

WAS *LOST GIP* REALLY LOST?: SOME REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LOST CHILD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY DISCOURSES OF CHILDHOOD

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“O blessed children! Tiresome as ye sometimes are, yet surely are ye ministers of God to weary men. How dark would home be without the patter of your little feet! And how lonely life, without your noisy laughter and happy songs!” (Hocking 32). This perspective, expressed here by Silas Hocking in his 1883 novel, *Dick's Fairy*, is representative of a late nineteenth-century tradition of childhood which regarded the child as an influential symbol of middle-class domestic and spiritual beneficence, and as such this figure was presented as a desirable model in many novels written for children at this time. However, beside this idealisation of childhood there existed another trope – almost an inversion of the first – that of the lost or abandoned child, searching for self-identity or a place of belonging, and which also featured in both the evangelical and romantic traditions which dominated writing for children during the nineteenth century. Moreover, as writers depicted the figure of the child in a colonial and imperial context, this trope acquired a wider connotation as it suggested the universal applicability of the values and standards promoted through such figures, even while the obvious differences suggested by the various colonial societies acquired popular significance. Furthermore, while the idea of the lost or abandoned child is dominated by nineteenth-century figures such as Alice, Little Nell, Peter Pan and Little Lord Fauntleroy, the trope continued to be widely used throughout the twentieth century.¹

The figure of the lost child, isolated and abandoned, was a prominent feature of a large number of nineteenth-century narratives produced by popular evangelical writers such as “Brenda” (Mrs. G. Castle Smith), Silas K. Hocking, Mrs. O. F. Walton and Hesba Stretton. Novels such as *Jessica's First Prayer, Alone in London, Lost Gip, Froggy's Little Brother, Christie's Old Organ, Dick's Fairy* and *Her Benny* all emphasised the various physical consequences (malnourishment, exposure, fatigue, disease, death) which resulted from the outcast status of their child protagonists and their constant struggles for survival in a hostile environment. However, while these texts depicted the extreme effects of urban poverty in a capitalist society, this was not their primary focus; instead they were concerned with the processes of the traditions of evangelical Christianity as documented by J. S. Bratton in which predominantly urban working-class children were brought into direct contact with the Christian Gospel and applied it to their lives in a positive and rewarding fashion. It is also apparent that the trope of the lost child derived from the tradition of the romance

¹ For example, Robert Heinlein's 1957 *Citizen of the Galaxy* is centred on an adolescent boy's quest for identity and family which is presented in ways which parallel the spiritual and physical searches characteristic of the evangelical texts referred to here.

which figured prominently in nineteenth-century literary constructions of childhood, and by the end of the nineteenth century, it was the romantic figure who had come to be regarded as integral to the construction of discourses of childhood, particularly with reference to imperial society, and as such can clearly be seen in the iconic figures of Peter Pan or Little Lord Fauntleroy.

Initially, the trope of the lost child was used as a means of instilling a moral lesson to children, and during the first part of the nineteenth century, both books and games² were available which utilised this figure purely as a deterrent. However, by the middle of the century, the trope had acquired rather more complex associations which were concerned with the establishment and maintenance of the child's position within society, and which the evangelical tradition of writing utilised as a means whereby spiritual and social messages could be conveyed to child readers without necessarily presenting a realistic portrayal of the character's reactions to their squalid surroundings. As will be seen, the child's atypical responses become a significant means by which their moral status can be assessed, a convention which both British and American writers utilised;³ for example, Jacqueline Rose analyses Gerty, protagonist of Susan Cummins's 1854 novel *The Lamplighter* as follows: "Gerty the lost child is a cipher rather than a character; her transformation into her own antithesis, her apotheosised self, invested with all the qualities of which the waif had been deprived is the proper pattern of development" (Rose 157). Gerty's transformation is typical of that experienced by the lost child in the evangelical novel, in that she is completely removed from her early environment and ultimately provided with all that she had previously lacked, including religious faith, the knowledge of her own legitimate identity and a family. Her development is all the more remarkable in that she had previously received no moral or spiritual guidance whatsoever, and is consequently shown as lacking self-control, possessing a violent temper and not perceiving the evils of lying and stealing – all of which had been shown to be necessary to her survival. Nonetheless, her departure from her first home signals a comparatively uncomplicated acceptance and acquisition of Christian morals and standards, and by the middle of the narrative, Gerty has become a representative member of the upper middle class, who deserves the legitimate and wealthy status afforded to her at the novel's close.

It is noticeable that the trope of the lost child frequently invokes the powerlessness of the individual within the structures of an industrialised, urban and capitalist society; thus, Hesba Stretton's *Pilgrim Street* (1872) introduces the

² An example of one such toy is described in volume 35 of the *Girl's Own Paper*, and comprises a series of scenes against which a paper doll is posed. The scenes tell the story of a little girl who is stolen by gypsies after she is disobedient and is eventually reunited with her family after a series of adventures.

³ This tradition of evangelical writing for children was evidently well-established in the US and culminated in Martha Finlay's thirty volume series detailing the life of "Elsie Dinsmore" and her extensive family. Throughout the series, the characters continually examine their spiritual and moral development in the light of both personal and public events, and relate their religious experiences to one another in great detail.

symbolism of the young child oppressed by the nominally Christian policeman, Banner (his first name is not given), whose reference to all destitute children as “born and bred liars and thieves” specifically excludes their claims for any sort of consideration by the establishment institutions which he represents. That this is clearly understood by those outside the establishment is evident in one boy’s claim that “the judge knows nought about poor folk like me [. . .] it doesn’t pay for a poor boy like me to tell the truth every time he speaks” (19), a claim which is significantly left unanswered in this text even while the necessity of affirming Christian morality is advocated. At this level the social practice of virtues such as honesty, cleanliness and industry depends not on the individual practitioner, but on the perceptions of those who are their partners in the social transactions involved in these processes. Evidently class can and does override the recognition of moral worth within the individual, but nonetheless, the redemption and recovery of the child frequently involve not only the individual’s willing response to Christianity, but also the acceptance and practice of the dominant social and economic traits of middle-class capitalism as emblematic and idealised aspects of integration within a capitalist urban society.

In this context, “lost” consequently refers not only to “the story of the quest for identity, set in the modern city streets, which was to become a staple” (Bratton 66); also it carries the more potent and spiritual connotations of lack of faith or sheer ignorance of religion which in turn involve the rejection of the values which define society. Hesba Stretton’s Jessica of *Jessica’s First Prayer* (1867) for example, is well aware both of her parentage and her indigent social status, and it is noticeable that Jessica’s extreme poverty is not addressed within the narrative as a primary problem, although it undoubtedly shapes her experiences of society; instead her lack of Christian knowledge and faith are foregrounded, and although Jessica is ultimately provided with a stable home and a respectable guardian, the text functions as a narrative of conversion in which her poverty and class status are taken as unquestioned. This is encapsulated in the emphasis placed upon Jessica’s ragged appearance as signalling the unacceptability of her attendance at church; she is told that “we couldn’t do with such a little heathen, with no shoes or bonnet on” (35) and although the clergyman’s daughters want to ask her to sit with them, “[t]he little outcast was plainly too dirty and neglected for them to invite her to sit side by side with them in their crimson-lined pew” (46). These visible difficulties are partially solved by the provision of an outgrown cloak and bonnet for her to wear to church – but she does not take them to her home and they are thus only available to her twice a week when she attends a service. Furthermore, when the clergyman of the church first tells her about God and prayer, her immediate and telling response is: “Will he [God] let me speak to him as well as these fine children that are *clean and have got nice clothes?*” [my emphasis] (58). In this context, as Jessica is well aware, cleanliness and neat clothing are an index of the individual’s spiritual status, and Stretton employs a device typical of philanthropists such as Thomas Barnardo in providing clean and neat clothing as a symbol of the child’s newly recovered status –

although, unlike Barnardo's children, Jessica's ragged clothing is covered rather than removed.⁴

This nexus between economic and spiritual development in the person of the lost child is seen very clearly in other evangelical texts; for example, Benny Bates, hero of Silas K Hocking's *Her Benny* (1879), is shown to be a worthy recipient of economic advancement only after his acceptance of Christian doctrine and experience of the appropriate conversion. Indeed, his spiritual progress is underscored by his eventual commercial and matrimonial success; he rises to the position of partner in a mercantile firm and marries his employer's daughter thus participating fully in the capitalist and middle-class perspectives which the Christian establishment largely supported. *Her Benny* uses many of the stock situations of this type of narrative in that Benny and his sister Nelly are the motherless product of an urban slum who must support themselves; their father drinks and beats them and is accidentally drowned after a drunken spree;⁵ Nelly dies of tuberculosis and although Benny obtains employment as an errand boy in a mercantile firm following the intercession of the owner's little girl who befriends him, he is sacked after having been accused of stealing. Despairing and unable to obtain work, Benny flees from Liverpool, collapses with the effects of sunstroke and is taken in by a farmer and his wife, who offer him a home and the opportunity to go to school. After some years, Benny, now an adult, saves Eva Lawrence, the daughter of his former employer, from injury and Eva reveals that the money that Benny had been accused of stealing had been mislaid. Benny returns to Liverpool to resume his employment with Mr Lawrence and the novel concludes with his mercantile success and marriage to Eva, of which Hocking remarks that "the angel that years ago brightened his childhood now blesses his home" (272).

Significantly, Benny's true progress commences only after he has left the slums of Liverpool and tramped into the surrounding countryside to find work; the implication is that urban life is so inimical to any form of permanent economic advancement that its abandonment can only prove beneficial, and it is noticeable that many of the narratives featuring lost children relocate the protagonist in the country in a move which emphasises the necessary spiritual change in physical terms. Hocking particularly emphasises this in the concluding scene of *Her Benny* in which Benny undertakes some prison visiting and encounters a childhood acquaintance, Perks, whose criminal career has now resulted in a lengthy prison sentence. Although clearly not a Christian and obviously a criminal, this man makes the telling observation – partially admitted by the narrative and addressed directly by Hocking in a preface to the novel⁶ – that Benny could not have remained honest in Liverpool,

⁴ I am indebted to Zeta McDonald's paper, "Thomas J. Barnardo and the Photographic Evidence of Philanthropy," for this point.

⁵ It is interesting to note that Benny's father is remorsefully looking for his children when he dies, suggesting that the actions of an earthly parent are not to be relied upon and must give way to the care of God the father.

⁶ Hocking's preface echoed Perks's assertions, but did not offer any definite solution other than that suggested in the text.

commenting that “‘you’d a-been bound to take up the perfeshun if you ‘ad kep here,’” (270) and insisting that “‘society had made him what he was, and was to some degree responsible for his wickedness” (271). However, this implied indictment of society and its responsibility toward its poor and criminal classes is immediately minimised by Hocking’s account of Benny’s attitude towards his Sunday school class: “‘often he told to the ragged and neglected children [. . .] the story of his life, and pointed out a bright future that might be theirs if they would be industrious, truthful and honest” (271). Of course, this does not address the problem of what happens when the expected results do not follow upon the efforts and ignores the fact that Benny had been honest prior to his departure from Liverpool, although this honesty was not recognised by the middle-class adults with whom he had dealings.

Children such as Benny and Jessica are, like all children, physically and economically powerless within the established structures of society. However, within nineteenth-century discourse, the apparently powerless child occupied a position analogous to that of woman in that, as indicated in the opening quotation, the child could be deemed to embody a profound moral and spiritual superiority, which was more telling when seen in the context of the dispossessed and rejected outcast. While these attributes were not restricted to the outcast child (Stretton’s *Lost Gip* depicts the conversion of a selfish man who ultimately perceived his son’s life as “‘full of pain [. . .] but full also of love, and patience, and quiet trust in God, and empty of selfishness and repining, as if he had been sent into the world to be a complete contrast to his father” (93), the lost child could, in this context, be seen to exert a disproportionate influence upon those with whom he or she associated. For example, the eponymous “Fairy” of *Dick’s Fairy*, also by Hocking, is directly responsible for her guardian, Luther Cobs, regaining his faith; Luther soliloquises that “‘Her coming to me was good. Her goin’ away was good, her blindness was good, an’ now that she can see again, that is best of all. I believe now that Thou didst send her to lead a poor blind old sinner like me to Thysel’f” (156). Similarly, Benny Bates’s younger sister, Nelly, is shown to be directly responsible for his continued honesty and his ultimate conversion: “‘Nobody knew how much ‘Little Nell’ was to him: she had been the only comfort of his cheerless life, and when the world seemed more rough and unfriendly than usual, it was Nelly who stood by his side like a ministering angel, encouraging him still to persevere” (80). Nelly’s goodness is innate and is apparent even in her appearance; she had “‘none of that wolfish expression that so often characterises the street Arabs of our large towns and cities; but on the contrary, there was an air of refinement about her that was difficult to account for” (3). Most tellingly, she accepts the gospel message as soon as it is presented: “[t]o Nelly, the words seemed to come as a revelation, responding to the deepest feeling of her nature and awakening thoughts within her that were too big for utterance” (52). Benny’s reaction to the same sermon is to fall asleep!

However, while Nell is representative of the innately moral influence ascribed to the child, she also represents another stereotype found in these novels, that of the good child who dies young and whose deathbed is made the scene of an adult conversion. Here the trope of the lost child is inverted as he or she becomes the guide and director

of the adult who should be their protector; however as this occurs within a specifically sanctioned context, the potential disruption of social and familial order is contained. Thus, the death of the heroine of Stretton's *Cassy* whose one desire in life has been to find a "little place" for herself, is responsible for the conversion of Mr Simon, the man who has protected her, and given her a place in which she can die peacefully, while Nelly Bates's dying words bring conviction to Joe Wragg, a night watchman, who had befriended both her and Benny. Joe's conversion in turn causes him to testify to his own friends, and to establish weekly services, which benefit others. Furthermore, the presentation of a child's death as an ultimate good within the narrative allows the impact of the child's physical environment to be minimised: thus, Nelly's death is explained to Benny as beneficial to her in that she will "not have to tramp the streets in the cold and wet" (110). This perspective reached its apotheosis in "Brenda's" novel, *Froggy's Little Brother*, where the author remarks: "How many a beautiful lesson can we learn from the poor – for sufferings nobly endured and heavy burdens bravely borne, where can we look better than to them; but what generosity they teach us!" (79). This approach allows the writer to present extreme poverty and suffering not as social conditions which require amelioration and which carry with them the fear of social disruption, but rather as ennobling to both the individual and the group; it also establishes the reader as inevitably superior, both in income and appreciation to the group that is depicted, although it must be noted that such novels did appeal to a working-class audience.⁷

By the 1880s, the identification of the unfriended or abandoned child as being potentially and innately morally superior to those who were responsible for them was becoming a valid and extensive characteristic of children's books. Indeed, the identification of this superiority began to be seen as a prerequisite for the progress available to such a character. Thus Rosalie of *A Peep Behind the Scenes* by Mrs O. F. Walton (1877) is not admitted to the higher social status from which her mother came – her mother is a lady who ran away with an actor and is now living in a travelling theatre in a state of poverty and ill health – until she has validated her Christian conversion by actively evangelising among her fellow performers. Following this evangelising amongst those around her, Rosalie is given a tangible earthly reward in the shape of a new home with her mother's former close friend, a clergyman's wife, and thus becomes an established member of the middle class in an environment which approaches Heaven. Like Benny Bates, Rosalie's spiritual progress is translated into a physical expression of restitution and reward, which becomes more obviously apparent as the individuals concerned gain a greater understanding of Christian virtues and doctrine.

However, by the end of the century, the romance motif of the abandoned child's quest for family and security began to take precedence over the individual's search for salvation. In this reworking of the trope, the vulnerability and impermanence of the apparently stable family group were brought into prominence, as it appeared to be threatened from without by an intruder, and the family worked to assimilate or

⁷ Both Flora Thompson (*Lark Rise to Candleford*) and Robert Roberts (*The Classic Slum*) give examples of the ways in which working-class readers could react to this type of text.

overcome the threat posed by the alienated newcomer. The stereotype of the intrusive and disruptive alien who, despite their apparent powerlessness, attempts to create a place within an established family group and in doing so alters it permanently is one which appears frequently in popular fictions of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. For example, in *Hetty Grey* and *Blue of the Sea*, both Rosa Mulholland and L. T. Meade offer variations on the theme of the nameless child saved from a disaster which deprived them of family and identity. Both children are initially adopted by peasant families, but are subsequently taken in by upper middle-class families; in both cases, the children are regarded with suspicion and hostility by those responsible for them, but both are ultimately revealed to be wealthy members of the landed gentry, whose restoration to their own rank is depicted as an inevitable result of the way in which they have responded to the harsh actions and attitudes of their guardians. The foster father of Oceana, the protagonist of Meade's novel, comments that "she bain't my flesh and blood, and why we should make more of her than our own beats me. It lies in a nutshell that it ain't fair" (6). Similarly, Hetty Grey's middle-class guardians, the Enderbys, regard her as "a dependent whom it had been judicious to snub," and regard her high spirits and good looks as inappropriate in an orphan who must work for a living. Significantly Mulholland comments of Mrs Enderby that "the woman who could be so exceedingly prudent in the management of 'nobody's child' was blind to a great deal that required skilful management in the characters and dispositions of her own daughters" (216), and the novel concludes with the suggestion that Hetty will now be in a position to influence positively those who had rejected her. And although Oceana's story concludes with her marriage to her cousin and return to the station to which she was born; the story of her birth is not revealed to those around her, because it would threaten the stability and status of her family in the eyes of those around and the novel ends with the statement that "people wondered where she had got that grace, that refinement, that air of high breeding" (305). Indeed, it is Oceana's innate refinement and Hetty's musical and artistic skills (both of which are denigrated by the Enderbys as unsuitable, and indeed dangerous, to one in her position) which signal to the reader that they are "really" members of the upper class who can be trusted to uphold its values and standards when they are returned to their rightful place.

Both novels clearly reveal the suspicion and fear which surround the nameless and alien child even while indicating that the lost child can be defined by the extent to which their own innate qualities supercede their apparent deprived and friendless position as George Macdonald's 1894 novel *A Rough Shaking* reveals; Clarence (or Clare as he is known) Porson is separated from his father by a series of misadventures which also expel him from the privileged lifestyle to which he was born, and the novel plots his literal quest in search of and journey towards his father in terms which emphasise the physical journey as a spiritual advancement. Clare's journey becomes a progress in which he encounters a variety of individuals, each of whom is assessed by his attitude to Clare and throughout the narrative, Macdonald frequently inserts authorial comment which foregrounds Clare's experiences in terms of their general value to society. For example, in a discussion on Clare's relationships with his

guardians he states: "he had lost his father and mother, but many were given to him to love; and so he was helped to wait patiently till he found them again. God was keeping them for him somewhere, and keeping him for them here." He then proceeds didactically:

The good for which we are born into the world is, that we may learn to love. [. . .] There are people who are always wanting people to love them. They think so much of themselves that they want to think more; and to know that people love them makes them able to think more of themselves. [. . .] Clare never thought about being loved [. . .] he was too busy loving. (72)

Throughout the novel, Macdonald constantly refers from the specific to the general in this way, using Clare as a symbol of what is possible and desirable both in the rearing of children and in the ways that society should respond to emotional demands. He constantly uses Clare's experiences both as a measure of his own progress and as a means of assessing those around him. Ultimately Clare's judgements are validated; he finds his father who immediately recognises him as a gentleman despite his destitute condition and unquestioningly accepts his experiences as true. Moreover, throughout the novel, those with whom Clare is brought into contact become aware that he is not the delinquent which his outcast position would suggest, but their reactions to him initially suggest that those who exist outside the boundaries of the nuclear family, and thus outside the parameters of middle-class society and its institutions are, by reason of their outcast status, suspect. In itself this is comprehensible, given the already noted link between acceptable behaviour and the re-establishment of social and familial ties. Furthermore, the nature of imperial society, with its emphasis upon a hierarchical social order meant that the threat of social change embodied in the alienated outsider – particularly within the form of a child, a romanticised symbol of domestic life – had to be neutralised by exposure to, and assimilation within, accepted social norms.

In this context, the integration of the outsider within the family group was crucial; within the romantic tradition of the outcast child, this assimilation was marked by a series of manoeuvres in which other family members, particularly adults, recognised the worth of the newcomer, and acknowledged their central role within the family. This motif is frequently seen in texts such as Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in which the intrusive child is initially rejected through no fault of their own; consequently their role within the family assumes a redemptive function as they atone for the shortcomings of another. Unlike the spiritually lost children of the evangelical tradition, these children, who are inherently romantic figures, undergo little of the personal conversion narrative but instead could themselves be said to perform an almost Messianic role within the family structure, which operates specifically upon individual adults. Significantly, this frequently involves the misreading of the motives of those around them in a reversion to the conversion

narrative which focuses on the true motivation of the individual being addressed. Thus, Lord Fauntleroy tells his grandfather:

“I think you must be the best person in the world [. . .] you are always doing good, aren't you? – and thinking about other people. Dearest says that is the best kind of goodness; not to think about yourself, but to think about other people. That is just the way you are, isn't it?” His lordship was so dumbfounded to find himself presented in such agreeable colours that he did not know exactly what to say [. . .] to see each of his ugly selfish motives changed into a good and generous one by the simplicity of a child was a singular experience. (127)

Fauntleroy differs from Clare Porson in that he cannot, or will not, recognise anything other than virtue in those around him; thus while appearing to disrupt the absolute power ascribed to his grandfather, the Earl of Dorincourt, he actually validates it. Although much is made of the changes in his grandfather's attitudes, which are ascribed solely to Fauntleroy's influence, his great-aunt comments that “[his grandfather] is being made into a human being, through nothing more or less than his affection for that innocent, affectionate little fellow” (177). The Earl is “not as good as Fauntleroy thought him” and by the novel's conclusion has altered only from an absolute tyrant to a benevolent despot. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* thus offers a comforting vision of the idea of the influence of the potentially disruptive alien child, inferring that the child's influence will be mediated through exposure to the governing norms of society and thus minimised, even while his or her family and friends all recognise the child's innate superiority. In Fauntleroy's case, approval of his actions extended far beyond the text itself to the reading society which encountered Hodgson Burnett's message and for which “this child was the model of infant beauty in fiction, and even in the dressing and treatment of some real children, for years” (Bratton 200).

Given the emphasis upon Britain's imperial role which dominated the philosophies of the second half of the nineteenth century at all levels, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is significant in its presentation of a protagonist who emerges from American society and the positive role given to his American mother, who is allowed to take her place effortlessly in the rigid class structure of a rural aristocracy. This affirmed the relevance and value of what were seen as comparatively recently developed societies in the production of fully socialised individuals who could take their place as promulgators of imperial precepts. Such affirmations allowed the depiction of British colonial societies such as Canada and Australia to demonstrate that these societies shared in the cultural myths and stereotypes of Britain, even while they were perceived to have a specific and distinctive colonial identity. This process is

recognisable in the treatment of the lost child as depicted in an Australian context and by both Australian and British writers.⁸

In his 1999 study of the lost child in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australia, Peter Pierce notes that “the figure of the lost child may stand for the adult emigrant to Australia, disoriented and vulnerable” (6). Moreover, there is a specifically nationalistic edge to discussion of the child in Australia as “the child [. . .] is precious because it bears and stands for a national future” (37); in this context, the lost child exists within the “discourse of ‘young Australia’” (8), and its loss and subsequent danger suggest a potentially perilous future in an inimical environment which does not easily accommodate the white colonial society of which the child is the representative. Clearly, the trope of the lost child had a specific resonance for Australian society, as is evidenced by the various accounts which exist of specific incidents in which children were lost in the bush; examples include the loss and successful finding of the Duff children in the Wimmera district in 1864 and the less happy discovery of three boys lost and subsequently found dead at Daylesford in 1867. Both of these events were not only recounted a number of times and in a variety of contexts by Australian writers, but were also utilised by British writers, who emphasised such events as symbolising the unpredictable and dangerous nature of colonial life.⁹ Moreover, it is significant that these experiences were predominantly rural rather than urban and, most tellingly, in both Australian and British accounts, the children’s physical experiences far outweigh any spiritual benefits that might accrue to them; although the Daylesford boys and the Duff siblings were lost during the 1860s, there is little sense of any accompanying conversion experience as was the case for their fictional British counterparts.

Australian writers, such as Ethel Turner and Ethel Pedley, who utilised the trope of the lost child in their fiction during the late nineteenth century did so in ways which minimised the potentially serious impact outlined above. Thus for Pedley in *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899), Dot’s losing of her way in the bush and her subsequent encounters with Australian wildlife are made the means whereby an ecological rather than a spiritual message is given to Australian child readers. Ironically, the role of the lost and unidentified child is enacted by the kangaroo’s missing joey, rather than Dot, whose return home and reunion with her family are in no doubt after her initial encounter with the kangaroo. Similarly, in *Miss Bobbie*, Turner uses the trope to further the story of a mischievous girl without making it the occasion for any specific spiritual or emotional advancement, although Bobbie’s experience, caused by her belief that she has fatally injured one of her companions, undoubtedly distresses her. After her initial shock, she runs away from home intent upon hiding and is mistaken for a general servant sent to a situation by a Sydney agency, an error which “transformed Miss Roberta Lennox into Sally, Mrs Wilkes’ drudge” (61). In a reversal of the process referred to above, Mrs Wilkes does not recognise that Bobbie

⁸ This came to be a given for many British writers, and by the early 1900s, the perilous nature of colonial life, together with the sudden acquisition or loss of wealth, were stereotypes that appeared in depictions of colonial life in writing for adolescents.

⁹ For a detailed consideration of the use made of these and other accounts, see Pierce 3-54.

is not a member of the working class, and treats her as she would any servant. Ethel Turner comments that “it seemed an almost impossible thing in these enlightened days that a little girl should disappear” (74), although it is clear that Bobbie has done that very thing, not by losing herself in a physical sense, but by losing the position to which she was born. This situation lasts less than three weeks, and when Bobbie is restored to her home, the event does not cause Bobbie to reassess her own spiritual or social status as would be the case in the British instances referred to above. As Pierce’s study demonstrates, it is clear that despite the presence of a perspective that regarded all British experience as universally applicable throughout the colonies, Australian writers at least used this trope in different ways to construct a specifically different notion of the lost child within Australia. During the 1890s both Turner and Pedley (and Mary Grant Bruce after them) demonstrated the extent to which this was primarily grounded in a fear of the physical consequences of losing oneself in the Bush, and all three writers’ detail assumes that this is a familiar concept to their readers; Turner refers to “the wholesome horror every Australian child acquires of really being lost” (211) and in *Glen Eyre* (1912) Grant Bruce gives a full account of the search for a toddler lost in the Bush near a country town. In this context, the spiritual and emotional impact of the trope is minimised.

Where then does this leave the iconic Peter Pan, and his tribe of lost boys, the literary monument to an idea of nineteenth-century childhood? In her analysis of fictional childhood Jacqueline Rose states that “Peter Pan offers us the child – for ever” (Rose 1), but it is not a child whom the writers referred to above would wish to acknowledge. Barrie’s Peter Pan is a child who, unlike Benny Bates and Clare Porson, consciously resists the notion of the patriarchal family structure and rejects assimilation within it and, by implication, a wider society. His function is to remain the eternal alienated outsider, continually alerting new generations of children to the possibilities that can exist beyond the middle-class school and nursery. However, his conscious decision to “want always to be a little boy and have fun” (Barrie 155) encapsulates the disruptive capacities that are present within the trope of the lost child: there is always the possibility that the offered redemption may be refused and that the child may reject assimilation within the dominant culture. Unlike Fauntleroy, an imperial figure who never stops considering the future and what he will do as a man when he takes his grandfather’s place, Peter Pan’s cry of “No one is going to catch me and make me a man” (155) positions him as oppositional to the aspirations articulated by Fauntleroy. The significance of these polarised perspectives is apparent in the continued awareness of these figures as iconic of the apparent “monument” of Victorian childhood, and demonstrates the extent to which an apparently universal perception was in fact characterised as a series of contradictions.

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