

'Lost Futures: Reading, Memory and Repression'

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Noel Streatfeild's classic children's novel, *Ballet Shoes* (1936), famously ends with a diaspora. The three Fossil sisters, protagonists of the story, go their separate ways: Pauline, the aspiring actress, lands a job in Hollywood; mechanically minded Petrova stays in England, while the dancing prodigy, Posy, travels to Czechoslovakia, in the care of Nana the nurse, to study ballet. In 1936, when the book was published and set, this no doubt seemed a satisfactorily adventurous outcome, with each sister looking forward to an exciting career in her chosen field. Unknown to both Streatfeild and her first readers, however, an ominous historical event was soon to overhang what would have been Posy's future. In March 1938, less than eighteen months after *Ballet Shoes* was published, Hitler's forces invaded Czechoslovakia, bringing the country under Nazi domination.

What happened to Posy Fossil after the final page? Such a question may seem naïve; as a fictional character, Posy was always beyond the reach of the Nazi regime. However, affective attachment to fictional characters is a common feature of engaged reading, as is a tendency to extend concern for them beyond the boundaries of the text (Keen, Vermeule, Butler 43-58), and events in Czechoslovakia may have retrospectively affected the extent to which it was possible to understand the conclusion of *Ballet Shoes* as a 'happy ending'. Child readers of the late 1930s and early '40s were sufficiently concerned that many wrote to Streatfeild asking for reassurance (Huse 78), and she duly provided it in her 1944 book, *Curtain Up*: 'Before the Germans over-ran Czechoslovakia, Monsieur Manoff and most of his pupils, including Posy and Nana, who was with her, escaped to America. There, Posy and Nana joined Pauline and their guardian, Sylvia, in Hollywood' (*Curtain Up* 56).

Other authors have of course occasionally revived popular characters in response to reader pressure. Joan Aiken's Dido Twite, presumed drowned in *Black Hearts in Battersea* (1964), was resuscitated in *Night Birds on Nantucket* (1966) after Aiken too received 'agonised letters' from readers (Aiken 2018). Unlike Dido, however, Posy was unwittingly

endangered; it was history, not authorial decree, that threw her in harm's way. Streatfeild was at hand to send Posy safely to California, but what if that had not been the case? Readers would have been left with a mismatch between the optimistic future anticipated at the end of *Ballet Shoes* and the historical fact of Nazi invasion. Posy would have remained for ever in suspension, caught between fictional and historical futures.

The readerly anxiety of which this is an example, and to which those letters gave voice, can be described most succinctly in terms of the Derridean concept of 'hauntology' (Derrida 118-155), and more specifically what the film theorist Mark Fisher has characterised as a melancholia about 'the lost futures that the twentieth century taught us to anticipate' (Fisher 16). Disappointment is of course a common, if not universal, human experience and a frequent subject of fiction, but in such cases it is not depicted but rather generated, as an ironic by-product of later reading. Where a text promises a future that history fails to deliver, readers are left with an aporia, or interpretative dead-end. That experience of textual dissonance is the subject of this article.

In his discussion of the 'spectre of communism' invoked by Marx at the start of the *Communist Manifesto*, Jacques Derrida emphasised that the haunting of Europe drew on both the past (the conventional originary point of ghosts) and the future (evidenced in the trepidation of communism's enemies), and that it was able to do so precisely because it had never been instantiated in reality. Likewise, when late-twentieth-century capitalism congratulated itself that communism had been defeated, it celebrated the death of something that had never lived. However, that spectral non-existence was also kind of permanence: 'a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back' (Derrida 99). Posy learning ballet in Czechoslovakia and the other fictional futures discussed in this article share this spectral quality, cut off like oxbow lakes from the current of history. Their disconnection bears comparison not only with the hauntological melancholia identified by Fisher but with

traumas, bereavements and other events that cannot easily be reconciled to the narrative of one's life and may thus be repressed or denied. To read them is to participate in the work of 'mourning' that, as Derrida noted, 'always follows a trauma' (97).

Recent work by Alison Waller ('Re-memorying', *Rereading*) has explored the temporal component in the activities of reading and rereading children's literature from a phenomenological point of view; here, I consider that component in its specifically historical dimension. The combination of elements involved is not uncommon: they include a text that anticipates a specific future, and a supervening historical circumstance, invisible to author and characters alike, that makes such a future impossible. In life, we may hope for one outcome, be disappointed, and eventually integrate that thwarted hope into the narrative of our own past. Literary texts, by contrast, exist in a continuous present; to return to them is not merely to recall a time when events seemed likely to turn out differently, but to experience that likelihood afresh, even as we are aware of its futility. Expectation and reality haunt each other, irreconcilable and inseparable.

Any narrative has the potential to elicit this kind of engagement, but certain features facilitate and even encourage the kind of breaching of textual boundaries that is its precondition. Narratives that embed themselves in the non-literary world, through references to familiar places or contemporary events and people, smooth the way for readers to exceed the text. I have known *Streatfeild* enthusiasts to track the Fossils through South Kensington; they were able to do so only because the author placed her characters in the Cromwell Road rather than in a fictional neighbourhood. Likewise, had *Posy* moved to Ruritania rather than Czechoslovakia, the Nazi threat might have seemed less urgent. Even more obviously, stories that explicitly predict future events or invite readers to imagine them at a point beyond the temporal limits of the narrative, inevitably make themselves vulnerable to this kind of melancholic haunting.

From Anticipation to Repression

In Britain, the most abundant source of such moments is probably the decade prior to the outbreak of the Great War. This was British children's literature's so-called Golden Age, and many of the books published at that time are still in print and widely read. Because of this, and because of the scale of the historic catastrophe that followed, the potential for later readers to encounter the kind of hauntological irony described above is unusually high. The Great War stands as a roadblock between Golden Age children's literature and the rest of the twentieth century. The lives anticipated by and for the child characters of Golden Age books, like those of their real-life counterparts, were blighted by the historical reality, and historically informed readers are inevitably aware of this, even if, while reading, they try to repress awareness of these 'lost futures'. Significantly, this was also a crucial period in the early development of trauma theory, conducted in large part as a response to the events of the war itself, and this is a fact that some recent children's authors have taken into account in their own responses, both to the events of the time and to the work of their predecessors.

Projection of possible futures is perhaps inevitable for parents, as for children themselves: 'What will I be when I grow up?' is a natural question for someone whose life (or so it seems) lies mostly ahead of them. To use a term coined by Clémentine Beauvais, children are 'mighty' – a word chosen to suggest not only power but potential (Beauvais). That future orientation was on bold display in the children's literature of the early twentieth century. For example, Rudyard Kipling's famous poem, 'If', first published in 1910 as one of the inter-chapter verses in his children's book, *Rewards and Fairies*, largely consists (as its title suggests) of a long conditional clause. It distils lessons drawn from the adult speaker's experience of life's challenges, but the past is not its ultimate subject. Instead, the body of the poem is a bow drawn effortfully back and pointed towards a potential future that will happen, *if* the young addressee's potential is fulfilled. It thunderously concludes with a prediction:

‘Yours is the world and everything that’s in it, /And what is more, you’ll be a Man, my Son!’
(Kipling, *Rewards* 176).

The children of children’s literature look forward on their own behalfs, too. Here is Wendy Darling, entertaining the Lost Boys in Neverland in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1911):

‘Let us now,’ said Wendy, bracing herself for her finest effort, ‘take a peep into the future’; and they all gave themselves the twist that makes peeps into the future easier. ‘Years have rolled by; and who is this elegant lady of uncertain age alighting at London Station?’

‘O Wendy, who is she?’ cried Nibs, every bit as excited as if he didn’t know.

‘Can it be—yes—no—it is—the fair Wendy!’

‘Oh!’

‘And who are the two noble portly figures accompanying her, now grown to man’s estate? Can they be John and Michael? They are!’ (Barrie 166)

Likewise, E. Nesbit, in her 1907 novel, *The Enchanted Castle*, has the two female protagonists, Mabel and Kathleen, amuse themselves by selecting future husbands:

‘Oh, if I could choose,’ said Mabel, ‘of course I’d marry a brigand, and live in his mountain fastnesses, and be kind to his captives and help them to escape and—’

[...]

‘Yes,’ said Kathleen, ‘or a sailor would be nice. You’d watch for his ship coming home and set the lamp in the dormer window to light him home through the

storm; and when he was drowned at sea you'd be most frightfully sorry, and go every day to lay flowers on his daisied grave.' (Nesbit, *Enchanted* 222-23.)

For Mabel and Kathleen this is a game, of course, as it was for Wendy. Even bereavement and grief are aestheticised into a pleasing tableau rather than pictured as real possibilities. Unlike adult Kipling, these girls are not in a position to speak from experience. For a closer equivalent to 'If' we might look to the last chapter of a different Nesbit novel, *The Story of the Amulet*, published in book form in 1906. This is the third in a trilogy about the siblings Anthea, Cyril, Robert and Jane. In it, they are able to travel in time thanks to a magical amulet, accompanied by a grumpy, wish-granting fairy known as the Psammead. The passage in question takes place in their own place and time, however: London, in 1905. Like Kipling's 'If', it features an adult projecting an adult future for the benefit of his young male listeners.

One really good thing happened when they took the Psammead to a magic-lantern show and lecture at the boys' school at Camden Town. The lecture was all about our soldiers in South Africa. And the lecturer ended up by saying, 'And I hope every boy in this room has in his heart the seeds of courage and heroism and self-sacrifice, and I wish that every one of you may grow up to be noble and brave and unselfish, worthy citizens of this great Empire for whom our soldiers have freely given their lives.'

And, of course, this came true—which was a distinct score for Camden Town. (Nesbit, *Amulet* 259-60.)

The final, throwaway line is Nesbit's joke – the Psammead has heard the lecturer's wish and been obliged to grant it – but it acquired a good deal of poignancy after the fact. Boys at school in 1905 would have been just the right age to join the armed forces in the

Great War and freely give their lives. In the event, almost seven hundred Camden Town boys were dead by the Armistice: about a school's worth (*London WWI Memorial*).

As the example of *Ballet Shoes* demonstrates, this kind of historical irony is by no means confined to books written before the Great War. However, the disjunction between expectation and reality was seldom so starkly revealed as by that disaster. Repeatedly, pre-War children's literature looks ahead to a world of possibility, a possibility that could never be fulfilled. Kipling's declaration that 'Yours is the world and everything that's in it' must have come to seem bitterly ironic; in 1915 his own son, John, for whom he had secured an army commission despite severe short-sightedness, was killed in battle at the age of eighteen. Later, he wrote that generation's epitaph in a short, self-castigating verse: 'If any question why we died, /Tell them, because our fathers lied' (Kipling, 'Common Form' 402). As for J. M. Barrie, Peter Pan's famous suggestion that 'to die will be an awfully big adventure' came to haunt *Peter Pan*. In 1915 it was omitted from the play's by-now-traditional January run as a mark of respect for those who had already died in the war, then just a few months old (Wullschläger 110). Nevertheless, it became iconic, quoted and paraphrased as the distillation of a carefree – even careless – attitude to life which, when combined with a discourse of duty and self-sacrifice, became an intoxicating and deadly rhetoric.

The violent truncation of the futures of real young men in the war was of course tragic for the men themselves and traumatic for those whom their deaths bereaved. Millions of parents lost not only the children they had known and loved, but also the bright futures they had anticipated for them. It must have been hard to make sense of a future that no longer allowed for the narratives they had planned and imagined. Likewise, the war affected the way that Golden Age fiction could be read by post-War readers. *The Story of the Amulet*, for example, is set quite firmly in the London of 1905: it is full of references to local roads and buildings, contemporary figures such as Annie Besant and David Devant, and even precise

dates (the children's adventure is completed on 3rd December [Nesbit 1959, 235]), features that reflect its initial serial publication in the *Strand* magazine during that year. Its first readers were able to follow the children's adventures in something approaching real time; but if later readers attempt to look forward from 1905, to sketch for themselves the future lives of Robert and Cyril, or of the Lost Boys, or of Michael and John Darling, they cannot do it: the way is barred. The war fragmented any attempt at a coherent imaginative account of their subjects' future lives. If we are to enjoy those pre-War books unproblematically we must train ourselves to repress our historical knowledge of what is coming. But that kind of repression is not unproblematic at all.

The repression of historical knowledge as a reading strategy in some respects echoes contemporary reactions to the war, both during the conflict and in its aftermath. On the one hand, striking gestures of remembrance were among the most visible responses to the loss of life. The War Graves Commission, the burial of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster Abbey, the institution of the annual Armistice ceremonies on what became known as Remembrance Sunday, were all important public avowals of memory, as were the war memorials with their carved lists of names that sprang up in every town and village. Perhaps the most famous lines of the poem most closely associated with the Armistice, Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen', is precisely a pledge to remember:

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

We will remember them. (*The Times*, 21 September 1914)

But, as Pierre Nora pointed out in his work on *lieux de memoire*, one need institute formal places and occasions of memory only where there is a fear that memory will not hold without such bolstering (Nora). The phrase 'Lest we forget' – coined by Kipling in a different context – also became associated with the Remembrance Sunday ceremonies, and there is a

kind of anxiety in it. Forgetting becomes a threatening, dreadful possibility, perhaps even a temptation.

What were the forces ranged against remembrance, that such a concerted rear guard should be needed? The war was traumatic. Probably millions of people suffered from various forms of what today would be called post-traumatic stress disorder. They had every motive to try to repress those memories, to concentrate on the future, and to recoup what remained of their youth. Ironically, victims of shell shock could find the fact of their own existence being repressed, as an unpleasant reminder of the horrors visited on the nation. 'Within a few years after the end of the war', Judith Herman notes in her classic study of trauma, 'medical interest in the subject of psychological trauma faded [...] Though numerous men with long-lasting psychiatric disabilities crowded the back wards of veterans' hospitals, their presence had become an embarrassment to civilian societies eager to forget' (Herman 21). Such patients act as a striking metaphor for the horrors locked away in the subconscious minds of traumatised individuals.

Meanwhile, some medical practitioners, such as the celebrated Chief Medical Officer at Craiglockhart Hospital, W. H. R. Rivers, were beginning to develop theories of and treatments for trauma, and were discovering that, in cases of shell shock, repression was an ineffective strategy. As Rivers put it in a lecture, on 4th December 1917:

It is [...] one thing that those who are suffering from the shocks and strains of warfare should dwell continually on their war experience or be subjected to importunate inquiries; it is quite another to attempt to banish such experience from their minds altogether. (Rivers 4)

Rivers was not a disciple of Freud, but it would have surprised neither man that repressed memories should surface during dreams, when the mechanisms of repression and

conscious distraction are at their weakest. For Rivers, the way to master nightmares was to acknowledge rather than to repress one's experience. He gives as an example the case of a soldier who had discovered the mutilated body of a friend on the battlefield and had recovered the dead man's personal effects for his family. Initially advised to 'keep all thoughts of war from his mind', the young man found his sleep terrorized by nightmares in which his friend appeared to him in mangled or leprous form. It was only when advised by Rivers to dwell, not on the horrific circumstances of his discovery, but on the fact that his friend must have been killed instantly and therefore spared the lingering death that was the lot of so many on the battlefield, that the patient became gradually reconciled to the situation, and the nightmares ceased (Rivers 6).

Fiction as Exorcism

More than a century after the Armistice, it may seem counterintuitive to suggest that contemporary readers are traumatised by the events of the Great War. However, a ghost 'remains always to come and to come-back', and modern readers continue to rehearse the tragedies of that time in their own acts of repetition and repression. Twentieth-century readers of *The Story of the Amulet*, *Peter and Wendy* and other Golden-Age books may have attempted to protect both the stories' fictional protagonists and their own reading selves from knowledge of what is to come by a strenuous act of historical forgetting, but in the opening decades of the current century a string of significant centenaries connected to the Great War made the conflict once more highly prominent in public consciousness. This was the context in which two novelists, Geraldine McCaughrean and Kate Saunders, produced texts that attempted to negotiate the dual, but contradictory, demands of commemoration and oblivion: *Peter Pan in Scarlet* (2006) and *Five Children on the Western Front* (2014).

This was not entirely new territory to McCaughrean, who had previously addressed the subjects of trauma and repression in relation to the Great War in her fantasy, *The Stones are Hatching* (1999), set in 1919. In that book, young Phelim Green finds he has been chosen to save Britain from the depredations of the gigantic Stoor Worm, a monster stirred from millennia of slumber by the wartime rumble of the distant guns in France (McCaughrean, *Stones* 29). As the Worm's body wakes and warms, its nursery of stone eggs hatch a brood of folkloric horrors. Black Dogs, the Washer at the Ford, the Noonday Reaper, Nuckaleevee, and many other nightmares no longer widely believed in, come to haunt post-war Britain, much as War itself, long thought to have been banished from Europe by the powers of diplomacy and civilisation, had returned a few years earlier. In this fantasy portrait of the national psyche, the Worm's Hatchlings function as the shell-shocked nightmares, not of an individual, but of a nation. Nevertheless, McCaughrean depicts a society desperate to repress its awareness of horror. Early in the novel, in a scene that recalls Herman's observations, Phelim recalls seeing a shell-shocked soldier in a nearby village: 'Shoppers had walked round him, avoiding him, ignoring his shouted gibberish. [... His sister] had pulled him away from the soldier as if the man's lunacy were a contagious disease' (17). After he finally defeats the Stoor Worm, the respectable townsfolk of nearby Storridge perform a similar act of oblivion with respect to the supernatural horrors that terrorised them just days earlier. As Phelim's companion Sweeney observes:

'[The Hatchlings] will wreak their havoc, but the world will explain them away. It has an art these days for explaining away its magics. Do you not agree? Its nightmares.'

Phelim saw it was true. The Great War had devoured millions of men, misplaying them under slurring mud. And yet already people were pretending it had not happened, glad to put it out of mind, trying not to think about it. They could easily ignore a few corn wives on their fields, a few boobries among the cows. (166)

The land that ‘explains away its magics’ recalls Rivers’ patient, advised ‘to keep all thoughts of war from his mind.’ But if those who forget history are doomed to repeat it, the same is true of those who repress trauma. And a country that forgets its magics, overlaying them with a veneer of respectable behaviour, will soon find its fields infested with Hatchlings.

In *The Stones are Hatching*, McCaughrean warned metaphorically against the dangers of repression; but a few years later, when she won a competition to write the official sequel to *Peter and Wendy*, she made a more active intervention. *Peter Pan in Scarlet* was published in 2006, and in it McCaughrean revisited some of the themes of her earlier book, while also taking the opportunity to project the lives of Barrie’s characters into a post-Great-War future very different from that anticipated by Wendy in her stories for the Lost Boys. In a postscript chapter to *Peter and Wendy*, ‘When Wendy Grew Up’, Barrie had depicted a time when the Lost Boys would forget how to fly and take up dull, quotidian professions: ‘You may see the twins and Nibs and Curly any day going into an office, each carrying a little bag and an umbrella. [...] The bearded man who doesn’t know any story to tell his children was once John’ (Barrie 220). McCaughrean incorporates this information into her narrative; however, she is able to exploit, as Barrie could not, the parallels between Neverland, where no one can grow to be a man or woman, and the no-man’s-land of France, where young lives were curtailed by war.

The story begins in 1926, with the Lost Boys – veterans of Neverland and of the Great War alike – suffering from nightmares. As foreseen by Barrie, they have been attempting to lead conventional lives of offices, sober suits, and gentlemen’s clubs, but in McCaughrean’s text this is no longer a lapse into dull, adult stolidity but an attempt to repress their own traumatic experiences. Each night their slumber is broken by dreams of the dangers of Neverland, which take on a reality that spills, Hatchling-like, into unmagical London.

Cosy at home, surrounded by family and friends, they thought themselves comfortable and safe [...] until the dreams began. Now each night they dreamed of Neverland and woke to find leftovers in their beds—daggers or coils of rope, a pile of leaves or a hook. (McCaughrean, *Peter* 3)

In addressing this fantasy version of shell shock, Wendy, here playing the therapeutic role of Dr Rivers, advises the Lost Boys that in order to stop the nightmares they must return to Neverland; and so they do. Neverland is in part a metaphor for the War, and the parallels and connections between them resurface regularly. Most memorable perhaps is a new piece of Neverland topography, the Grief Reef, where the broken perambulators of Lost Boys (who come to Neverland, as Barrie explains in the earlier book, after falling from their prams) are piled like shipwrecked hulks; and the nearby Maze of Regrets, where heartbroken mothers call perpetually for their missing sons (258).

Peter and Wendy allowed for the possibility of death, but the ambiguity of Barrie's text, poised perpetually between reality and make-believe, robbed it of force. It is hard to picture much peril, or even violence, in such activities as the killing of pirates, when it is expressed in the playground language of Peter Pan's boast that he has killed 'tons', or John Darling's decision 'to have tea first' before killing any himself (Barrie 107). Likewise, although the Darling parents grieve for the loss of their children, their histrionic gestures of self-abasement – such as commuting to work in a dog kennel – are framed as ludicrous rather than tragic. Barrie was able to defer a resolution of his material indefinitely; indeed, that deferral is his text's distinctive mode. The illusion of Neverland can be maintained only as long as Barrie is able to keep it spinning; as with a zoetrope, to let it slow would be to expose its discontinuity. However, for readers with knowledge of the Great War, the ultimate invitation to Peter Pan's 'big adventure', it may be harder to maintain the kind of mercurial flexibility necessary for unqualified enjoyment of this rhetorical ride. In assimilating the

immovable fact of the war into her fiction, McCaughrean collapses the fragile ontology of Barrie's world. The exercise is not without cost, and McCaughrean's Neverland cannot entirely keep the violence of war out:

Maybe flying debris from the Big War—shrapnel and bullets and such—made holes in the fabric between Neverland and this world. Dreams leaked out through the holes; grown-up mess leaked in. (273)

McCaughrean creates a remarkable pastiche of Barrie's prose, but, for all that, in her Neverland death is irrevocable and real. Most notably, Michael Darling, Wendy's younger brother, has already been truly lost in that 'grown-up mess'. It is impossible to repress our knowledge of the war while reading McCaughrean's book; and, for readers who accept *Peter Pan in Scarlet* as a canonical extension of Barrie's work, that impossibility extends retrospectively to Barrie's own text. The barrier between Neverland and our own world is not the only one to have been breached; so has that separating the fictional future of Barrie's pre-War fiction (in which Wendy could envision her brothers as 'portly figures ... grown to man's estate') from the historical future of the 1920s.

E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* concerns itself with the future even more directly than *Peter and Wendy*. The hopes and wishes of the Camden lecturer described earlier do not constitute that book's only vision of what awaits its young protagonists. As the first time-travel narrative in children's literature, *The Story of the Amulet* offered its characters a far more direct way of experiencing the world to come. In one chapter, the children use the amulet to visit a scholar friend some twenty-five years in the future. In his study they notice, among other things, photographs of their adult selves on display:

The children saw four grown-up people's portraits—two ladies, two gentlemen—and looked on them with loathing.

‘Shall we grow up like THAT?’ whispered Jane. ‘How perfectly horrid!’

‘If we’re ever like that, we sha’n’t know it’s horrid, I expect,’ Anthea with some insight whispered back. ‘You see, you get used to yourself while you’re changing. It’s—it’s being so sudden makes it seem so frightful now.’ (Nesbit, *Amulet* 234-35)

Looking ahead is a habit of Golden Age children, as we have seen, even if they do it with a degree of ambivalence. Jane is as repulsed by the prospect of adulthood as Peter Pan could be, her older sister Anthea less so; yet it occurs to neither that they may not grow up at all.

In 2014, the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, Kate Saunders published a revisionary sequel: *Five Children on the Western Front*. In an Afterword, Saunders describes her childhood realisation, on reading Nesbit’s novel, that Cyril and Robert were ‘exactly the right ages to end up being killed in the trenches’, and reports that Nesbit’s description of the encounter with the ‘learned gentleman’ in the future became ‘the chapter of *The Amulet* that most haunted me’ (Saunders 323). Her own book is evidently an attempt to lay that haunting. It begins with a Prologue, reworking the same episode; but in Saunders’ version the friends’ reunion is very different. Between the children’s 1905 present and the distant future of 1930 the Great War sits like a landmine, waiting for youthful feet to cross. When Saunders’ children return to 1905, Anthea remarks:

‘I saw a couple of pictures of ladies who looked a bit like Mother, and might have been me or Jane. But I didn’t see any grown-up men who looked a bit like you boys – I wonder why not.’

Far away in 1930, in his empty room, the old professor was crying. (Saunders 9)

The majority of Saunders' novel is set during the war, and depicts its effects on the children's family and the society of which they are a part: romance, war work, the gradual erosion of the class divisions of early twentieth-century Britain, and the experiences of Cyril and Robert at the front, provide the body of the story. This thoroughly intertextual book is not without its references to *Peter Pan*; the family go together to see the play, and later Cyril remarks of his childhood dreams of becoming an explorer, 'this war's a much bigger adventure' (242), echoing that play's most notorious line. In due course, the bigger adventure's outcomes include the blinding of Robert, and Cyril's own death.

Through all this, the Psammead is present, but the Psammead has his own problems, which present themselves in a way that should by now be familiar: he is haunted by bad dreams. Nesbit had made the Psammead a peppery and rather self-centred character, but in Saunders' novel we learn of his more violent past as a deity in the ancient Akkadian desert, in which form he turns out to have been a tyrant. He was particularly careless of the young, whose worship he took for granted and whose lives he wasted as carelessly as Peter Pan did those of the Neverland pirates.

'My dear Lamb, everyone kills a few slaves.'

'Oh, Psammead!' Anthea shook her head. 'How many did you kill?'

'I don't know. A few thousand. Numbers don't matter.' (9)

The Psammead's sleep is disturbed, not by shell shock, but by guilt. Fate, in the form of an ancient priestess's curse, has forced him to live through the Great War and witness the suffering of other young people until he can learn empathy and understand the enormity of his crimes. Only with Cyril's death, and the production of his first spontaneous tear, does the Psammead earn release and oblivion. Saunders' portrayal of the Psammead seems a pointed reflection on the readiness of Kipling's generation to sacrifice their own children's futures.

Such were the horrors of the Great War that writing about it, not least for children, has sometimes seemed to require a degree of obliquity, a mode capable (as Paul Fussell once put it) ‘of both fully gauging the calamities [...] and imaginatively protecting oneself against them’ (Fussell 235). This apparently paradoxical objective echoes Dr Rivers’s desire to find a middle way that avoids both ‘dwell[ing] continually on [...] war experience’ and ‘banish[ing] such experience from [one’s] mind altogether’. What McCaughrean’s and Saunders’ sequels perform for modern readers of *Peter and Wendy* and the Psammead trilogy is comparable to Rivers’s recommendation to his shell-shocked patients. Rather than repress knowledge of the historical fate of children literature’s Golden Age youth, they encourage readers to acknowledge those sufferings, in a spirit not of horror but of recuperation. Both books venture into the no-man’s-land between anticipation and reality, to recover their classic predecessors.

I have focused on the Great War in this article, largely because it offers a particularly rich source of instances where fictional futures have been superseded by a history dramatically at odds with the expectations of authors and characters alike. However, as the example of *Ballet Shoes* demonstrates, the ‘lost futures’ phenomenon is a more general one. Likewise, the responses offered by McCaughrean and Saunders are far from uniquely applicable to the historical situation following the Great War. *Peter Pan in Scarlet* and *Five Children on the Western Front* are both, among other things, therapeutic fan fictions. Each supplies a historical perspective necessarily absent from its source material; each models ways to deal with historical loss that neither lurch towards cynicism nor retreat into repression. Although few readers may have the ability or desire to write a fully-fledged sequel, many have found less public ways to ameliorate the melancholy caused by children’s literature’s unintended collisions with history. The children (and adults) who write pleading letters to authors; fans who share reparative fictions and theories among their peers; readers

privately curating their personal head-canon: all are attempting to build a world fit for the heroes and heroines of children's literature to live in. All are engaged in the work of recuperation, which is also the work of mourning. Literary criticism has not traditionally concerned itself with such activities, and has indeed at times suppressed discussion of them, preferring to treat the 'fictional world' as an independent entity untouched by external events. Nevertheless, it is only through such therapeutic work that we can acknowledge, and perhaps exorcise, history's hauntological ghosts.

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