of psychoanalysis in general. Robert Hale notes that he was a patron of the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency, along with Freud, Jung, and H.G. Wells. Founded by Dr. Grace Pailthorpe in 1933,

the Institution was dedicated to providing psychoanalytic care (Frisch 110). Thus, like many of the Modernists, Masfield was interested in and relatively well informed about psychoanalysis. As Childs observes literary allusions to Freud proliferated during this time, “because so many writers and thinkers were keen to explore their own and their characters’ psychological recesses” (53).

The pervasiveness of psychoanalysis within the literary community during the Modern period suggests that these ideas would have been all around Masfield. Woolf, for instance, had personal connections to Freud. In “History, psychoanalysis, modernism,” critic Kylie Valentine reflects:

Auden’s “we are all Freudians now” recalls the importance of psychoanalysis to interwar culture as well as to the personal networks of some English moderns. Virginia Woolf’s brother Adrian was a psychoanalyst; her friend James and Alix Strachey were Freud’s translators; the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press published those translations. Psychoanalysis presented a program for radical cultural upheaval and a nexus of modern scientific discourses: think of Emma Goldman at Freud’s lectures, or the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski at a meeting of the British Psycho-Analytic Society. (37)

Thus, given the shared intellectualism of the period, it is not surprising that Modernism and psychoanalysis partake in many of the same “aesthetic practices and thematic concerns” (Valentine 37).

Despite its status as a children’s fantasy, *The Midnight Folk* incorporates the alienation and isolation of the Modernist condition by positioning its protagonist as an orphan. Within the first few lines of the book, Masfield introduces the reader to a miserable young boy named Kay Harker. With both parents gone, he suffers under the care of a very stern and unyielding governess. In a sense, he has been prematurely cut-off from childhood. Not only has he been forced to grow up quickly due to the sudden loss of his parents, his governess has taken away his childhood toys and games. Much of Modernism’s concern for the individual seeks to express the

feelings of uncertainty, anonymity, and isolation that resulted from the sweeping technological advances of industry, movement into the urban space, and the failure of nineteenth century rationalism (Childs 182). Certainly, Kay's situation as an orphan speaks to this condition. He, along with many other characters in the novel, are troubled by something in their past. However, as in Freud's observation about dream work, these problems are manifested within both the individual's past as well as their generational history. Not only then does this text deal with self-revelation through the very Modernist exploration of the subconscious, but it also approaches that exploration in a very Freudian way.

The text's avoidance of Kay's past suggests that there are unresolved issues in his prehistory. In fact, the narrative seems to deliberately sidestep the story of how he became an orphan. There are only a few moments in the text when Masfield mentions his parents and not one of them explains how they died. The absence of this narrative, along with the lack of any serious dialogue about his parents, suggests that their deaths are wrapped up in a repression of the past. Combined with the fact that Kay's governess has essentially removed him from his childhood by taking his toys away, the presence of these unresolved issues allows for Kay to be seen as a traumatized individual. When the good cat Nibbins takes him through the guardroom, Kay clearly articulates the loss of his childhood:

Alas, Kay knew those names only too well: they were the names of his beloved companions of old, before there had been any governess or Sir Theopompus. They had been his toys, of bears, dogs, rabbits, cats, horses, and boys. They had all been packed away long ago, when the governess came because, as he had heard her tell Ellen, "they will only remind him of the past." (14)

Not only is Kay's governess forcing him to repress the loss of his parents; she also denies him the state of childhood he needs to resolve the issues of his past. By which I mean, without the fantasy world of his childhood, and without either of his parents, he has no means of working out

his problems. As such, Kay is not only traumatized; he is facing disintegration of his identity. Entrance into society threatens individuality because an individual must learn to reconcile their personal beliefs with cultural norms and societal laws. Since Kay has no way of working out his identity and morality, these threats are even more imposing to his individuality. Thus, with the standard tools for dealing with his problems removed from him, the text utilizes the psychoanalytic methods of subconscious dream space and storytelling to allow Kay to work through his trauma.

As indicated by the novel's title most of the action in Masfield's novel occurs during the nighttime. Kay discovers that after the clock strikes twelve, an enchanted world of witches, pirates, and talking animals comes to life. The fact that Masfield chooses to associate his magical realm with dream space aligns him with other Modernists. For, as Butler explains, within the period the feeling was that "primitive or dream-like symbolic material might have a peculiar status in expressing and helping us to confront the profound problems of life and personal identity" (104). Our first introduction to the magical realm of the night occurs when Nibbins wakes Kay from his sleep. Although Kay supposedly "wakes up," the nighttime world that he finds himself in appears to be more real than anything he had previously experienced during the daylight hours:

Waking up, he rubbed his eyes: it was broad daylight; but no one was there. Someone was scraping and calling inside the wainscot, just below where the pistols hung. There was something odd about the daylight; it was brighter than usual; all things looked more real than usual. (11)

Kay's world seems more real at this moment because he has actually entered the dream space of his mind. As such, the peculiarities of this nighttime world reflect the brightness of his subconscious imagination. For this reason, the light in his room seems brighter than normal

daylight. Later on, Masfield emphasizes the strangeness of this state when he transforms Kay's bedroom into dream space: "As before, he woke up into what seemed like broad day-light, although he could see the stars through the window" (126). Here the text draws upon the contradiction of stars being visible in daylight in order to stress the change in reality. Both examples show how Kay's perceptions of reality mirror his change in consciousness. In this way, the text seems to convey the Modernist idea that true reality exists within the human mind. D.H. Lawrence expressed this notion in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1923) when he observed that there is "only one clue to the universe. And that is the individual soul within the individual being" (qtd. in Childs 46). While this attention to individuality accounts for the strangeness Kay's surroundings, his entrance into the subconscious space also explains why magic is only possible at night.

In creating a setting within the text where the magic world is juxtaposed with a world the audience understands as their own, Masfield legitimizes the possibility of magic by offering the audience a space where they can believe in the fantasy. Thus, many of Kay's nighttime adventures are reaffirmed during the day as actually having happened. For instance, when he comes downstairs for breakfast the morning after his first adventure with Nibbins he gets in trouble with the governess for his wet slippers. While she attributes this to him merely being out in the garden, the wet slippers are evidence that Kay had in fact been out the night before. Not only that, but the magical happenings of that adventure are also confirmed for Kay when Jane (one of the housekeepers) discovers that the goose has been eaten and that some brooms have disappeared overnight. While the cats are blamed for the consumption of the goose, Jane's alarmed statements imply that strange occurrences like this have happened before: "The cats have been in again, ma'am. I don't know how they get in' and the chine's gone the same way,

and there's two more brooms gone" (37). Although the women of the house appear to be dumbfounded by these events, Kay knows full well what magical mischief occurred during the evening hours: "Kay stared at the bones of the goose. He knew how that goose and chine had disappeared. Almost immediately Jane reappeared. 'If you please, ma'am, Wiggins has found the two brooms, the besom and the broom. They were in the road outside, near the spring'" (37). To Kay, it is not a coincidence that the two brooms were found exactly where he and Nibbins had left them. The confusion of the morning confirms that the nighttime adventure was real, not only for Kay, but for the reader as well.

Several other moments within the text likewise support my claim that this book portrays a navigation of the subconscious. The most apparent example occurs in the middle of the book, when Kay's room suddenly becomes the high seas, and the model of Great Grandpa Harker's ship, *The Plunderer* comes to life. In this scene, Kay physically enters the dream space fantasy world, seemingly awakening into it after falling asleep admiring the painting *Full Cry*. This passage is worth quoting at length, because it illustrates how Masfield's syntax and punctuation enhance the sense of movement into the internalized space of the mind:

[Kay] was aware at once that something very odd was happening in the print of *Full Cry*: the hunting men, whose red coats were flapping, were turning from the brook...He could see not only eddies, but bright, hurrying, gleaming ripples which ran into bubbles, and yes, yes, it was coming into the room, it was running on both sides of the bed, clear, swift, rushing water, carrying down petals and leaves and bits of twig. Then there came the water-rats, who dived with a phlumpling noise when they caught sight of him. He was in an island in the midst of the stream: and the stream was so crystal clear that he could see the fish in the shallows, flapping like water plant leaves, and filmy as dead weeds. (126)

In this instance, Kay's entry into the dream world, his movement into the subconscious space, is signaled by a change in the structure of Masfield's writing. Just as Virginia Woolf composes passage featuring "stream of consciousness" narration, Masfield uses lengthy sentences and

heavy punctuation to describe the fantasy of Kay's subconscious. Thus, several commas and colons splice together the series of fragmented perceptions that are rapidly running through Kay's mind during this experience. In this way, Masefield captures the "myriad of impressions"<sup>i</sup> that are occurring in this single moment, allowing the reader to partake in the fury of experiences Kay is having as the world of fantasy comes to life ("Modern Fiction").

Additionally, the narration of the above section draws attention to this experience as a profound moment in the text. In using the phrase "As before," the text signals to the reader that these moments are not only connected, but are moments laden with structural meaning. In other words, the text *wants* its readers to see the process of characterizing the subconscious fantasy realm as a truer reality, so that it can stress the importance that dream space has on the action of the story. As such, these moments exemplify a Modernist quality, in that they reflect the idea that true reality lies "in human consciousness and the fathomless working of the mind" (Childs 45).

While this entrance into the dream space parallels Kay's other nighttime adventures, this one is not confirmed the next day as having actually happened like some of the others. This fact appears to challenge the legitimacy of the novel's magical world. However, I would like to offer a different explanation for this disconnect. In my opinion, this mix of confirmation and uncertainty can be seen as not only purposeful, but also as an example Masefield's artful crafting of the diegesis. In fact, the blurred lines between reality and fantasy very much resemble the gray area that exists between the conscious and subconscious mind. Masefield's weaving of the fantasy world into and out of reality further stresses how that realm resembles the subconscious. This is because the process of Kay's journey resembles Freudian therapy in that it uncovers the magical world in the same manner that psychoanalytic therapy was thought to uncover the latent ailments in the subconscious of an individual.

Masefield's depiction of Kay's experience waking up after the dream about *The Plunderer* illustrates how Masefield blurs the line between conscious reality and subconscious dream space. After a lengthy sixteen-page adventure at sea, in which Kay finds out some more history about the lost treasure, Ellen awakens him: "As he cried, he heard the window creak; somebody rolled him into bed and the *Plunderer* went back to the wall. As for the sea, it was not there. When he opened his eyes, Ellen was there, but no water at all" (141). The fact that Ellen wakes him up does seem to create uncertainty about the existence of the magical world. Of course, this is not the only fantastical experience Kay has where he wakes up in his bed as if it were a dream. The same thing happens with Sir Piney's visit, as well as the trip to Round Table Camp. Yet in the end, like Kay's initial adventure with Nibbins, all of these events are confirmed in various ways later on as legitimate *experiences*, whether they are real or not. Even as events of the subconscious, Kay's dream space engagements drive the narrative forward, not only by unearthing vital information about the treasure, but also by allowing him to work the repressed traumas of his childhood.

Perhaps the best example of how Kay processes his emotional issues within dream space comes from his daydream encounter with Great-grandpapa Harker. To be sure, much of what Kay learns during his subconscious visit with Great-grandpapa Harker seems repetitive. However, Kay's repetition of thoughts demonstrates that he continues to repress the trauma of his past. Despite this, meeting his great grandfather allows Kay to reestablish a connection with a male family member. Although the subconscious form of Great-grandpapa Harker cannot actually take over the role of a father figure, his fantastical guidance helps Kay to overcome that loss. Furthermore, in prompting Kay to establish himself as the head of the Harker household, Great-grandpapa Harker exposes the unresolved conflict in the Harker family past: "You ought



to know about the treasure, Kay' great-grandpapa Harker said; 'for until it is restored or traced, no man of our name ought to rest. Your grandfather would not move in the matter; your father could not; there is only you'" (43). This moment of dialogue illustrates the extent to which the lost treasure has plagued the Harker family. While this dream space encounter does not physically shape the action of the real world, it does force Kay to resolve both his family's trauma, as well as his own personal trauma. Thus, as Kay assumes the responsibility of restoring his family's reputation, he accepts the role of his father and begins to move past the loss of his parents.

While dreams such as Kay's visit with Great-grandpapa Harker lack grounding in reality, experiences like the *Plunder* dream are actually confirmed by real world events. These real world confirmations allow Masfield to encourage the audience's belief in the fantasy. Not only does Kay's nautical fantasy provide details as to how the treasure left the sunken *Plunderer*, the subconscious experience allows Kay to account for the missing the statue of St. George at the end of the novel. As Kay swims with the mermaids around the wrecked ship, they point out the statue lying amidst the coral and Sea-Flower explains to Kay why it was left behind:

The ship was full of golden and silver people at one time. We loved them, they were so very beautiful; but they never answered when we spoke to them. Men came here searching for them in the old days, dragging anchors for them along the sea-floor. At last some Indian divers came down and carried them all away to a yacht, all except this one, which they would not touch, because we had so decked it with flowers. (134)

While the missing statue seems like a rather unimportant detail of the plot, Kay's decision to include a postscript explanation of the statue's whereabouts in his letter to the Archbishop symbolically reflects the complete restoration of the treasure, and likewise, his family's honor.

Moreover, the employment of dream space itself strongly exemplifies Masfield's continuity with the techniques of both Modernism and psychoanalysis. In particular, Masfield's

depictions of dreams in *The Midnight Folk* strikingly resemble Freud's accounts of his patient's dreams in his case histories. For example, in his essay "Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales" Freud recounts the dream of a young married woman:

She was in a room that was entirely brown. A little door led to the top of a steep staircase, and up this staircase there came into the room, a curious manikin – small, with white hair, a bald top to his head and a red nose. He danced round the room in front of her, carried on in the funniest way, and then went down the staircase again. He was dressed in a grey garment, through which every part of his figure was visible. (102)

Leaving aside Freud's sexual interpretations of the material, the characteristics of such dream-accounts resound with Masfield's depictions of Kay's dream space. This particular dream resembles the instance of Sir Piney's drawing room visit later in the novel. The physical appearance and dress of Sir Piney draw attention to the strangeness of his character. In fact, his peculiar movements resemble those of the women's manikin:

Kay saw Sir Piney rise to his feet, draw breath, beat with his hand, and look at his daughter for the signal to start singing. Somehow the song did not begin, though Miss Piney was nodding, and her father was beating with his hand. Something made Sir Piney flit rapidly over the table; his daughter opened her mouth very wide. Then both Triggers faded swiftly, the drawing-room faded; but no, Sir Piney was shaking a book on the table, saying. "Page 275"; he seemed angry about something, the book shook and shook, until it was as indistinct as the leaves of a tree all blown together on a windy day. (168)

Both Freud's case histories and Kay's dream vividly evoke the abstract nature of the subconscious, providing rich material for symbolic interpretation. As well, the heavy punctuation accentuates the impressionistic quality of the dream in both accounts, a Modernist technique that I discussed earlier. Moreover, both of these dream accounts contain a particularly scopophilic focus on the body, further aligning them with Modernist concerns.

However, the descriptive quality of Kay's dreams is not the only aspect linking them to Modernism and psychoanalysis. The text's narrative structure also offers a fruitful point

of comparison. *The Midnight Folk* resembles the process of Freud's "talking-cure" in the sense storytelling drives the narrative forward. As Freud's primary method of therapy, the talking cure allowed patients to freely associate the ideas of their mind in order to uncover insights into their repressed issues. As I mentioned above, Freud believed that dreams often provided some of the richest material for this process. This explains why so much of *The Midnight Folk's* unknown past reveals itself while Kay is within a dream space. When Miss Caroline Louisa flies Kay to visit Miss Susan Pricker, she provides a lot of information about the treasure the telling of her father, Sir Piney Trigger's story. In fact, Kay learns that the original Abner Brown recovered the treasure from the wreck of the bottom of the sea:

When he took my father to look for the *Plunderer's* wreck that first time, long, long ago, he sighted the wreck, as it chanced, when Pa was asleep. Did he tell my Pa? No. Like a false knave he made a note of where she was, and told my Pa it was no good looking nay longer. So back he sailed, waited till my Pa had moved elsewhere, then came back with his divers and took everything. (104)

Susan Pricker's story takes up nearly fifteen pages of text, a fairly significant contribution of dialogue. Although she is a minor character, her storytelling significantly adds to the progress of the story by providing missing details to the history of the treasure. By conveying the information, the storytelling process aids in the healing of the past, because Kay and Miss Pricker make amends between their families through the sharing of these details.

Yet, Kay's own actions almost never prompt the storytelling process. Indeed, Kay emerges as a rather passive character in the sense that he is almost always guided by the stories and actions of other characters in the novel. Little of what he learns about the treasure's whereabouts is actually uncovered by his own undertaking. For example, the flat character of Miss Caroline Louisa has a great deal of agency within the story, despite being undeveloped. While Kay learns a great deal of the treasure's history through the stories of Miss Susan Pricker,

this only happens because Miss Louisa brings him to her house and authoritatively provokes the woman to speak. Similarly, when Kay's tries on one of the magic cloaks in the governess's changing room, he finds himself unwittingly transported to the witches' meeting: "Instantly he felt himself lifted into the air, off his feet, and through the open window... 'Oh Dear,' Kay cried, 'it's taking me straight to where all the witches are... and they'll turn me into tomtit'" (182). The magic cloak takes him to Abner Brown's house where he learns more about the treasure by mistakenly ruining the witches spell to view events of the past. What both of these examples show is that Kay lacks any real agency in the story, despite being its main character. Thus, just like the talking cure, agency is given to the storytelling process rather than to Kay's external actions.

Furthermore, the text itself seems to be structured as a free association of ideas. The absence of chapter divisions allows the narrative to function as a single movement, as if it were the case history of a therapy session. As such, movements within the narrative are achieved by using randomness to prompt a change in textual form, usually to song or poetry. Thus, these sudden transitions work as if they are a natural change in thought within the mind. For instance, in the aforementioned example of Kay's trip to Susan Pricker's house, the division between scenes is marked by the song of the weathercocks on the roof of Kay's house: "I watch the common people live and die / Between the hard earth and the windy sky" (90). While the song is a quite depressing observation about the mortality of man, this use of lyric demonstrates the rapid transition of ideas within a dream space. In this way, the form of the text reflects the processes of the mind by capturing the rapid change of thought brought on by moments of randomness in both dreams and everyday life. Here again Masefield's aesthetics overlap with those of Virginia Woolf.

In writing *The Midnight Folk*, Masfield addressed the traumas of his own past; not surprisingly, much of Kay's situation reflects Masfield's own childhood. His mother Caroline (who shares a name with the angelic Caroline Louisa of the *Midnight Folk*) died when Masfield was six. A year later he lost both of his grandparents and the family discovered that "their wealth and social standing had been lost because of the paternal grandfather's poor management" (Whited 186). The culmination of these events caused his Father to succumb to a mental illness, thus leaving Masfield to the care of his Aunt and "much hated governess" Kate. As Whited remarks, she "disapproved of the dreamy child's proclivity for stories and poems" (186). In a way then, Masfield's audience serves as his analyst, allowing him to freely associate the ideas of his troubled childhood within the text of *The Midnight Folk*. Therefore, the audience participates as much in Masfield's own therapy as Kay's.

However, as I stated before, addressing the past is as important to society as it is to the individual. Like many Modernist texts then, aspects of the individual story in *The Midnight Folk* appeal to the larger cultural issues of society. At the turn of the century, English culture faced a long history of monarchic rule by divine right. There was tension between the industrialized economy and the feudal land system of the past. While both of these issues were addressed literally by changes in government, perhaps English society needed to address them metaphorically as well. In that sense, the use of folkloric myth within dream space is another point where *The Midnight Folk* aligns itself with Modernism and psychoanalysis. The re-contextualized use of myth in literature, or the "mythic method" was a way that the Modernists negotiated the turmoil of the present in relation to the issues of the past. For the artists of the moment, modernity was the crossroads where the rolling tides of the past were enveloping the present and threatening to carry humanity into a future of further depravity; it was "a moment of

potential breakdown in socio-cultural relations and aesthetic representation” (Childs 16). Thus, Joyce, Eliot, and others saw the use of the past, and more importantly myth, as a way to place the individual, who otherwise was lost in the sea of uncertainty that was the technological age. As Peter Childs explains, “To writers like Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce the importance of myth applied to contemporary literature was in its ordering power which the disharmony of modern society and culture had lost and only art could recapture” (58).

In the *Midnight Folk*, Masfield uses the structure of an Arthurian legend as a way to place Kay and his personal history within the cultural history of England as a whole. However, rather than simply incorporating a tale of King Arthur into the text, Masfield directly appropriates aspects of the Grail legend into Kay’s quest to recover the treasure. As such, the text’s adoption of this mythic structure produces an added layer of intertextuality, in that it pulls from the same folkloric tradition as T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). Although, as David Ayers notes, *The Waste Land* works more from a pre-Christian version of the tale, the overall plot structure is still similar to that of the Thomas Mallory version, which *The Midnight Folk* seems to adopt (28). As Ayers explains, the Christian tale states that the “grail was used to catch the blood which spilt from [Christ’s] wound, and in the story of Arthur it is a sinless man, Parsifal, who must find the grail and restore Arthur’s kingdom” (30). Although the message of *The Waste Land* differs in its lamentation of permanent suffering, aspects of the mythic structure aid Kay in the recovery of the treasure.

At the end of the novel, the structure of the Grail legend directs the recovery of the treasure. Masfield’s first reference to this myth comes when Kay enters another dream space after someone outside his window yells: “The harvest moon is rounding; / King Arthur holds court this First Night” (169). The caller is a rider from King Arthur’s court who has been sent

with a horse for Kay. After a battle with the Black Knight, the rider takes Kay to meet the King. When Kay arrives, the King and Merlin are engaged in a meeting with an unidentified muddy traveler. The King's order at the conclusion of this meeting reflects how the Grail legend has been appropriated into Kay's story: "The King turned, spoke to the traveler and then told a couple of Knights: 'Go with him, will you, to see if you can find this treasure? It ought to be restored'" (175). It turns out that the traveler is actually Kay's toy bear Edward, and the knights are tasked with helping him to restore Kay's family name by finding the treasure. Thus, Kay, rather than King Arthur, is the ruler whose kingdom must be restored with Edward serving as Kay's Parsifal. As I stated before, Masefield switched to writing children's literature after the war because he sought a way to negotiate the emotional trauma of both the individual and post-war society. Therefore, as Kay works to resolve his personal issues, he also helps England to confront the mythical and patriarchal orders of its war torn past. It is important then that the knights help to restore Kay, not the King, as the head of his house. This change illustrates that the concerns of the individual are more important than those of the government, thereby confronting the patriarchal structure of the past.

When Kay's Edward returns with the treasure, the restoration of both the family name and Kay's mental health is complete. As Edward remarks: "I've Got the treasure. We've jolly well got the treasure for you, Kay. We've been a long time about it, but, when I give my mind to a thing, I carry it through" (231). The word mind is the key to this statement. This is because the return of the "guards" can be seen as Kay's coming to terms with the trauma of his childhood. With their return, he has restored the missing piece of his fractured identity and is now able to assume his role as head of the Harker estate. Likewise, with those who were previously in a position of authority (the witches) now removed, and the treasure returned to Santa Barbara,

England can begin the healing process as well.

In seeing the past as something that needs to be resolved in order to move forward, the text rejects, rather than embraces, a nostalgic perspective. Despite the dominance of Realism in Masfield's poetry, the war clearly affected him as it did with many Modernist authors. As well, Masfield's familiarity with psychoanalysis revealed his concern for both the identity of the individual as well as the culture of Modern society. As a work of fantasy for children, *The Midnight Folk* contains rich material for Freudian psychology. Masfield clearly utilizes the structure of storytelling as a "talking cure" to resolve the repressed traumas of the past. In short, *The Midnight Folk* serves as a wonderful example of a text that transcends the boundaries of children's literature and Modernism. Such a connection not only elicits a need for further work in this area, but also extends the existing critical relationship of children's literature to psychoanalysis. By going back to forgotten texts of the past such as *The Midnight Folk*, perhaps the critical community can perform its own version of the "talking cure" and address a clear need to re-evaluate the importance of children's literature to our understanding of the Modern period.



#### 4.0 DEPICTING POVERTY: *THE FAMILY FROM ONE END STREET*

Before Eve Garnett's *The Family From One End Street* (1937), few children's texts dealt with the representation of the working class. Critics admired Garnett's attention to this topic, and as a result, The British Library Association chose *One End Street* over J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as the second ever recipient of the Carnegie Medal (Wojcik-Andrews). Generations of readers have enjoyed how Garnett's text chronicles the everyday adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles and their seven children. As Critic Ian Wojcik-Andrews states in his biography of Garnett, much of the book's success can be attributed "to the ordinariness of the adventures, dreams, and aspirations of the Ruggles family as a collective unit and as individuals. In many ways they are heroic, not in the grand epic style of the classical period, but in the smaller novelistic style of the modern age" (Wojcik-Andrews). Furthermore, these qualities have in fact allowed *The Family From One End Street* to retain enough popularity to remain in publication. For example, the book was announced as one of the ten favorite winners of all time when Carnegie Medal celebrated its 70th Anniversary in 2007 ([carnegiegreenaway.org](http://carnegiegreenaway.org)).

However, despite the novel's enduring success, a few critics have debated the authenticity of Garnett's depictions. As Wojcik-Andrews explains, "the question is whether or not a middle-class person--in this case Eve Garnett--can honestly and accurately represent working-class life" (Wojcik-Andrews). In short, the focus of this debate is whether or not *The Family From One End Street* realistically portrays the effects of poverty and the struggle of the

working class. Although Garnett fails, the fact that she *tries* to create an accurate depiction of poverty demonstrates the influence of Modernism on this text. Therefore, I argue that Garnett's commitment to a realistic portrayal of working class life, her attention to the relationship of history and class struggle, and her representation of internalized anxiety, all attest to her correspondence with Modernist theories about both history and characterization. Reflecting on the writings of both Walter Benjamin and Karl Marx, I align Garnett's concern for the working class with the emerging social theories connected to Modernism at the time. By highlighting the importance of the internalized imagination to Garnett's characterization, I show how the anxieties of financial hardship are portrayed in accordance with the aesthetic theories of Modernists like Virginia Woolf.

On the surface, *The Family From One End Street* seems to be a text that harshly contrasts with the tenets of Modernism. In fact, the plot structure can be more properly ascribed to the properties of realism or even romance, quite the opposite of Modernism. This is because the story idealizes the virtue and perseverance of its characters. Consider for example what happens when the Ruggles's oldest daughter, Lilly Rose, tries to help with the family laundry business and ends up shrinking one of her mother's best client's petticoats. The incident results in Mrs. Ruggles becoming very distressed over the possible financial effects of Lilly's mistake. However, the *kindness* and *lightheartedness* of that client, Mrs. Beaseley, allows the incident to be resolved and the Ruggles end up better off than they were before:

But when Mrs. Beaseley undid the parcel and saw her petticoat she burst out laughing. 'I never saw anything so funny!' she cried, 'I should love to have seen it running away from the iron – it doesn't matter a bit, Mrs. Ruggles. It was a cheap petticoat, and I know artificial silk behaves like that sometimes if the iron is too hot. Cheer up, Lily Rose. Even if your ideas aren't always a success it's a good thing to have them, and I'm sure you meant to do a good deed. I used to be a Guide once,' she added, 'and I've made lots of mistakes over good deeds in my time. (35-36)

Following the exchange, Mrs. Beasley gives Lily Rose cake and biscuits to take home to the family, thereby rewarding her attempted good deed despite it having destroyed her personal property. Instead of Mrs. Ruggles losing both the money to replace the petticoat and Mrs. Beasley as a client, Lily Rose is exonerated in light of her good intentions and the family subsequently has more food to go around. While this is only one of many examples throughout the text, it illustrates why many critics have refused to regard this text as a realistic depiction of the working class. Wojcik-Andrews emphasizes Garnett's patronizing stance, noting that "the financial problems that the Ruggles family face *are* resolved by the patronage of others, and the Ruggleses *do* always know their place: few working-class people, if any, are in reality so deferential to their 'betters'" (Wojcik-Andrews). However, putting aside the novel's idealized image of working class life, Garnett did succeed in doing something immensely important for children's literature; she pioneered the practice of focusing on working-class characters in children's literature, thus paving the way for other writers to do so more realistically in the future.

Garnett's focus on the portrayal of social inequality aligns her work with certain political undertones that fueled Modernism. As such, *The Family From One End Street* participates in the Modernist treatment of human history as an on going disaster. When Jim, one of the Ruggles twins, joins a boyhood gang, the distress of potentially disclosing his secret pact causes him to become afflicted with nightmares. Although Mrs. Ruggles's explanation of these nighttime disturbances seems comical, it actually illustrates the Modernist, and for that matter, Marxist beliefs on the relationship of history to the working class:

Jim came home very late for supper that evening and muttered something about bird-nesting to account for it. That night and all the following week he suffered

from nightmares of a most alarming description, and would wake shrieking in the middle of the night rousing, not only John who shared his bed, but the entire Ruggles family. ‘History – that’s what it is!’ said Mrs. Ruggles after she had been awakened four nights in succession, ‘shouting out about daggers and beheadings and pools-of-blood – much more of it and I’ll complain at the school!’ (91-92)

The narrative of Jim’s nightmares resounds with the Modernist rejection of history in that it perceives history as an obstacle of individuality. As Child’s explains, writers like Joyce “turned against forms of historical understanding, seeing greater meaning in the individual than in society” (32). Jim’s affliction arises because he is unable to disclose his personal narrative of adventure to his twin brother. If, as the text seems to suggest, the two boys’ conception of identity is wrapped up in the process of sharing experiences as a twin, then the nightmares can be seen as a result of the splitting of Jim’s identity. In other words, the nightmares stop when the gang allows Jim to bring in his other half, his twin brother John. However, Mrs. Ruggles’s observations in the above instance parallel the socioeconomic underpinnings of Modernism by alluding to the problematic nature of history in relationship to the working class.

In the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Karl Marx states, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Moore). Walter Benjamin echoes this sentiment in his 1940 essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” stating that “Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge” (*Theses XII*). Both these statements point to the Modernist view of the past as being the debris of progress, a progress that blindly sweeps society into the future, while at the same time consuming the life of the individual. In essence, both Modernism and Marxism seek to disrupt the cyclical nature of history by confronting the crisis head on. In Child’s deconstruction of the relationship of Marxism and Modernism, he explains this shared view of the crisis:

Modernism has not only been theorized as an alienation from capitalism, by commentators from Georg Lukács through to Fredric Jameson, it has also had its most radical aspect in Marxist criticism and theory, as evidenced in the writings of Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Theodor Adorno. An understanding of the nineteenth-century shifts from country to city, land to factory, individual to mass production, can best be arrived at in terms of the influence of Marx's analysis of history, politics and society. Modernism has repeatedly been characterized as a literature of crisis and it is Marx who places crisis at the centre of capitalist development. (28)

It is unclear whether Garnett had read the works of either Marx or his associate Engels during her time as a student. However, it is clear that like Marx, her writing had a purpose: "to expose social and economic deprivation among the working class" (Wojcik-Andrews). To that end, the text demonstrates that Garnett was at least thinking about Marxian theory in cultural contexts. When Mr. Ruggles comes home defeated from the police station after turning in money he found at work, he remarks his disgust with the socioeconomic structure: "It's no wonder to me some chaps turn Communist; no wonder at all" (222). Although Wojcik-Andrews claims that it is puzzling why Garnett has Mr. Ruggles say this, I believe that Garnett included it deliberately in order to show that she was thinking about the possible outlets for social change that were flowing around her. Thus, Garnett partakes in Modernism by creating a text that does not simply reflect social conditions; it seeks to change them by alerting working-class readers to potential alternatives to the capitalism system.

Furthermore, Garnett's attempt to create internally complex and conflicted characters follows Modernist theories of characterization by moving her writing towards the subjective. In her 1923 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Virginia Woolf points out that the same objective qualities that make Victorian characters memorable, also make them unbelievable: "the undeniable vividness of so many of them is the result of their crudity. The character is rubbed into us indelibly because its features are so few and so prominent. We are given a keyword...and

then, since the choice of the keyword is astonishingly apt, our imaginations swiftly supply the rest” (386). For Woolf, creating a believable character means abandoning the superficiality of external qualities in favor of the intricate workings of the inner mind. While Garnett’s text lacks the highly aesthetical moments characteristic of Modernist writing, her focus on the inner thoughts of the Ruggles family reflect her attentiveness to movement’s ideas.

Garnett develops complexity in the character of Mr. Ruggles by creating a tension between his anxieties and aspirations: “There was a small yard at the back where the washing was hung to dry on fine days, where Mr. Ruggles did a little landscape and kitchen gardening in his spare time, kept three hens in an old soap-box, had dreams of a Pig, and at times, being a Dustman, nightmares of a Sanitary Inspector” (3-4). Although the tone is comical, this small piece of information introduces the juxtaposition of hope and anxiety that the Ruggles internalize throughout the story. As such, Garnett gives psychological depth to this contrast by utilizing the subjective, subconscious experiences of dreams and nightmares to further develop tension in her characterization. In this way, Garnett supplies her audience with a believable, internally conflicted character. Later on, Garnett expands upon the inner thought processes of Mr. Ruggles as he sits in church:

Mr. Ruggles found it hard to keep his attention on the service, for his mind was busy with many things. At the present moment the Twins filled most of it, but one corner, his gardening corner, was very much occupied with the progress of his spring vegetables and how it was that Mr. Hook at No. 2 One End Street was so much further on with his leeks and carrots. Then there was the problem of whether one or two more hens could be squeezed into the soap-box. If the family was going to increase at the present rate, thought Mr. Ruggles, the more he could produce in the food line at home the better.  
(11-12)

The narrative actually stays inside Mr. Ruggles head for several pages, going back and forth between financial anxiety and dreams of the future. This illustrates not only that Garnett was

interested in exploring the inner thoughts of her characters, but that the novel has a “real sense of constant financial hardship, particularly when compared to the financially comfortable middle-class fantasies of Ransome (fiction) and Tolkien (fantasy)” (Wojcik-Andrews).

Virginia Woolf famously wrote in her essay “Modern Fiction,” that “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying?” While I do not think Garnett adequately answers Woolf’s challenge, her work does move the genre of children’s literature towards a more internalized form of representation. The varying ideas that are depicted as flowing through Mr. Ruggles’s mind are reminiscent of Woolf’s use of stream of consciousness. As well, Garnett’s movement between characters bears similarity to Woolf’s technique of varying perspectives in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Thus, when Garnett changes viewpoints, she often stresses the imagination as the catalyst of action in the novel. For instance, when Garnett introduces Jim, she characterizes him by his proclivity for ideas: “James Ruggles, the elder of the twins, and called Jim for short, like his father and sisters was afflicted with Ideas – indeed sometimes, as he himself expressed it, he was bursting with them” (85). Just like with the other Ruggles children, Jim’s actions in the story are first defined by his thoughts. Although Garnett still relies on the objective details of the Ruggles’ lives like clothing and food, those details are premised by the representation of inner thought.

In short, Eve Garnett’s *The Family From One End Street* tries but fails to represent working-class life in a way more real than realism. However, that is not to say that the motives behind the text, as well as Garnett’s approaches to characterization, were not influenced by Modernism. As I have shown, Garnett’s challenging of socioeconomic conditions parallels Modernism’s efforts to stem the tides of progress from consuming the identity of the individual.

Likewise, her attentiveness to the inner thoughts and ideas of her characters expresses a Modernist concern for psychological depth as a means to more realistic characterization. Altogether, this analysis shows that there is a clear need to go back to the children's literature of the interwar period and place it into dialogue with the more known works of Modernism that dominated the literary scene at the time.



## 5.0 CONCLUSION

This thesis has covered a varied range of children's texts that have long been absent in discussions concerning the literature of the interwar period. By connecting *David Blaize*, *The Midnight Folk*, and *The Family from One End Street* to the concerns of Modernism, this thesis distinguishes the interwar years as a unique period of children's literature. In doing so, it suggests a need to recover more children's texts from the early twentieth century. From what I have observed through this study, I am certain that further examinations into the representation of childhood during the interwar years could definitely help us to better understand not only the relationship of Modernism to the children's literature of the time, but also to the children's literature created before and especially after the interwar years.

In considering these texts as participants in Modernism, this thesis adds a valuable perspective to the literary scholarship of the interwar period. After all, children's texts depict the cultural perceptions of childhood; since the culture around interwar children's authors was the same culture that surrounded Modernists, studies of children's literature during this time adds to our overall understanding of both literature and childhood during the interwar period.

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