Mary Poppins in Popular Culture
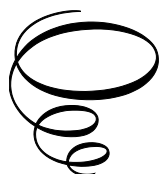
Mary Poppins in Popular Culture

By

Renáta Lengyel-Marosi

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To my husband, my most profound inspiration.

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Introduction

A strangely bottomless carpetbag and a talking and flying parrot-headed umbrella; the chaotic Banks family; the cosy Cherry Tree Lane, and an amusingly magical nanny. These words recall Mary Poppins's name in the minds of people worldwide, regardless of their nationality, native language or cultural background. The iconic English governess, who first appeared in the books of Australian-born author P. L. Travers which have been published in twenty-nine languages, entertains not only readers across the globe, but the fantasy series has seen its audience grow thanks to various film and stage adaptations, including, in particular, Disney and Broadway musicals.[1]

What makes this timeless nanny so popular? Why is her success so endless? Why is this classic of children's literature such desirable material for screenwriters and contemporary authors? Why and how is it apt to be the focus of the cinematic and literary world? What Mary Poppins adaptations exist in Anglophone films, series, cartoons, and certain examples of contemporary fantasy literature? What do these adaptations consider their source: Travers's or Disney's? The purpose of this book is to answer the questions mentioned above thoroughly. I argue that whereas several adaptations studied here were inspired directly by Travers's fantasy series, many more films, sitcoms and books adapted Mary Poppins's most characteristic personality traits (such as her vanity and bitter-sweet ironic mood), her unusual teaching methods or use of magical accessories (such as her umbrella and carpet bag), which do not necessarily require them to reach out towards the source text, as the Walt Disney Studios' film musical of 1964 had also already adapted them in one way or another. Therefore, it is sometimes impossible to identify the source text of these adaptations.

I also believe that since the source determines the success of adaptations–be it a character, a story or the plot–it was easier for directors and authors to turn to the one that is more known worldwide. Considering

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[1] This paragraph was originally published in Renáta Lengyel-Marosi's "Miért meséljünk Mary Poppinsról? P. L. Travers regénysorozatának helye az (angol nyelvű) gyerekirodalomban," Mesecentrum. Petőfi Irodalmi Ügynökség, August 15, 2022, https://mesecentrum.hu/esszektanulmanyok/miert-meseljunk-mary-poppins rol.html.

the insufficient number of available sources on the *Mary Poppins* fantasy series, I drew the conclusion that the public is much more familiar with and willing to examine Disney's magic nanny than Travers's. Hence, apart from a few studies,[2] only six monographs examine and analyse this eight-volume saga from different perspectives, along with Travers's life and literary career. These are: Steffan Bergsten's *Mary Poppins and Myth* (1978); Patricia Demers's *P. L. Travers* (1991); Valerie Lawson's *Mary Poppins, She Wrote; The Life of P. L. Travers* (1999)–previously published as *Out of the Sky She Came*; *A Lively Oracle; A Centennial Celebration of P. L. Travers, The Creator of Mary Poppins* (1999) edited by Ellen Dooling Draper and Jenny Koralek; Giorgia Grilli's *Myth, Symbol and Meaning in Mary Poppins; The Governess as Provocateur* (2007) and Julia Kunz's *Intertextuality and Psychology in P. L. Travers's Mary Poppins Books* (2014). Bergsten recorded the first biographical data about Travers, which was then continued by Patricia Demers, based on her interviews with Travers. Later, Valerie Lawson published the most detailed description of her life. In Draper and Koralek's essay collection, Travers's close friends and former colleagues share details of her career and personal life. Finally, Kunz's book interprets various characters and chapters of the *Mary Poppins* novels in terms of their connection to the classics of Victorian children's literature, fairy tales, myths, and Buddhism.

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[2] See, for example, Valverde, C., Pérez. "Dreams and Liminality in the Mary Poppins Books". In Dream, Imagination and Reality in Literature. South Bohemian Anglo-American Studies No. 1., eds. Kamila Vránková and Christopher Koy (České Budějovice: Editio Universitatis Bohemiae Meridionalis, 2007, 67-72); Pérez Valverde, C. "Magic Women on the Margins: Eccentric Models in Mary Poppins and Ms Wiz," Children's Literature in Education, Vol. 40 (2009): 263-274. doi: 10.1007/s10583-009-9090-3; Li-ping Chang, Yun-hsuan Lee, and Cheng-an Chang, "The Subversive Mary Poppins: An Alternative Image of the Witch in Children's Literature," International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 2014): 31-40. www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v2-i6/5.pdf; Mary DeForest, "Mary Poppins and the Great Mother," Classical and Modern Literature, Vol. 11, No 2 (1991): 139-154; Catherine L. Elick, "Animal Carnivals: A Bakhtinian Reading of C. S. Lewis's The Magician's Nephew and P. L. Travers's Mary Poppins," Conventions of Children's Literature: Then and Now, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2001): 454-470. www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.35.3.454; Donna M. Revtai, "The Domestic Sybil: Feminist Concerns in P. L. Travers's Mary Poppins and Mary Poppins Comes Back," Thesis, (Florida Atlantic University, 1997), http://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A12727; Vathanalaoha Kriangkrai, "Spatialisation of Text Worlds: Contrastive Interpretations in P.L. Travers's Mary Poppins," Manusya: Journal of Humanities, Vol. 25, No. 1 (26 Dec 2022): 1-22, https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-25010018.

As far as the research focus of these books is concerned, multiple perspectives have been applied: biographical, psychological, anthropological, folkloristic, religious, and social. Giorgia Grilli published the as-yet-only full-length monograph on the entire *Mary Poppins* book series. She described the heroine as a subversive character with a thousand faces, naming her Shaman, Dandy, Trickster, and a mysterious governess who subverts Victorian mores and educational methods and who paradoxically can restore and maintain order and harmony through her rebellious nature and presence.

In *Mary Poppins in Popular Culture,* I wish to continue the interpretations from a novel perspective and expand the literature on *Mary Poppins* further. Mary Poppins, as a character and as a fantasy series, is known worldwide and has been adapted in literature, film, and theatre. Despite the fact that Mary Poppins is a popular target of pop cultural adaptations, to the best of my knowledge, this book is the first publication that surveys and collects P. L. Travers's and her fantasy series' connection to the overall culture shared by audiences.

This book is designed for literary academics and professionals eager to know more about popular culture and children's literature concerning Mary Poppins. Therefore, it lacks a general and profound theoretical background to the phenomenon of adaptation and popular culture. Instead, in Chapter 1, "Mary Poppins and its Connection with Popular Culture," I wish to map out the conceptual landscape and interpretation of the terms *culture* and *popular culture* with regard to *Mary Poppins*. At the same time, in terms of the saga's literary genre, this chapter reveals Travers's plans for getting closer to the public and her readership's cultural and everyday life. The first chapter further describes the challenges of the fantasy genre; the position it had or rather lacked in literature and culture, and how it finally developed and became a crucial part of the golden age of children's literature. As a key example of this genre, *Mary Poppins*'s reception followed the same difficult path, which will be mentioned too. I then define and scrutinise what I mean by pop cultural references in the *Mary Poppins* fantasy saga: any form of intellectual or cultural entertainment in which a specific crowd is involved and which has its roots in Victorian popular culture, an era significant and inspirational for the interwar authors, such as Travers. Thus, the first chapter examines pop cultural-based chapters (e.g., "Christmas Shopping" and "Park in the Park") and positive and negative characters (e.g., Nellie Rubina and Matilda Mo) of the *Mary Poppins* series, which embody a specific product or form of entertainment. Subchapter 1.2 ("The Pop Cultural Aspects of Mary Poppins") formed part of my dissertation entitled

"Reconfiguring the Victorian Female Ideal in the Mary Poppins Novels," which was defended successfully in 2022.

I strongly believe that the success of *Mary Poppins* harks back to three reasons: Mary Poppins's personality traits, its universal themes and handling of social issues, such as feminism, that Travers focuses on in her *Mary Poppins* novels, and, finally, the issue of intertextuality.[3] As Puskás aptly concludes concerning intertextuality, "The emphasis is on the link between previous texts in the past and the texts of the present…It is not only past texts that influence new ones, but the identities, philosophies, ideas and also characters and plots involved in previous texts which gain special significance as well."[4] In this sense, I will scrutinise Mary Poppins's personality and examine the fantasy series' intertextual connection to nineteenth and twentieth century British children's literature with special attention given to Travers's dream world in Chapter 2, "Examining Mary Poppins's Worldwide Popularity." This chapter was one of the introductory chapters of my dissertation under the title, "Mary Poppins and the Nineteenth-and Twentieth Century Children's Literature."

Through the categorisation of Jane and Michael Banks's journeys with Mary Poppins, the most important characters (e.g., the Bird Woman, Mrs Corry, and the Balloon Woman) and stories (e.g., "Full Moon," "High Tide," and "Hallowe'en") will be introduced. The character analysis for Mary Poppins, Mrs Banks and Jane Banks that is found in that section first appeared in two main chapters of my dissertation, "Angels in the Banks House" and "Reluctant Women in the Banks House." At the same time, various connections will be revealed between Travers's stories and Victorian and Edwardian it-narratives (e.g., *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Wind in the Willows*, and *The Enchanted Castle*) and literary dream worlds (e.g., *Alice* books and *Peter Pan*). The depiction of feminism in the *Mary Poppins* books will be scrutinised in the following chapter concerning what I refer to as the Disney dilemma.

Chapter 3 examines the issues and focal points of certain adaptations of the *Mary Poppins* saga ("The Issues and Foci of the Mary Poppins Adaptations"). As the film critic Brian McFarlane states, the "adducing of fidelity to the original novel" is "a major criterion for judging the film

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[3] This statement was first published in Lengyel-Marosi's "Miért meséljünk Mary Poppinsról? P. L. Travers regénysorozatának helye az (angol nyelvű) gyerekirodalomban."

[4] Andrea Puskás, Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare. Segédkönyvek a Nyelvészet Tanulmányozásához 162 (Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó, 2014), 22.

adaptation."[5] It is a fundamental approach that examines if the basic meaning of the source text (with its themes and messages that it communicates) has been respected or in some sense violated or falsified.[6] As far as the fidelity of the Disney adaptations is concerned, Travers was firmly convinced that although the film musical of 1964 was entertaining, it was untrue to the meaning of the *Mary Poppins* books.[7] More to the point, Pearce notes that during the making of *Mary Poppins* (1964), Travers argued against things that are now "hard-wired into popular culture."[8] Chapter 3 reveals P. L. Travers's family background and literary career in connection with the world of Mary Poppins in order to understand the author's "uneasy wedlock"[9] with Disney and her negative opinion of and attitude towards the 1964 adaptation of *Mary Poppins*.

Just as franchises such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* have had a "generational cultural impact,"[10] the *Mary Poppins* film musical–despite Travers's low opinion–has become not only a commercial asset for Disney Studios, but also an immense cultural touchstone in the collective memories of multiple generations.[11] So much so that, for example, the American Film Institute ranks *Mary Poppins* (1964) sixth on the list of the Top Twenty-Five Film Musicals of All Time. Therefore, in terms of fidelity to the source text, chapter 3 will also explain the problems and obstacles that occurred and might occur when adapting *Mary Poppins* onto the screens through the existing Walt Disney Studios' adaptations (*Mary Poppins*, *Mary Poppins Returns*, and *Saving Mr Banks*).

Chapter 4 ("Mary Poppins's Influence on the English and American Literary and Cinematic World") will demonstrate certain Anglophone examples of the *Mary Poppins* adaptations. There are many definitions for the term *adaptation*, which Jens Eder, a professor of aesthetics of audio-visual media, aptly summarises as follows:

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[5] Brian McFarlane, Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation (Clarendon Press, 1996), 8.

[6] McFarlane, Novel to Film, 8.

[7] Sharyn Pearce, "The business of myth-making: Mary Poppins, P.L. Travers and the Disney effect," Queensland Review, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2015): 68.

[8] Pearce, "The business of myth-making: Mary Poppins," 70.

[9] Valerie Lawson, Mary Poppins She Wrote. The Life of P. L. Travers (Lancaster: Pocket Books, 1999), 276.

[10] Patrik L. Baka, Kristályszilánkok. A világépítő történelmi mintázatok irodalmi manifesztációinak nyomában (Budapest: NAP Kiadó, 2018), 16.

[11] Jack Zipes, Pauline Greenhill, and Kendra Magnus-Johnston, Fairy-Tale Films beyond Disney: International Perspectives (Taylor & Francis, 2016), 31.

> (1) In the broadest sense, "adaptation" refers to the process or product of transferring anything into something other by fitting it into another environment and changing it in the procedure: … an artwork [is turned] into another artwork. (2) In a narrower sense, "adaptation" is limited to the transcoding of whole texts, or elements of their content or form, into new texts fitting into other contexts of media, cultures, etc. (3) This again can be specified by additional criteria into various narrower meanings, e.g. in Hutcheon's … definition of adaptations as "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works"…, or in Geraghty's claim that any adapted text "draws attention to the fact of adaptation in the text itself and/or in the paratextual material which surrounds it.[12]

In this instance, this chapter focuses on the process of turning the written texts into an audio-visual medium; that is, making a film, sitcom, series or cartoon from the *Mary Poppins* fantasy novels. This includes the transcoding of certain characters (e.g., Mary Poppins, Mrs Banks, Jane Banks, and the Bird Woman) and chapters (e.g., "The West Wind", "The Day Out," "High Tide," and "Lucky Thursday"), which ultimately resulted in a public and intentional reconsideration of the fantasy saga in terms of the plot (e.g., in *Mary Poppins Returns*, the Banks children are grown-ups), characters' portrayal (e.g., in *Mary Poppins* of 1964 Mrs Banks is depicted as a suffragette), and the messages conveyed (e.g., the adaptation of its magic and entertaining aspects are preferred to the serious themes originally depicted in the series).

Considering Disney's huge impact on Mary Poppins, which is called the "Americanization" (Lawson) or "Disneyfication" of Mary Poppins (Pearce), many adaptations in Chapter 4 can be regarded as adaptations of the Disney adaptations, which makes it inevitable that the phenomenon of *transmediality* is introduced. The American media scholar Henry Jenkins in his famous 2003 article on transmediality pointed out that "we have entered an era of media convergence [both economic and technical] that makes the flow of content across multiple media channels almost inevitable."[13] Jenkins adds that this flow comprises "the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost everywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they

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[12] Eder, Jens. "Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation: Concepts, Forms, and Strategies". In The Politics of Adaptation. Media Convergence and Ideology, ed. Dan Hassler-Forest, and Nicklas Pascal (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 68-69.

[13] Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia storytelling: Moving characters from books to films to video games can make them stronger and more compelling," MIT Technology Review, January 15, 2003, n. p.

want."[14] In other words, the term transmediality refers to an increasingly fashionable "trend" in media production whereby media conglomerates stream their content across as many media channels as possible thus linking to "diverse forms of marketing, merchandising and fan discourses."[15] For example, the cinema blockbusters of Disney Studios are streamed over the Internet, released on Disney+ while also turned into books, video games, comics, posters, toys, or live events. Thus, the consumers of popular culture also become enthusiastic and active participants.

Regarding the connection between Mary Poppins and transmediality, two descriptions can be applied. First, as Eder explains, in a broader sense, transmedial corresponds "to anything observable in more than one medium– typically, semiotic phenomena like genres, whole texts (a novel as printed book and e-book), parts of texts (recurring sentences or images), tokens or types of content, and formal features of style and structure."[16] Second, in a narrower sense, according to Jenkins's definition, it refers to "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience."[17] Finally, it is worth mentioning Marrone's thoughts about intertextuality (also characteristic for the *Mary Poppins* books as seen in Chapter 2), who suggests that a "character does not live in a single text or in a generic context with no textual links; it rather lives and feeds itself in the intertextual network in which it is constantly being retranslated."[18]

Travers's fantasy series has grown into a transmedial multi-text, and so Mary Poppins "went from book to silver screen to stage,"[19] enabling the readers to get closer to or recall the stories and characters of *Mary Poppins*, sometimes from a new perspective. For instance, besides certain characters (such as the Bird Woman in *Neverwhere*) and chapters that have been adapted (e.g., "Hallowe'en" and "Lucky Thursday"), Mary Poppins's

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[14] Jenkins, Henry. "Introduction: 'Worship at the Altar of Convergence': A New Paradigm for Understanding Media Change". In Convergence culture. Where old and new media collide (New York City: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

[15] Eder, "Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation", 67

[16] Eder, "Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation", 69

[17] Eder, "Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation", 69

[18] Freeman, Matthew. "A World of Disney: Building a Transmedia Storyworld for Mickey and his Friends". In World Building. Transmedia, Fans, Industries, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 98.

[19] Zeiser, Anne. "Chapter 9: Branding". In A Companion to Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital Media (New York and London: Focal Press, 2015), 95.

personality traits (e.g., her mysteriousness, vanity, pride, and arrogance) and creative but strict educational methods and magical staffs can be found in characters in a range of fantasy books (e.g., *The Graveyard Book,* the *Harry Potter* saga), comic books (e.g., *Sandman*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen III: Century,* and *2000 AD: Pandora Perfect*), and films about unusual nannies (e.g., *The Sound of Music, Nanny McPhee, The Nanny Diaries,* and *Mrs Doubtfire*).

In several other cases, these features are spread across channels directly from the Disney film musicals. This means that instead of taking from the source text, certain novels and sitcoms recall famous phrases (e.g., supercalifragilisticexpialidocious), scenes, costumes or songs from the film (e.g., *Hogfather,* episodes of the sitcoms *Big Bang Theory,* and *The Simpsons,*). Furthermore, the once passive audience of the Disney films and/or readers of the *Mary Poppins* books can become witnesses or active participants in the wondrous adventures of Jane and Michael Banks by attending the Mary Poppins attraction at EPCOT Theme Park and the annual Mary Poppins Festival in Maryborough, Australia.

Finally, in many cases, the exact source of adaptation cannot be identified. Several films (e.g., *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*), sitcoms (e.g., *The Nanny, How I Met You Mother, Friends,* and *My Wife and Kids*), and cartoons (e.g., *Paddington, Inside Out, Puss in Boots: The Last Wish,* and *The Willoughbys*) adapt Mary Poppins's magical belongings, such as her carpet bag and parrot-headed umbrella, or make reference to her subversive teaching methods which are features in both Travers's original stories and the film musicals later based on her fantasy creation.

The selection of these adaptations in Chapter 4 is based on personal reading, cinematic experience and research work carried out over seven years. This non-exhaustive list includes only the most relevant British and American examples, by which I mean those literary and cinematic adaptations whose connection to *Mary Poppins* can be explicitly supported by lines, scenes, plots of the film or stories and characters of the source text. The list was mostly created based on certain genres and fields of classicised popular culture, in which the most successful franchises of entertainment besides science fiction, horror and action films are fantasy books, comics, animated family films, and cartoons.

CHAPTER 1

MARY POPPINS AND ITS CONNECTION WITH POPULAR CULTURE

One of the fundamental life philosophies forming the basis of Mary Poppins's character and the series' general mood is that, as P. L. Travers argued, the real miracle, which should be recognised and respected, is everyday life.[20] Therefore, the author made several attempts to get her magical Mary Poppins closer to the everyday life of people to cause the same effect on them that she had made on her own life; in a word, to enrich people's lives with love, hope, and humour and to convince them of the significance of tiny trivial details that could and should be perceived as wondrous and unusual. I believe that from the first steps of writing and publishing *Mary Poppins*, Travers made use of several fields of popular culture to achieve this goal. These include her choice of genre in which she wrote and published the *Mary Poppins* books, the pop cultural themes (holidays, travelling, and entertainment) that Travers introduces in her chapters, and, finally, her contract with Walt Disney.

1.1 The Genre of Mary Poppins

The first step to popularising Mary Poppins was writing it in a specific genre. Fantasy literature, *Mary Poppins* (as an example of this genre), and popular culture share a similar history with respect to their struggles to be appreciated by the public and/or critics. Concerning the genre itself, until the mid-nineteenth century, imagination and fantasy were "often considered irresponsible and socially dangerous."[21] Childhood was purely seen as a developmental phase during which children should be educated and regulated lest they fall into sin,[22] and literature was intended to serve this conviction. For this reason, the seventeenth-and eighteenth-century canon

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[20] Lawson, Mary Poppins, 254.
[21] Colin Manlove, From Alice to Harry Potter. Children's Fantasy in England (Cybereditions Corporation, 2003), 11.
[22] Manlove, From Alice to Harry Potter, 11.

for children included religious texts and moralising stories to teach humbleness and humility and to warn of the consequences of disobedience towards one's parents (e.g., James Janeway: *A Token for Children*, Sarah Fielding: *The Governess, or The Little Female Academy*, and Maria Edgeworth: *The Purple Jar*).

Over time, another, more positive view of childhood began to emerge, which later became recognised and which is depicted in the *Mary Poppins* series. Following in William Blake's (*Songs of Innocence*, 1789) and William Wordsworth's (*Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, 1807) footsteps, Travers supported and voiced a romantic view of childhood that became characteristic from the 1860s and a perspective that entailed a new attitude towards literary texts encouraging the cultivation of free imagination and entertainment. In this sense, childhood was seen as a "happy condition of natural innocence" and "an object of nostalgia and veneration."[23]

Travers devotes two chapters ("John and Barbara's Story" from *Mary Poppins* and "The New One" from *Mary Poppins Comes Back*) to celebrate children's natural innocence, which finds expression in their innate connection to nature,[24] and which ends with their growing consciousness. John and Barbara, the twins, are wondering if their older siblings, Jane and Michael, can also understand the birds, the wind, and the language of the sunlight and the stars. Mary Poppins and the Starling explains that once they did, but they have now forgotten:

> "Because they've grown older," explained Mary Poppins. …
> "That's a silly reason," said John, looking sternly at her.
> "It's the true one, then," Mary Poppins said, tying Barbara's socks firmly round her ankles.
> "Well, it's Jane and Michael who are silly," John continued. "I know I shan't forget when I get older."
> "Nor I," said Barbara, contentedly sucking her finger.
> "Yes, you will," said Mary Poppins firmly.
> The Twins sat up and looked at her.
> "Huh!" said the Starling contemptuously. "Look at 'em! They think they're the World's Wonders. Little miracles–I don't think! Of course you'll forget–same as Jane and Michael."
> "We won't," said the Twins, looking at the Starling as if they would like to murder him. The Starling jeered.

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[23] Manlove, From Alice to Harry Potter, 13.
[24] Giorgia Grilli, Myth, Symbol and Meaning in Mary Poppins. Translated by Jennifer Varney (Routledge, 2007), 94-95.

"I say you will," he insisted. "It isn't your fault, of course," he added more kindly. "You'll forget because you just can't help it. There never was a human being that remembered after the age of one–at the very latest–except, of course, Her." And he jerked his head over his shoulder at Mary Poppins.[25]

Annabel, the youngest Banks child, equates her birth to a departure from the natural world and reports it to the Starling and the Fledging in the following way:

"I am earth and air and fire and water," she said softly. "I come from the Dark where all things have their beginning." … "I come from the sea and its tides," Annabel went on. "I come from the sky and its stars, I come from the sun and its brightness …"[26]

All in all, from the early twentieth century onwards, childhood was considered a "special time," and it was voiced that "children should be treated differently" to adults.[27] This new perspective on childhood facilitated the emergence of children's literature with the express purpose of entertaining its readership. Such examples include works by Charles Kingsley (*The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*), Lewis Carroll (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), and George MacDonald (*The Princess and the Goblin*). Even if these narratives differed from traditional fairy tales, many Victorian fantasy texts relied on their form and motifs, and were therefore originally classed as fairy tales[28] and, later, the "forerunners of modern fantasy."[29]

However, the birth of fantasy literature did not instantly guarantee its recognition by the critics and its inclusion in the literary canon. Indeed, interwar British fantasy works often received a negative reception because

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[25] P. L. Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2010), 97-98.
To help maintain the continuity of the reading experience, I will abbreviate the titles of each book in the following way: *Mary Poppins* (MP), *Mary Poppins Comes Back* (MPCB), *Mary Poppins Opens the Door* (MPOD), *Mary Poppins in the Park* (MPP); *The Complete Mary Poppins* (CMP)–a collection of the *Mary Poppins* books (with the exception of *Mary Poppins in the Kitchen* and *Mary Poppins from A to Z*).
[26] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 227.
[27] Jill Barber, Children in Victorian Times (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 2007), 27.
[28] Manlove, From Alice to Harry Potter, 17.
[29] Farah Mendlesohn, and Edward James. The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11.

of their heavy reliance on Victorian classics.[30] When *Mary Poppins* came out in 1934, the Library Association Review critically observed that the market was overrun mainly by "half-witted fairy tales."[31] Probably for the same reason, Mary Poppins was not included on the Children's Literature Association's Touchstones list because, as Perry Nodelman noted, "so much of its fantasy is, despite its inventiveness, finally unconvincing."[32] I agree with Peter Hunt, who explains that Mary Poppins could be regarded as unconvincing only because Travers herself undermined the reader's fantasy experience by insisting on its great significance.[33]

So, for different reasons, such as literary traditions, views on children's education, and publishing opinions, fantasy literature (or at least some of its examples) held a marginal position in literature for a long time. However, the contemporary approach to pop culture had a significant effect on the change of the canon map in the twentieth century. As Péter H. Nagy explains, its "autonomy, departure from genre hierarchy, strengthening, and differentiation (in magazine culture and later in book publishing) was part of modernity even if was met with a great deal of resistance from elitist canon and academic value systems."[34] Consequently,

> with the reordering of the canon map in the twentieth century, in addition to canon types that had long been in circulation (e.g., criterion canon, national canon, canon of meaning, academic canon, and educational canons), works not included in these were reorganised into so-called alternative canons, which eventually contributed to the so-called classicisation of popular literature, which now includes, for example, the canons of science fiction, fantasy, horror, alternative history, and crime fiction…[35]

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[30] Peter Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

[31] Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature, 106.

[32] Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature, 119.

[33] Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature, 106.

[34] All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

„A peremműfajok önállósodása, eltávolodása a műfaji hierarchiától, megerősödése és differenciálódása (a magazinkultúrában, majd a könyvkiadásban is) a modernség része volt, és igen nagy ellenállásba ütközött az elitkánonok és az akadémiai értékrendek felől." Nagy, Péter, H. "A Popkultúra rétegei. Dance in the Dark". In Poptechnikák. Komplexitás a népszerű kultúrában (MA Populáris Kultúra Kutatócsoport monográfiák 3), ed. Péter H. Nagy, and Péter L. Varga (Budapest: Prae Kiadó, 2022), 16.

[35] „A popkultúra jelenkori megközelítése tehát jelentősen érinti a kánontérkép 20. századi átrendeződését. Ugyanis a régóta forgalomban lévő kánontípusok (pl. kritériumkánon, nemzeti kánon, jelentéskánon, akadémiai kánon, oktatási kánonok) mellett az

Victorian England saw the birth of children's literature, which later solidified its place in the alternative canon with the animal stories of Rudyard Kipling (*The Jungle Book*), Beatrix Potter (*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*), Kenneth Grahame (*Wind in the Willows*), and A. A. Milne (*Winnie-the-Pooh*), with the it-narratives of Edith Nesbit (*The Enchanted Castle*), with the portal-quest fantasies of Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*) and C. S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*); as well as with Roald Dahl's (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*), Philip Pullman's (*Dark Materials*), Neil Gaiman's (*Stardust*) and J. K. Rowling's fantasy series (*Harry Potter*). There are three reasons why I listed the aforementioned authors and works. Firstly, Travers was greatly inspired by these literary dream worlds and it-narratives. Secondly, she voiced her positive opinion of Tolkien and Lewis's famous fantasy works.[36] Finally, because twenty-first-century fantasy authors like Gaiman and Rowling eagerly adapted characters, magical tools, and motifs of the *Mary Poppins* books to create their own popular stories, which have since become a recognised and well-respected part of popular culture in the form of books, comics, and films.

Thus, fantasy literature has a specific relation to popular culture. Like the fantasy genre, the history of popular culture is rooted in the Victorian era and had to face challenges to become recognised. In more detail, as Vera Benczik and Natália Pikli state, the study of popular culture has been an integral part of the English-speaking academic world for the past forty years,[37] but its history dates to the years following industrialisation and urbanisation.[38] Theatre festivals and plays entertained the public even in ancient and medieval times, but it was in the nineteenth century when social and economic changes facilitated new cultural relations and the emergence of popular culture. These changes included a new *cash nexus*-based depersonalised employer-employee relationship (a phrase coined by

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ezekben nem szereplő alkotások a 20. század folyamán ún. alternatív kánonokba rendeződtek. Ilyen értelemben alternatív kánonnak minősülhet a sci-fi, a fantasy, a horror, az alternatív történelem, a krimi stb. Kánonja. Nagy, H. "A Popkultúra rétegei", 17.

[36] Lawson, Mary Poppins, 296.

[37] Benczik, Vera, and Pikli, Natália. "Introduction – Bevezetés". In Encounters of the Popular Kind: Traditions and Mythologies – Populáris típusú találkozások: Hagyományok és mitológiák, eds. Judit Anna Bánházi, Zsolt Beke, Benczik Vera, Eszter Zsuzsanna Csorba, Ádám Márton Kling, Györgyi Kovács, Natália Pikli, Eszter Johanna Székelyhidi, Orsolya Szujer, and Éva Vancsó (Budapest: ELTE Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2021), 7.

[38] Martin Hallett, and Barbara Karasek, Fairy Tales in Popular Culture (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014), 13.

Thomas Carlyle, a nineteenth-century Scottish historian),[39] "a residential separation of classes" and "production of a cultural space for the generation of a popular culture more or less outside the controlling influence of the dominant classes,"[40] the "development of national consciousness", "the eradication of agrarian work tied to the land, the destruction of the tightly knit village community, the decline of religion and the secularisation of societies…the growth of scientific knowledge, the spread of mechanised, monotonous and alienating factory work, the development of large anomic cities populated by anonymous crowds, and the relative absence of moral integration."[41]

Throughout the years, there have been debates about what is considered *popular culture*. Many definitions have been coined and multiple descriptions have been made for the term. It can refer to a mass-produced, commercial culture that is loved by the people and distributed through mass (information) technologies; it is often considered inferior to other conceptual 'high-culture' categories as it is said to be less structured and regulated by intellectual institutions and is meant to celebrate trivial and false pleasures at the expense of serious and intellectual values. Pop culture is also regarded as an arena for struggle or negotiation between dominant and subordinate classes and ideologies, between directors and actors, the publishers and the writers, women and men, heterosexual and homosexual, black and white, old and young.[42] Finally, Storey states that "popular culture is in effect an

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[39] Ashley Crossman, "Cash Nexus: A Discussion of the Term Coined by Thomas Carlyle and Popularized by Marx," Thought.Co, August 27, 2020, https://www.thoughtco.com/cash-nexus-3026127.

[40] Storey, John. "What is popular culture?". In Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009), 13.

[41] Strinati, Dominic. "Mass Culture and Popular Culture". In An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture (Routledge, 2004), 1, 5.

[42] Read more: MacDonald, Dwight. "A theory of mass culture". In Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader, ed. John Storey (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1957/1998); Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontara, 1976/1983); Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott, eds., Popular Culture and Social Relations (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Gamman, Lorraine, and Margaret Marshment. "Introduction". In The Female Gaze, Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, eds. Lorraine Gamman, and Margaret Marshmen (London: The Women's Press, 1988); John Fiske, Reading the Popular (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Maltby, Richard. "Introduction". In Dreams for Sale: Popular Culture in the 20th Century, ed. Richard Maltby (London: Harrap, 1989); Chandra Mukerji, and Michael Schudson, eds., Rethinking Popular Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Ben Agger, Cultural Studies as Cultural Theory (London: Falmer Press, 1992); Peter Goodall, High Culture, Popular

empty conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use."[43] In this book, instead of providing a conceptual overview, my aim is to give a single definition of popular culture that can be applied to the analysis of *Mary Poppins*. In order to do so, first, I consider it important to clarify the term *culture*.

For this, I introduce the thoughts of British cultural critic Raymond Williams who gave three broad definitions of culture in 1976. Firstly, culture is "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development."[44] Secondly, it also suggests "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group."[45] Finally, Williams states that culture can refer to "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity."[46] Storey adds that speaking of popular culture "usually means to mobilize the second and third meanings of the word 'culture.'"[47] More particularly, it includes practices such as seaside holidays, the celebration of Christmas, youth subcultures, listening to pop music, and reading comics. These definitions are relevant here because the *Mary Poppins* series reflects specific signifying practices–characteristics both for a Victorian way of life and Travers's modern period.

In this sense, I argue that pop cultural references depicted in the *Mary Poppins* series cover any activities and practices that rely on positive (consumption) or negative preoccupations (materialism) with goods as well as rely on entertainment offering sensual (eating, dancing, and singing) and

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Culture: The Long Debate (St Leonards: Allen &Unwin, 1995); Graeme Turner, British Cultural Studies (London: Routledge, 1996); Noël Carroll, A Philosophy of Mass Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); J. M Golby, and A. W Purdue, The Civilization of the Crowd. Popular Culture in England 1750-1900 (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999); Richard Shusterman, "Entertainment: A Question for Aesthetics," British Journal of Aesthetics 43, No. 3 (2003): 289-307; Domonic Strinati, An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture (Routledge, 2004); David Walton, Introducing Cultural Studies: Learning Through Practice (London: Sage, 2008); John Storey, Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009); Nagy, Péter, H. "A Popkultúra rétegei. Dance in the Dark". In Poptechnikák. Komplexitás a népszerű kultúrában (MA Populáris Kultúra Kutatócsoport monográfiák 3), eds. Péter H. Nagy, and Péter L. Varga (Budapest: Prae Kiadó, 2022).
[43] Storey, "What is popular culture?", 1.
[44] Williams, Keywords, 90.
[45] Williams, Keywords, 90.
[46] Williams, Keywords, 90.
[47] Storey, "What is popular culture?", 2.

intellectual pleasure (playing, reading, visiting the Zoo or the Park[48]) engaging the 'crowd,' a specific group of characters (the Banks children, the visitors of the Park, the inhabitants of Cherry Tree Lane, Mary Poppins's friends and relatives) gathered together by Mary Poppins's magic and magical presence.

1.2 The Pop Cultural Aspects of *Mary Poppins*

Pop cultural references find expression in two forms in the *Mary Poppins* fantasy series. Firstly, through the Banks children's everyday lives, their play and fields of interest. Secondly, certain female villains embody or find themselves trapped in products and activities of popular culture and entertainment as a way of punishment for their wickedness.

    As for Mary Poppins's charges, the upper and middle classes "were the first to enjoy the new consumer goods" of the Victorian era.[49] Here I must emphasise that although the *Mary Poppins* books belong to twentieth-century children's literature, they conflate more historical periods in terms of its socio-political and cultural background–with special attention to that of the Victorian period. More precisely, I assert that certain aspects of the novels display a chronological continuity from the Victorian age up to interwar Britain. The eight books of Mary Poppins (written mainly in London) are said to take place in the Edwardian era, which to some historians like D. Paul Farr is consistent with "a continuation and extension of the nineteenth century."[50] Furthermore, Eve Colpus describes the interwar period as a "resurgent Victorianism" within the elite and educated society in the form of the "reassertion of the civilizing or moralizing mission."[51] Finally, Grilli describes the setting of the magic nanny's stories and stresses the chronological continuity as follows:

> … the time in which it takes place appears suspended … imprecise …
> Certain specific social characteristics, with all their intrinsic contradictions,
> point to … the dimension against which, regardless of time or place, the
> ontological and psychological struggle for freedom, authenticity and

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[48] Travers capitalises the words "Zoo" and "Park" in the *Mary Poppins* series, so I am using the same spelling.
[49] Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 114.
[50] Paul D Farr, "The Edwardian Golden Age and Nostalgic Truth," The Dalhousie Review, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1970): 380.
[51] Eve Colpus, "Women, Service and Self-actualization in Inter-War Britain," Past and Present, No. 238 (February 2018): 201

individual possibility takes place. The stories then are set against the backdrop of an England caught between the end of the long and burdensome Victorian era and the beginnings of the more frivolous Edwardian age … this past that refused to pass defined the period going from the end of the nineteenth century, through the years preceding World War I and extending up to the threshold of World War II.[52]

To further justify my conviction of the Victorian era depicted in the stories, it is first necessary to point out the family's Victorian features. The Banks family, whom Mary Poppins serves and helps, can be considered Victorian in terms of its size, the structure of the household, and the strict distribution of gender roles. As for the size of the family, Martin Pugh notes that whereas the mid-Victorian middle-class and working-class wife "had experienced an average of 5-6 live births, by the late 1920s her counterpart had 2.2."[53] In this sense, Travers introduces the Banks family and its household as follows:

If you are looking for Number Seventeen … you will very soon find it. To begin with, it is the smallest house in the Lane. And besides that, it is the only one that is rather dilapidated and needs a coat of paint. But Mr Banks, who owns it, said to Mrs Banks that she could have either a nice, clean, comfortable house or four children. But not both, for he couldn't afford it. And after Mrs Banks had given the matter some consideration she came to the conclusion that she would rather have Jane, who was the eldest, and Michael, who came next, and John and Barbara, who were Twins [and Anabel who came last of all in the second book].[54]

Mrs Banks proudly and wholeheartedly gave birth to her five children Michael, Jane, John, Barbara, and Anabel. She sacrifices "comfort for duty," namely a dream house for five children, which benefits her and her beloved ones.[55]

Although Mr Banks complains about their lack of money, I am not convinced of the family's poor financial condition when the number of workers in the household is considered. Thompson explains that the "[w]ealthier middle-class households kept more than one servant" with

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[52] Grilli, Myth, Symbol and Meaning in Mary Poppins, 3-4.
[53] Martin Pugh, Women and Women's Movement in Britain (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 251.
[54] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 13.
[55] Cobbe, Frances P. "Celibacy vs. Marriage". In Essays on the Pursuit of Women. Also a Paper on Female Education (Emily Faithfull: London, 1863), 49.

specialised duties.[56] Similarly, "the Banks family came to live at Number Seventeen, with Mrs Brill to cook for them, Ellen to lay the tables, and Robertson Ay to cut the lawn and clean the knives and polish the shoes."[57] Pat Hudson explains that the huge demand for and a considerable increase in the number of domestic servants "was a marked feature during and beyond the Industrial Revolution period."[58] Additionally, as Sheila Jeffreys points out, "the [Victorian] domestic servant industry relied almost entirely on unmarried women:"[59] be it young, single working-class girls acting as live-in servants such as Ellen or young widows like Mrs Brill, compelled to earn her own living having "lost her 'protected' place in the private sphere for reasons beyond her control."[60]

Ellen represents those working-class maidens waiting to leave after many years of service and find "a partner through contacts made in doing her mistress's housekeeping business."[61] Indeed, Ellen encounters a suitor and develops a romantic relationship with him whilst working. She is escorting the Banks children to the Park when she meets the Policeman who "took tight hold of Ellen's arm with one hand, and the handle of the perambulator with the other, and led her across the street as tenderly as though she were a bride."[62] His modest courting continues in later chapters. In contrast, we hardly know anything about Mrs Brill except that she likes reading; probably it is–as Cynthia Curran points out–because the Victorian widow was required to remain hidden from public view.[63]

I wondered why Mr Banks, who can afford to hire and keep three servants and financially support a large family, is still concerned about financial difficulties, and why Mr Banks states that he cannot provide his wife with a nice, clean, comfortable house. Mr Banks, as his name conveniently indicates, works in a bank. It is described that

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[56] F. M. L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society. A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830–1900 (William Collins, 2016), 225.
[57] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 14.
[58] Hudson, Pat. "Women and Industrialization". In Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945: An Introduction, ed. June Purvis (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007), 29.
[59] Jeffreys, Sheilla. "Spinsterhood and Celibacy". In The Spinster and her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930 (North Geelong: Spinifex Press, 1997), 87.
[60] Cynthia Curran, "Private Women, Public Needs: Middle-Class Widows in Victorian England," Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1993): 235.
[61] Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society, 225.
[62] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 221.
[63] Curran, "Private Women, Public Needs," 228.

> All day long he worked, cutting out pennies and shillings and half-crowns and threepenny-bits. And he brought them home with him in his little black bag. Sometimes he would give some to Jane and Michael for their money-boxes, and when he couldn't spare any he would say, "The Bank is broken," and they would know he hadn't made much money that day.[64]

I believe that Travers here conflates the Victorian milieu with the modern period she was living in, one that was trying to recover from the economic hardships of the Great Depression, the world's financial crisis (1929-1933). Since Mr Banks intends to maintain the family's financial situation despite the "bank often being broken," he readily agrees with his wife's dreams of motherhood. The notion of the glorification of motherhood–which displays a continuous nature regarding the Victorian and interwar eras–could explain Mr Banks's support. Motherhood was a dominant social role not only in nineteenth-century England, but the "mother at the hearth [also] became an icon of the interwar era–a sentimental image that served powerful material interests."[65] Ann Taylor Allen writes that the law "regarded children as a national resource, indispensable to economic growth and military strength"[66] by the late nineteenth century. Therefore, motherhood was regarded as a valuable "service to the state."[67] I believe that Mr Banks supports his wife's maternal aspirations not only in order to conform to social expectations but because her motherhood could contribute to the family's welfare. After all, interwar mothers "became major recipients of public services, including maternity insurance, prenatal care, and child health services."[68]

Mrs Banks does not consider motherhood a simple duty but an occupation that includes financial responsibilities. Like her husband, Mrs Banks occasionally expresses her despair about the family's financial insecurity. When Mary Poppins leaves the house, her self-pity reaches its peak:

> "Here am I, thought Mrs Banks miserably, with five wild children and no one to help me. I've advertised. I've asked my friends. But nothing seems to happen. And George is getting crosser and crosser; and Annabel's teething;

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[64] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 15.
[65] Ann Taylor Allen, Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970. The Maternal Dilemma (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 149.
[66] Allen, Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 42.
[67] Allen, Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 49.
[68] Allen, Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 44.

and Jane and Michael and the Twins are so naughty, not to mention that awful Income Tax"[69]

When they receive a letter from an old acquaintance, not knowing what the letter hides, Mrs Banks impatiently wants answers to her questions:

"Oh, what is it?" asked Mrs Banks. "Is somebody ill?"
"Worse than that!" said Mr Banks miserably.
"Have we lost all our money?" By this time Mrs Banks, too, was pale and very anxious.[70]

In this chaotic household, the children's everyday life follows Victorian patterns characteristic of the middle class. They enjoy Victorian consumer goods, products, and entertainment of popular culture in many ways. For example, Jane and Michael Banks often buy sweets such as gingerbread, peppermint candies and star, half-moon, and peppermint-shaped sweets. In addition, in "The Marble Boy" (*MPOD*)–in which Neleus, a marble statue and the son of Poseidon, regains his human form to spend a day with the Banks children in the Park–Jane and Michael express their love for comics. By 1900, these books were attracting working and middle-class readerships.[71] The Banks children visit Mr Folly's Bookstall to get the comic paper*, Lot-o'-fun*, to read a story about Tiger Tim, a character from one of the earliest strip-cartoons, Julia Stafford Baker's "Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys," which first appeared in the *Daily Mirror* (1904), then in *The Rainbow* (1914), the first coloured comic for children.

 Furthermore, the Banks children are cheerful customers at shopping malls at Christmas. Christmas celebration had been re-established in the nineteenth century, which facilitated consumerism by producing Christmas cards, gifts, decorations, and food such as Christmas crackers.[72] Travers emphasises the Victorian shopping craze in various respects: for instance, in Mary Poppins and Ms Andrew's craze for fashion, in Mary Poppins and Mrs Banks interest in a magazine (e.g., *Everything a lady should know*) and evening paper, and finally, in the chapter entitled "Christmas Shopping." In it, Jane and Michael are keen on attending the Toy Department and spending time in the mall, where:

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[69] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 340.
[70] Travers, The Complete Mary Poppins, 164.
[71] Golby, and Purdue, The Civilization of the Crowd, 179.
[72] Golby, and Purdue, The Civilization of the Crowd, 150-156.