Ways of Being in Literary and Cultural Spaces

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Edited by

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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In our shifting world of constructing meanings differences, *identity* constitutes a dominant ontological term.[1] The global community has changed the rigid semantics of individual and collective ways of being, accentuating their ambiguity and forms of expression. As the painting featured on the cover of this book metaphorically expresses, it takes time for the viewer to detach the figure from the ground[2] and come to recognise a person caught up in the dance of life, an identity celebrating "the great chain of being." Captured for a moment in time, the dancer's performance of a carnivalesque ritual transcends the limitations of the private or the public self and provides the performer with an inclusive identity. In a similar fashion, the contemporary interweaving of cultures generates a "multicultural person," a new way of being "beyond cultural identity," grounded in both "the universality of the human condition and the diversity of cultural forms" (Adler 1977).

Among the parameters of identity, Adler values "a coherent sense of self that depends on a stability of values and a sense of wholeness and integration" (*ibidem*). The rigid meaning of a fixed Cartesian identity, understood as "being something" or "being the same," was essentially contradicted by the Bakhtinian principle of dialogism. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin argued that the self is "never coincident with himself" (1973: 48). His philosophical anthropology introduced the notion of "difference" into the definition of identity: "I realise myself

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[1] "Our data indicated a growing interest in words related to identity, as people encountered new terms throughout the year based on events tied to gender, sexuality, race, and other key issues," Liz McMillan, CEO of *Dictionary.com*, said in a news release. "Many words surrounding these topics trended or were newly added to our dictionary this year, making identity the clear front-runner as the Word of the Year" (McAfee 2015).

[2] The notion of "figure and ground" is crucial for the ability to distinguish an object or a "figure" from the background onto which it is projected. In cognitive science, Ungerer and Schmid (1996: 156–204) discuss the theory of *figure and ground organization* in the frame of linguistic *foregrounding*. In cognitive poetics, Peter Stockwell (2002: 21–25) introduces the notion of "attractors" (figures which focus the attention of readers / listeners, while neglecting the context) in order to describe stylistic foregrounding.

initially through others […]. From them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself" (Bakhtin 1986: g 138). Accordingly, from the vantage point of modern philosophy we should not regard identity simply as "the first way of being" (Descombes 1980: 35–37) because "it coincides with the principle of otherness" (Skulj 2000: 3).

Identity is an "excessively defined" term (Paskoy 2006: 17) which has been conceptualised in a relativistic[3] and even contradictory manner.[4] Recent research has revealed that identity is essentially a fluid, diverse set of characteristics that varies in relation to the existence of others in time and space. Our myriad ways of being are contextual and culture dependent and offer up an inexhaustible source for comparative research (Parpală and Loveday 2015).

In a restricted sense, cultural identity is "a functioning aspect of individual personality, a fundamental symbol of a person" (Adler 1977); in the context of reciprocal cross-cultural influences and changes, it is "an intertext expressed in many instances in and via culture texts including literature […]. Our cultural identity is our intertext" (Skulj 2000: 2). Openness and uniqueness of a culture lies in its Otherness: "The world of culture and literature is essentially as boundless as the universe" (Bakhtin 1986: 140).

Comparative literature is interested today in "the rebirth of a discipline of genuinely global scope and impact" (Damrosh 2006: 111). This universal dimension is leading to the transcendence of the hegemonistic Eurocentric perspective and the re-evaluation of marginal and peripheral cultures embodied in the languages of different literatures and arts.

The dialogic paradigm has brought a significant shift in the literary frame of reference:

> Literature is an inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be
> studied outside the total cultural context. It cannot be severed from the rest
> of culture and related directly (by-passing culture) to socio-economic or

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[3] Four dimensions relating to identity have been singled out by theorists such as personal identity, role identity, social identity, and collective identity. To this we can add the subcategories of cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, group and gender identity.

[4] In present-day social psychology the self-oriented model regarding roles and identities has been adopted by Connell (2002), Stephens (2008) and Bianco (2015) among others, while a process-oriented symbolic interactionist approach is proposed by theorists such as Goffman (1959), McCall and Simmons (1978), Paskoy (2006) and Burke and Stets (2009), for example.

other factors. […] The literary process is a part of the cultural process and cannot be torn away from it (Bakhtin 1986: 140).

As the expressive medium of a language, literature exploits and uncovers the changes which take place in identity under the pressure of external contacts or internal ethical revisions when characters face dilemmas, crises and internal conflicts which ultimately bring about the formation of authentic, hybrid, divided or antagonistic beings. In fact, within the issue of identity, otherness plays an essential role in the arts as well as in social interaction. An allegorical exemplification concerning the defensive reaction to the Other can be found in a recent novel, *Different Ways of Being* by Alan Balter (2015), the title of which coincidentally echoes that of our own volume. The novel's two central characters are both congenitally deaf and communicate only by means of American Sign Language. They try hard to restrict their interaction to only those of their own kind rather than communicate with people who can hear. Furthermore, they firmly believe that unions between the deaf and hearing persons are "mixed marriages" bound to end in failure.

The notion of "linguistic identity" is fundamental for narratology and poetics and frequently emerges as significant in the fields of stylistics and pragmatics. The canvas of this volume is not restricted to comparative literature but offers an all-encompassing anthropological, philosophical and interdisciplinary vision that includes research from linguistics as well as political and cultural studies.

Today identity has turned into a basic umbrella-term because the opening towards otherness that accompanies crossing borders of communication has increased the degree of awareness for identity issues. Multicultural coexistence is only possible if individuals become aware of different symbols of identity and their value and if they consciously participate in intercultural dialogue by operating with flexible concepts and, above all, unifying under the banner of tolerance.

The deconstruction and reconstruction of the ways we communicate modify our ways of being in social and cultural space. Mediated by different types of discourse, cultural identity is complex, versatile, contextualised and dialogic. Identity as performance is communicated by means of at least two codes: by telling and by showing (Christian 1997).

This volume offers interdisciplinary tools with which to explore how literature and other texts of discourse construct and represent the variability of identity. The interdisciplinary and intercultural frames proposed by researchers from Bulgaria, England, Iraq, Japan, Romania, Spain and Ukraine cover diverse identities which have crystallised in a multitude of linguistic spaces.

This collection of 15 chapters is structured into two inter-communicable parts; *Part I* deals with collective and personal discourses of identity while *Part 2* focusses on the performance of identities in literary space. Of course, an absolutely strict division between the terms "discourse" and "performance" is difficult to defend but one way of understanding our categorisation here is that the latter term, "performance," refers here exclusively to artistic and literary representation. On the other hand, in *Part 1* we view "discourse" as a phenomenon that needs to be analysed in relation to its particular sociological, political, national, historical or personal-psychological contexts. However, a careful reader should be able to discern how the subject-matter appearing in individual chapters of both parts of this volume is mutually interwoven and cross-validating. Thus, instead of adopting a sequential approach to introducing each chapter based on the principal division of this volume into two parts, we will offer instead a unifying guide to its content grouped under seven distinct major themes which dominate this academic undertaking.

a. Diversity: Racial, ethnic and group / collective identity

According to Bianco (2015) our greatest cultural crisis may be the elevation of identity as a form of categorisation that structures, and arguably stifles, our lives through the policing of individual identities. These identity categories that we seem so ready to apply and which we believe make us more real, or even more authentic human beings, are actually weighing us down. They limit and immobilise us, preventing us from moving forward as a united human race. The goal, therefore, should be to find a way to exist beyond identity without stemming the fight against racism, sexism, and the other forms of political, social, and economic injustices.

Olga Grădinaru's thought-provoking study of *The Discourse of Russo-Ukrainian Identity in the Luhansk / Lugansk Region* spotlights the emergence of a new type of nationalism in the form of ethnic separatist movements which result from regional instability and even military conflict. While Western states use this phenomenon to enlarge their sphere of influence, former Soviet Union rulers strive to regain theirs. The movements of minorities in post-Communist states, especially in the case of the Russian population in Ukraine, co-occur with an economic crisis, a low level of civic and political education, general discontent with the authorities and nostalgia for past times (Hroch 1996: 75–76). The analysis of contemporary cinematic documentaries delves into collective discourses in this region which offer conflicting interpretations of resistance to

German occupation during the Second World War and provides a window into the complex dynamics of being Russian as an ethnic minority today in the vicinity of the Russian Federation.

Hikaru Fujii perceptively focusses on *21st century American Identity and the Road Narrative* and how contemporary immigrant writers reconstruct literary space to create new personal discourses as Americans. A lone character on the road, typically a young man seeking his authentic identity, has remained a powerful prototype for American fiction from the 19th century onwards but in the past decade this motif has been reshaped in order to explore transnational forms of identity beyond the physical and literary borders of the U.S.A. As Yasemin Yildiz (2012: 5) has argued, these pioneering literary efforts augur "a multilingual paradigm that would restructure perceptions and social formations along new lines after monolingualism," thus opening up American literature to multiethnic ways of being.

In her philosophical study *The Paradox of Linguistic Signs: A Linguo-semiotic Analysis of "Losing Isaiah"* Jamila Farajova explores the personal interface between semiotics, linguistics and literature through the paradoxical notion of "A step back for a step forward". This exegesis involves antinomies, self-reference, generalisation, induction, linguistic and autotelic signs, semiosis as well as vicious circularity and contradiction by way of a linguo-semiotic analysis of the novel by Seth J. Margoli called *Losing Isaiah.* The paradoxical symbolic nature of contextual and racial identity in the United States results from the co-production between the individual and the social setting. Farajova's conclusion is that lack of identity negotiation may ultimately induce a paradoxical existence but human semiosis can offer a way out of such challenges by offering the chance to attain a freer and more balanced way of being.

b. Linguistic identity

Zlatina Dimova applies the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity to her intriguing investigation into *The Sentence and Collective Identity: Comparing Bulgarian with English.* It would seem that Bulgarian structure, with its "predicate–subject" axis works differently from analytical, objectivity-driven ways of organising reality in other languages which are subjected to the dominant influence of English today. The data for this study is drawn from internet discourse occurring in chat room texts encoded in different languages and reflecting different cultural ways of thinking. The research focus is on coming to grips with the contrastive

structure used to share responses to Bulgarian folk songs viewed on YouTube by Bulgarian native-speakers and other language groups expressing themselves in English.

Likewise, Ahmad Kareem Salem's illuminating chapter concerns itself with a collective style of communication and examines it, not in terms of structure, but through the pragmatic lens of a particular speech act in his study entitled *Elusiveness in Political Discourse: How to Apologise the American Way.* His findings are that indirectness functions as the dominant marker in acts of apology in American public speaking. A preference for refusing to make an apology or, more precisely, the strategic use of the "non-apology," seems to be growing in popularity in American political speeches, perhaps because apologising is increasingly viewed as an act of cowardice or backing down.

Leo Loveday's study also applies the framework of illocutionary speech acts in *The Making of a Sarcastic Villain: The Pragmatics of Captain Hook's Impoliteness* but instead explores how such utterances are exploited for stylistic goals and function as a device for literary characterisation. The chapter demonstrates how an author influences a reader's ascription of a villainous identity by associating it with the pragmatic untruthfulness that underlies a character's sarcastic output. Captain Hook is too polished a villain to lower himself to the crudeness of foul insults and vulgar curses but revels instead in abusing his targets by subverting and contravening the conventional norms of conversation and society.

c. Role and gender identity

Today it is evident that there exists no one universal collective gender identity for femininity nor masculinity, but rather dynamic "configurations of gender practice" negotiated in time, ideology and culture (Connell 2000: 28).

In order to capture delineations of female ways of being represented in Canadian literature, Andreea Raluca Constantin offers a stimulating examination of two Canadian women writers in her chapter *Female Identity in the Literary Discourse of Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro.* Although these authors depict every-day heroines carving out their lives in the patriarchal society of Canadian small towns of the 1960s and 1970s where almost nothing happens, the surprising result is a literary portrait of the universal nature of every woman's perceptions, fears and dreams as well as the century-old dichotomy between the battle of the sexes.

d. Child and childhood

Adela Livia Catană provides a sweeping and authoritative synthesis of *Representations of Childhood in British and North American Literature.* Her broad and rich panorama reveals the acceptance of the relatively modern fabrication of the notion of "childhood," its extraordinary plasticity and diversity, as well as its profound social implications. The chapter highlights the role of adult authors who tacitly manipulate the concepts of "child" and "childhood" in their story-telling. Her research approach is pioneering and invites readers to follow up with their own reading along the lines set out.

Leo Loveday's chapter also centers on one of the most celebrated and enduring works of British children's literature, *Peter Pan* and its content will be summarised in the following section.

e. The villainous outsider

Raluca Faraon presents an innovative analysis in *Splitting Mirrors in Fowles' "The Collector"* based upon the anxiety generated by modern man's sense of solitude and isolation. Multiple personal discourses of identity are constructed in this work: the author's and the protagonists'. The mentally diseased kidnapper's way of being not only represents limits to our freedom but also the ambiguity of our ontological state. The interpretation proposed is that Fowles wishes to convey a warning about the dangers inherent in industrialised society which does not hesitate to annihilate Art, the Beautiful, the Unique and the Misunderstood. Accordingly, the main character's insanity is the underlying reason for which the writer engages with critical issues of contemporary society such as freedom, identity, suffering and loneliness.

The pragma-stylistic framework adopted by Leo Loveday in the chapter entitled *The Making of a Sarcastic Villain: The Pragmatics of Captain Hook's Impoliteness* has already been introduced above in the section concerned with linguistic identity. This study shows how the attribution of malice and spite can be triggered when a character's sarcastic performance is perceived to violate social and moral limits. In this case, Hook's conversational implicatures intimate sadistic pleasure in humiliation, torture and murder. Evil doers as archetypal figures have fired the human imagination ever since storytelling began. The malevolence underlying their personality can be referenced through various semiotic devices but sarcasm emerges as a firm literary favourite for the depiction of British villainy.

Keiko Shirakawa offers perspicacious insights into the construction of a literary prototype for the rogue narrative in *American Victim, Rebel, and Author-ity in "Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs."* The protagonist is a petty thief, bogus preacher, counterfeiter, jail-breaker, troublemaker as a teacher, and alleged rapist. His theatrical personal discourse demonstrates his skill in manipulating rhetoric to construct multiple identities. Masterfully depicting himself as a subjugated victim of society, he later exerts rhetorical authority in ridiculing those who engage in civil disobedience against the young American government of early colonial times. In this chapter we learn how the metamorphosis of Burroughs from aggrieved rebel to authoritarian figure parallels that of post-revolutionary American national identity.

f. Spatial identity: Discourse on cities

Discourses of City Identities in Postmodern Fiction by Alina Ţenescu explores surrealistic literary representations of the postmodern urban landscape by examining three distinct city images which are created in the works of Serge Brussolo, Philippe Soupault and Paul Auster. Using an anthropologic-cognitive approach and the comparatist method, this study uncovers narrative constructions of the postmodern city built around several unique metaphors such as a female entity, a zone in cyberspace and an expanse of intricate walking trajectories. It is striking how these personal discourses draw upon extremely unconventional imagery to depict urban ways of being.

g. Writers, poets, readers and critics

Part II of our volume brings together research into the performance of identity in literary space. Chapters Ten, Eleven and Fourteen have already been introduced above so they will not be directly referred to here even though they present case-studies of how authors deal with the personal performance of a particular identity in terms of race, ethnicity and stylistic characterisation.

For the contributions appearing in *Part II*, we should bear in mind the work of Karen Christian (1997) who argues for a theory of "performativity" to be melded with research into literature. The result is the creation of a framework for viewing identity as a continuous process that cannot be reduced to static categories. Through their narrative "performances," Latina/o writers in the United States and their characters

move among communities and identities in an ongoing challenge to the notion of "Latina/o essence."

In her chapter on *Reconstructing the Literary Landscape of Romania and Former East Germany after the Fall of Communism,* Roxana Ghiţă considers how the anti-communist revolutions of 1989 forced novelists to undertake radical reconfigurations. This in-depth study looks at issues such as the writer's self-understanding, the public role of the intellectual and the function of literature in a period of political transition. This survey examines novelists who have risen to prominence after the fall of communism, whose writing addresses the socio-historical upheavals of recent history such as Mircea Cărtărescu, Dan Lungu on the Romanian side and Thomas Brussig and Ingo Schulze representing former East Germany. The conclusion is that writers are forced to maintain a difficult balancing act between preserving artistic autonomy and turning into just another commodity of late capitalism. Furthermore, contemporary authors are now forced to resolve the challenge of fusing national identity with local specificity and globalisation.

Paula Pascaru's chapter *Exhibitionism and Voyeurism in Colloquial Chinese Poetry* examines a new parodic genre disseminated via the internet in China which delivers covert, associated meanings and carries implications of subversion. This unique study allows the reader to share a special insider's understanding of innovative literary developments taking place online and also in public performances in China today. This sometimes mischievous colloquial poetry challenges the power behind Chinese cybercommunities and raises questions concerning the future identity of Chinese national poetry.

The Horatian Tradition in "Odes on Spring" by English and Russian Poets presents a meticulous piece of comparative research by Anastasia Kistanova. It is concerned with the 18th century reworking of the classical Roman ode genre by major European literary masters. Although creating poetry in two completely different national and socio-historical contexts, the odes to spring composed by the two English poets, Thomas Gray and Samuel Johnson, in comparison to those by the two Russian poets, Vasily Trediakovsky and Mikhail Myravyov, all reveal influences from the Horatian tradition in their homostrophic form as well as their philosophical and didactic mode of expression. Every one of these texts take spring as an occasion for contemplative reflection but the way this message is poetically performed, of course, varies according to personal and national conventions and ways of being.

The final chapter in our volume is the provocative deliberation by Alena Rettová on *Comparative Literature and the Position of the Critic.*

Drawing upon specialist familiarity with Swahili literature, the researcher ponders on the relevance of postcolonial theory for comparative literature. Since literary criticism is always grounded in an embodied existence which underlies the critic's particular viewpoint, the question that needs to be addressed is how the literary critic's identity impacts on his or her work. Ultimately, we must recognise that the literary critic possesses a privileged hermeneutical position vis-à-vis a socially and historically constructed performance of the real world encoded in narratives.

From the above, it cannot be denied that the varied contributions which have been carefully selected for this volume span an immense cultural spectrum from African, American, Bulgarian, British, Canadian and Chinese to French, German, Romanian and Russian. Of course, the theoretical insights offered vary but the contributors' penetrating and innovational engagement with discourse and literature from manifold perspectives offers truly stimulating and valuable inspiration in the endless quest to understand the dynamics and complexities underpinning humanity's ways of being.

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PART I

DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY:
COLLECTIVE AND PERSONAL

CHAPTER ONE

REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILDHOOD IN BRITISH AND NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE

ADELA LIVIA CATANĂ

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to throw light on the construction of childhood by representative writers in British, American and Canadian literary space. Childhood is a way of being that is undeniably a socio-cultural construct that also features in products of art varying across time in conjunction with socio-political contexts, technological developments, psychological transformations, ideological trends, literary movements and, of course, the writers' own individual experiences. Our fundamental goal here is to examine the notion of "childhood" and how writers go about depicting it in their fictional discourse.

On the ideational level, the 21st century has inherited a major preoccupation with childhood and, thus, is in need of a new theoretical approach that can provide a more adequate explanation and understanding of it. In fact, the concept of "childhood" has already been extensively explored in various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, art, geography, economics, medicine, pedagogy and law as well as literature over a considerable period. Already by the 1990s researchers recognised childhood as a "complex phenomenon which requires complex understandings that cannot be arrived at by looking through a single disciplinary lens" (James and James 2008: 2). In this vein, sociologists such as Allison and Adrian James (1997), Gertrud Lenzer (2001), psychologists such as David Elkind (1990) and Teena Kamen (2000), philosophers such as Anthony Krupp (2009) and literary critics such as Adrienne E. Gavin (2012) and Sally Shuttleworth (2010) in addition to various other experts in different academic fields, joined efforts

to establish a multi- and interdisciplinary field that would bring together knowledge about the young from infancy to the age of legal majority. Institutionally acknowledged as *Children's Studies*, this domain of enquiry continues to be developed, enriched and redefined as *Children and Youth Studies*.

Without doubt, this chapter has been inspired by many different scholars but it also aims to offer fresh insights for this still nascent field from the perspective of the history of literary discourse by scrutinising the numerous transformations undergone by the concept of "childhood" in the literary domain as well as raising questions about the authority of adult writers in their fictional construction of childhood.

2. Collective discourses concerning childhood identity

Childhood is commonly understood as the first period of life generally associated with a specific biological age whose upper limit extends more or less towards adulthood, possibly including adolescence (Fass 2004: 818). It is usually understood as a stage of "preparation for life, of assimilating human nature […], a period of apprenticeship" while the child is a "being which grows" and needs "protection, support and facilitation" (Bonchiş 1998: 12). From an idealised viewpoint, childhood is considered as an "age of hope and dreams" or as "a form of nostalgia, a longing for past times" with the youngster turning into "the primary and unequivocal source of love and a partner in the most important and negotiable form of a relationship" (Cojocaru 2008: 37).[1]

However, as Philippe Ariès asserts, childhood should, in fact, be regarded as a modern construction forged from a powerful exchange between ideas and technology within a context of socio-political, economic and psychological needs (Ariès 1973: 5). It is a "part of society and culture rather than a precursor of it" with the young needing to be recognised as "social actors" rather than "beings in the process of becoming social" (James and Prout 1997: vii). They are "agents in as well as products of the social processes" and not just a "biological reality" (James 2005: vii–viii). Moreover, the concept of "childhood" is characterised by an "extraordinary plasticity" (Steedman 1995: 7) and varies according to the complexity of the adult environment. Furthermore, literary works often embody, disseminate and impart various ways of being a child across time and cultural space. Fictional children are not merely the result of social forces, philosophical trends and cultural

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[1] This is my English translation of the Romanian authors Bonchiş and Cojocaru.

influences but their construction also includes their creators' imagination and life experiences as well as their personal visions and aspirations.

3. Between "sin" and "purity"

Philippe Ariès argues that the concept of "childhood" is a product of the 17th century and that medieval societies lacked "awareness of the particular nature of childhood, […] which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult" (Ariès 1973: 128). This does not mean that the young were not invested with love or lacked attention before modern times but that, as soon as they could cope without the constant care of their mothers or nannies, they belonged to the adult world. In this sense, early texts such as *Pearl* (c. 1375–1400) and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale* (c. 1392–1395), religiously moralising texts such as *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (c. 1425) and *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* (c. 1425) as well as romances such as *Havelok the Dane* (c. 1290) prove that children, their Christian upbringing and future development were all accorded considerable attention in the Middle Ages. Confronted, however, with strict discipline and the severe demands of feudal society, minors were forced to act like "little adults" in ways which, from a contemporary perspective, would not be ethically acceptable. For instance, Shakespeare's young characters such as Romeo, Juliet, Mercutio, Prince Arthur, Perdita and Miranda, are depicted as ready for participation in both marriage and deadly duels or even warfare; nowadays they would still be considered underage and their behaviour morally unacceptable.

Gutenberg's revolutionary invention and the spreading of printing helped to popularise early modern children's literature in the form of catechisms, ABCs, conduct manuals, stories, songs and poems which were simultaneously didactic and entertaining. Puritan discourse had a huge influence on the construction of childhood in English literature by instilling the "deadly fear of the liability of children to corruption and sin, particularly those cardinal sins of pride and disobedience" (Stone 1975: 43). Consequently, the young faced endless restrictions and their books had to be religious with a sermonising content. James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671) is a typical example of this approach; it became enormously influential on both sides of the Atlantic, disseminating the Christian theory of humanity's "fallen state" as a result of original sin with a highly pessimistic vision of childhood.

From the beginning of the 18th century, however, the young gradually came to be regarded in a more positive light while at the same time their existence started to be treated as a truly worthy and significant theme in

contemporary literary discourse. According to John Locke's theory of *tabula rasa*, children came into the world as "blank slates" untouched by sin and in need of guidance in order to grow into virtuous and rational beings (Locke 1689, dated 1690). In addition, according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), children were the embodiment of purity and natural goodness; they should be raised far from the temptations of city life and allowed to discover the world by themselves in a free, natural way rather than only reading about it.

Nonetheless, children depicted in fiction were still only granted a "mostly marginal status in the literature of the period" and their presence limited to "often a brief and perfunctory one" (O'Malley 2012: 89). In Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), for instance, the protagonist narrator keeps postponing his birth in dread of his future as a youngster and his possible debasement. For the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake, childhood became a lost stage of dreams and innocence, wisdom and freedom, for which adults yearned nostalgically. The child was celebrated as a "Mighty prophet […] trailing clouds of glory" (Wordsworth 1965: *Ode,* lines 64–65) or as the "father of the man" (*ibidem*: *My heart,* line 7) offering something important for adults to learn. According to this discourse, childhood was regarded as a pastoral world blessed with naive hopes in contrast to adulthood, which was marked by the bitterness of its own irreversibility.

4. The persecution of "angels on earth"

During the Victorian Age (1837–1901), literary works for and about children increased extensively, reflecting several conflicting theories. Some writers remained faithful to an idealised image of minors, considering them to be "angels on earth." Others, influenced by Darwin's study *On the Origins of Species* (1859), saw the young as carriers of "the ancestral forms of the species, both human and animal" (Shuttleworth 2010: 4). According to this discourse a long series of only partially developed, vulnerable or feral children living outside the norms of civilization were constructed such as Catherine and Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) or, some years later, Mowgli, a child raised by wolves, in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and another feral orphan brought up by animals, in Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912). More powerfully than ever before, conceptions relating to the survival of the fittest or the child as a potentially violent, cold-blooded criminal continued to appear in numerous contemporary works including William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *A Clockwork*

Orange (1962) by Anthony Burgess, Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* (1952–1969) and *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010) by Suzanne Collins.

Significantly, numerous Victorian novelists came up with realistic depictions of the young conforming to contemporary expectations concerning gender and class. The Industrial Revolution which was in full swing in Great Britain and spreading towards American shores brought huge economic and social transformations accompanied also by significant changes in the perception of childhood. Injustice regarding the conditions of minors continued to prevail: "elder children had fewer options than the younger ones, boys had more than girls, and the well-off children had more than the poor" (Frost 2009: 7). Less fortunate youngsters raised no particular concern until the social researcher Henry Mayhew (1851) exposed their cruel plight in his *London Labour and the London Poor*. In the literary sphere, novelists such as Charles Dickens described the fates of a number of natural and good hearted children who had to confront the ugliness, squalour and inhumanity of industrial London in his memorable coming-of-age novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839), *Dombey and Son* (1846–1848), *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861). Focussing on the rigid education system, writers depicted schools either as private fee-paying institutions or open to the poor; in either case they were full of animosity, misery and overcrowding.

Another approach favoured by Victorian authors was to present their young characters as victims; they were humanised and their deaths sentimentalised but, at the same time, they were portrayed as corrupt and sinful. Brutalised by society, the majority of poor children wandered the streets begging or committing crimes. When caught, they faced severe punishment such as whipping, lengthy prison sentences alongside hardened adult offenders, or deportation to the colonies. The theme of how minors could be corrupted by irresponsible, villainous and insensitive adults was also appraised on a more subtle level by the American writer Henry James in his well-known works *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

By the late 19th century, British and North-American children went through a socio-economic process of "sacralisation" and started to be defined as "emotionally private assets" rather than sources of income. According to Viviana Zelizer (1985: 32), society acknowledged "child life as uniquely sacred" and "child death as singularly tragic" by increasing the legal measures for their protection and education. Youth was seen to embody humanity's past history as well as to epitomise the guarantee of a more positive future, as the Canadian anthropologist Alexander

Chamberlain (1900) pointed out in *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man*.

The "sacralisation" of the young triggered the emergence of a children's culture with its own special practices and specific products. Above all, it led to the recognition of children's literature as a separate genre. Young readers were particularly enchanted by Lewis Carroll's fantasies *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) and *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889–1893) which contained beautiful illustrations, riddles and games of logic. Alternatively, in the United States, children were enthralled by the exciting adventures depicted in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868 and 1869) in addition to Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876–1896) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), while at the same time absorbing their moralising lessons concerning nature, American capitalism, racism and religion. Yet, not all American youth led a life of bliss; Harriet Beecher Stowe's widely acclaimed novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in addition to autobiographies such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs exposed the problems and sufferings of young African Americans.

In Canada, literature written in English was steadily developing its own national characteristics despite the sway of British colonial models. Various influences from America, the French-speaking region, the indigenous peoples and immigrant groups were given a voice in the emerging literary output. Canadian books were written for and about children drawing upon distinctive elements from the local way of life, the adaptation to its landscape, conflicts with its native peoples and the colonisation of their land. Such writing contributed to the creation of original vehicles of expression for the new nation. One compelling metaphor for how Canadians should unite to realise common goals is conjured up in Catharine Parr Traill's 1852 novel *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains*, which brings together four youngsters, two English-speaking and one French-speaking in addition to a Mohawk girl, who must all cooperate in order to break out of the wilderness. While the genre of the school story has not been as popular in Canada as in Britain or in the United States, there remain a few important works worthy of mention such as Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days* (1902), and Nellie Mcclung's *Sowing Seeds in Danny* (1908), which describe with considerable sentimentality the lives of young people growing up in a small Canadian town. Likewise, we cannot forget Lucy Maud Montgomery's bestseller, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), with its heart-

warming depiction of an ebullient orphan girl's adjustment to her new "family" on Prince Edward Island.

It is not without significance nor coincidence that most of the fictional minors created during this period, both in Europe and North America, come from an orphan background since this vulnerable position is a persistent *leitmotif* in children's literature. John Mullan has answered the intriguing question as to why orphans appear so frequently in fiction in the following manner: "The orphan is above all a character out of place, forced to make his or her own home in the world […], set loose from established conventions to face a world of endless possibilities (and dangers);" these circumstances lead the reader through a "maze of experiences, encountering life's threats and grasping its opportunities" (Mullan 2012: 2).

5. Idyllic escapism and adult failure

That the 20th century would witness an unprecedented production of social, cultural, and fictional work focusing on childhood was successfully predicted in 1909 by Ellen Key, the Swedish social theorist, in the title of her seminal book called *The Century of the Child*.

Between 1901 and 1914, child welfare legislation was improved, recognising that the young had needs distinct from adults and were deserving of different entitlements. According to Humphries (2012: 182–3), unlike the glorified youth of Romantic poetry or the victimised children of Victorian novels, Edwardian minors were envisioned as deeply connected with nature and innocence, inhabiting a fantastical, timeless world far from adult conventions as dreamt up by J.M. Barrie in *Peter Pan* (1902–1911) and Henry de Vere Stacpoole in *The Blue Lagoon* (1908).

The fascination with childhood led to the extension of its duration to the age of twenty, a legal transformation that received both literary and scientific support. G. Stanley Hall, the first American to hold a doctorate in psychology, consecrated an entirely new category of human being with his ground-breaking study entitled *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* appearing in 1904. Consequently, there emerged a youth culture and young adult literature based on age-specific issues such as schooling, responsibilities, first love and courtship. Such themes are exemplified in the 1912 epistolary novel *Daddy Long-Legs* by the American writer Jean Webster, which follows a young female orphan-protagonist through her college years up to her romantic encounter with her benefactor. Furthermore, as a result of the catastrophic impact of the

First World War (1914–1918) and the dramatic effects of the Great Depression on young workers, state policies regarding children and teenagers were overhauled allowing a greater percentage of them to attend school, particularly beyond grade nine through to twelve, a major step in the foundation of compulsory universal education.

The rise of the philosophical movement of modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries together with wider familiarity with Freud's theories, particularly those concerning infantile sexuality, altered literary depictions of childhood in the interwar years. Yet, as Paul March-Russell emphasises in *Baby Tuckoo among the Grown-Ups* (2012), previous patterns were not simply forgotten since the contrast between idealised children and corrupt adult society continued as a literary convention. In actuality, modernist writers carried on with the theme of young life but in order to further a more diverse set of aims. For instance, Bowen and Hughes drew attention to the darker side and self-deceiving myth of innocent childhood in novels such as *The House in Paris* (1935) and *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1929).

On the other hand, Joyce and Woolf explored a human's early years in order to highlight the complicated processes of memory and language acquisition while Katherine Mansfield regarded it as "a battleground for the power structures that underwrite family relations and individual socialization" (March-Russell 2012: 209). At the same time in the United States, works such as Laura Ingalls Wilder's famous *Little House* series (1932–1943) were still fondly reminiscing about an idyllic childhood spent on the American Frontier.

After the Second World War (1939–1945), the literary construction of children was once again modified. Even if there appeared narratives evoking nostalgia for security and an idealised past, usually rendered through the eyes of an innocent child as in L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953) together with the desire to escape the present through twists of fantasy as in Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), disturbing voices of adult failure were also present, as signalled by the descent of public schoolboys into primitive violence in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

Consequently, by the mid-20th century in the literary sphere American, Canadian and British children were no longer perceived in a similar fashion. Nevertheless, it must be stated that this lack of thematic synchronisation between American, Canadian and British literary depictions of the young should not be judged in terms of artistic quality but rather interpreted as an expression of cultural differentiation.

Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, postmodernist writers began to focus on ways in which children confronted social complexities such as gender, race, multiculturalism and social conditions. As Waller (2009: 3) points out, childhood shifted from being "fixed and universal" to a much more fluid and unstable state. In other words, there appeared multiple narratives of childhood experiences which could be either local or global and which tackled tough issues concerning ethnic otherness, social integration, discrimination on the basis of class or immigrant background as well as a sense of alienation.

The emergence of this new approach can be found in British and North American literary works such as Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Floella Benjamin's *Coming to England* (1994) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). Furthermore, there has also been a revival of older works such as Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep* (1934), depicting a Jewish immigrant child's oscillation between the maintenance of ethnic identity and assimilation in New York. Surprisingly, this novel featured in *Time Magazine*'s 2005 list of the 100 best English-language novels that had been composed since the end of the First World War.

Today, a plethora of novels categorized as *Young Adult Fiction* abound with neo-realist themes placing youth in nightmarish scenarios. The characters are usually "sexualized, pathologised, criminalized, fetishised, or figured as unknowably knowing and disruptive to family, social, and national life" (Gavin 2012: 15). Works such as Shena Mackay's *The Orchard on Fire* (1995) and Anne Enright's *The Gathering* (2007) or Pat Barker's *Border Crossing* (2001) and McEwan's *Atonement* paint children simultaneously as victims but also as morally culpable. The presence or absence of adults can equally carry negative consequences. The first scenario, with adults present, frequently leads to restrictions, abuse, unhealthy dependence and infantilism, while the second setting without adults, triggers the victimisation or feralisation of children (Dodou 2012: 240). In this vein, the young who are depicted in *The Wasp Factory* (1984) by Iain Banks, McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978) and Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988) appear as alienated, aggressive and gothicised.

Positioned as "perceptive and reflexive subjects, more knowing than the adults around them," the young sometimes represent the "last refuge of a collapsing society" (Hunt 2009: 51). The adult world is "unstable, both morally and foundationally" and "parental authority is questioned and questionable" so that children are often "required to assume the decision-making power that their parents have abandoned" (Sands-O'Connor 2012: 227). Practically all these characteristics are strikingly displayed in J.K.